

# US Perspectives on China's Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia and the South Caucasus

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## Abstract

To date, the US response to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia and the Caucasus has been calm, if not tacitly supportive. Two main reasons for this are: (a) the reopening of age-old east–west trade corridors as one of the most important legacies of the collapse of the USSR and (b) it views the engagement of both China and Europe in east–west trade across Central Asia as furthering the Central Asians' own ability to achieve balanced and positive relations between all the major powers, thereby constraining hegemonic aspirations from any quarter. Further, the United States supports the emergence of Central Asia as a defined world region akin to ASEAN or the Nordic Council and believes that reforms under way in Uzbekistan and elsewhere in the region serve that end as well as increase east–west and west–east trade across the region. Finally, the United States realizes that the ultimate judgement on the viability of BRI in Central Asia and the Caucasus will be that of the market and not geopolitics.

## Keywords

Silk Road, Belt and Road, China, United States, Central Asia, connectivity, South Caucasus

## Introduction

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of the most ambitious development projects ever undertaken, comparable only to the post-World War II Marshall Plan and China's own Three Gorges Dam project. Significantly, China deftly presented

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it to the world as a civic economic project designed to benefit all participating countries and many other countries where its effect was expected to be indirect but positive. Many countries have expressed enthusiasm for the project, while others have reacted more warily, expressing concerns over the amount of indebtedness it may entail or giving voice to various geopolitical anxieties. The position of the United States, as the world's largest economy, with respect to the Belt and Road (originally 'One Belt One Road', hereafter 'BRI') in Central Asia and Caucasus, is of significance not only to China but also to all the other countries affected by it.

About the time China announced its BRI, there was much speculation in the West, as well as in Turkey, that the United States might oppose it. Inevitably, the Washington think tanks produced numerous papers reviewing the position of regional governments and advising the American government on what it should and should not do. Some of these were useful,<sup>1</sup> and others less so. The Chinese-sponsored Institute for China–America Studies in Washington issued a paper on 'American Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative' that included, inter alia, dyspeptic comments by unnamed 'experts' who predicted trouble ahead (Chance, 2017). Others took a less anxious view, and still others concluded that the USA was likely to take the new project in its stride.

From the outset, there were solid historical reasons for thinking the US response might be positive or at least neutral. After all, the US government constructed the Transcontinental Railroad, a 1,912-mile (3,077 km) rail link between the eastern and mid-western rail network and the Pacific, completed in 1869. And it later built the 51-mile (82 km) Panama Canal, opened in 1914. Surely these projects, and others that could be cited, anticipate China's BRI. Both the United States and China have long histories of digging canals on their own territory to strengthen economic links between disparate regions and for using transport as an engine for economic development. America's Federal Highway Program, launched in the 1950s, and China's high-speed 'bullet' trains of half a century later had the same objective of knitting disparate regions together. As a result, each of these countries has solid historical reasons for being predisposed to favour large infrastructure projects to foster transport and trade and for understanding when the other side did the same thing.

The success of China's effort to open land transport corridors across Central Asia and through the South Caucasus to Turkey will ultimately depend not on the infrastructure, which is a prerequisite, but on the market. Thus, any judgement on the long-term viability of the BRI, and hence any projection of the US response to it, must wait until the governmentally driven infrastructure phase has been completed and the market begins to offer its judgement.

## **Existing Initiatives**

The existence of the BRI immediately raises questions regarding its relationship with the Asian Development Bank's 'Central Asia Regional Cooperation' Program (CAREC).<sup>2</sup> CAREC, which held its seventeenth annual ministerial

conference in Ashgabat in November 2018, complements the BRI rather than competes with it. On the one hand, CAREC is broader than the BRI, in that it includes activities to promote trade by small- and medium-sized businesses, energy sector cooperation and development, and compliance with WTO standards. On the other hand, CAREC focusses on transport and trade between its 11 members and South Asia rather than east–west trade. It is regrettable that CAREC has not promoted the so-called ‘Southern Corridor’ between the Indian subcontinent and the West through the South Caucasus, a route that is older, more heavily travelled and less frequently interrupted than the so-called Silk Road to China (Starr, 2018). But this project, which would provide a southern complement to the BRI, has not been possible because CAREC’s mandate stops at Pakistan and does not extend to India.

Some have suggested that the so-called ‘Northern Distribution Network’ (NDN), which NATO opened to transport supplies from the Baltic to the fighting in Afghanistan, may provide insights into the viability of the BRI and the US response to it.<sup>3</sup> This is not the case. The NDN was set up to meet strictly military needs. Russia, along with Latvia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, consented to it and profited from it. Russia, however, retained the right to cut off transport at any time along this route, a condition that would have been clearly unacceptable to the Chinese designing the BRI.

## The Russian Dimension

Indeed, a major motivation for China to open the BRI across Kazakhstan to the Caspian and through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey was to avoid giving Russia veto power over its transport links with the West. At conferences in St. Petersburg and Urumqi at the start of the BRI’s planning stage, Moscow officials fought bitterly to divert the railroad line from Urumqi in a northwestern direction in order to connect with Russia’s Trans-Siberian Railroad and to proceed thence to Europe. At the time, Russia was proclaiming its friendship with Kazakhstan, yet at the same time working relentlessly to prevent Kazakhstan from overcoming the isolation from both East and West that the Soviet system had imposed on it. But it failed. China refused Moscow’s pleas, bluntly informing the Russians that it would proceed with its planned route across Kazakhstan. By doing this, it instituted an important check on Russia’s power in both Central Asia and the South Caucasus. To be sure, after crossing Kazakhstan, trains from China can still be diverted northward through Russia to northern Europe. This is actually happening today, largely because the route from Kazakhstan across the South Caucasus to Europe is still under development. But the impending completion of the Azeri port at Alat and the construction by Georgia of its major deep water port at Anaklia will greatly speed transport through the South Caucasus and will likely reduce the proportion of Europe–China trade conducted through Russia. In the long run, it is likely that the Russian route will be mainly used for goods destined only for northern Europe.

An important element of the United States diplomacy since the rise of Putin has been to prevent him from taking further actions like his invasions of Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014 to present). While it refused for a long time to provide these and other threatened countries with even defensive weapons, it had unbounded faith in economic instruments and also in traditional notions of balance among contending powers. Because of this, the USA has worked to prevent any single outside power, or combination of outside powers, from dominating Central Asia. In contrast to Russian thinking on the subject, such a strategy by Washington is not a covert means of taking control of the region itself, but a way of strengthening the region's sovereignty and capacity for self-government and, at the same time, preventing other powers from controlling the territory.

This, as much as anything else, has shaped American thinking about the BRI and accounts for its generally positive stance with respect to the programme in Central Asia, as opposed to its more sceptical view of its plans for Southeast Asia and the Asia–Pacific region. Washington inevitably perceived as positive the gradual shift of transport corridors from north–south, as had prevailed throughout the Tsarist and Soviet eras, to east–west, as is taking place under the BRI and related initiatives. To be sure, China poses serious challenges to the USA, among which its BRI programme in South and Southeast Asia is a conspicuous example. But for the time being, the USA can welcome the BRI in Central Asia for the same reason the Central Asians do: it enables the region's states to more effectively pursue their strategy of balancing the pressures exerted by external powers.

Indeed, the idea of preserving sovereignty by balancing external pressures, first proposed in a book by Kazakhstani foreign minister Kassaym-Jomart Tokayev (now president), in 1997, is now the cornerstone of the foreign policies of all regional states as well as of Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup> The key to this strategy is that each country must maintain cordial relations with all the external powers while at the same time carefully balancing them against each other. Were the relative strength of these pressures to change, for instance, by China significantly expanding its influence in Central Asia from economic to strategic, it would of course be necessary to rethink this strategy. But it works very well for now. This explains why all the states of the region except Armenia, which is open to joining the BRI but has not yet done so, support the BRI, for it engages both China and Europe in their balancing act. The US support for it hinges on this same reality (Zhao, 2017).

## **Regional Infrastructure**

A further reason for which Washington has to date responded calmly and even positively to the BRI in Central Asia is that it appreciates the extent to which the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia have themselves invested in transport infrastructure, independent of BRI. Until China committed to subsidizing the rail line from Kashgar through the Kyrgyz Republic to Uzbekistan in 2018, the Uzbeks had expanded their transport infrastructure using their own resources. Kazakhstan too invested heavily in infrastructure, including new ports

on the Caspian, using mainly its own resources. Turkmenistan completely rebuilt both the road and railroad from the Afghan border to the Caspian, paying for them with profits from its energy sales to China, and then proceeded on its own to build the ambitious new port at Turkmenbashi. Azerbaijan, at the same time, is using its own resources to construct its impressive new port at Alat, just as it generously subsidized road, rail and energy transport projects during its first two decades of independence. Meanwhile, neighbouring Georgia rebuilt its port of Batumi, while a private Georgian firm is planning the major new deep water port at Anaklia.

As these many locally funded initiatives have gone forward, both the European Union (EU) and Turkey have also invested in east–west transport routes through the South Caucasus to Central Asia through the Caspian. In a visionary move in 1993, only 2 years after the collapse of the USSR, the EU set up the Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia (TRACECA). Fourteen regional states in the South Caucasus and Central Asia joined forces with the 28 states of the EU to mount a many-sided programme to boost trade through the Black Sea with the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. TRACECA also envisioned the extension of its infrastructure to China. Iran subsequently joined the programme, but sanctions have prevented it from becoming actively involved. A Director Generalship and permanent secretariat was established in Baku in 2000, giving permanence to the organization.

The heart of TRACECA has been its reconstruction or construction of road and railroad links between the Mediterranean and Caspian Sea. Air transport was also included but has turned out to be a secondary focus. The concept of TRACECA directly anticipated the BRI, and the Chinese doubtless studied it carefully. Where it failed was in attracting adequate funding to execute the most important projects. In some cases, local governments stepped in to fill the breach, whereas in others, nothing happened until the advent of the BRI. But TRACECA remains an active player and will doubtless become more so as the infrastructure phase of the new continental trade initiative is completed.

The history of TRACECA helps explain Europe’s mixed response to the BRI. As Le Corre (2017) has pointed out, the EU and member countries initially voiced various objections to the project, many of them reflecting the fact that China had seemingly pre-empted Europe’s own initiative. However, by 2018, these objections had diminished to the status of reservations and cautions, which may reappear if China plays a stronger hand in east–west transport but are more likely to vanish as discussion of the new routes shifts away from geopolitical concerns towards commercial issues and market-driven concerns.

In reviewing the list of active players in the construction of infrastructure for east–west continental trade, special mention should be made of Turkey. Not only did it play a key role for the development of the first pipeline from the Caspian to the Mediterranean, but it has spent billions of dollars to forge railroad and road connections between Baku and Istanbul. The USA strongly supported Ankara in this effort, thus providing a further reason for Washington to support China’s contribution to east–west transport.

The existence of TRACECA and NDN, along with the many projects undertaken by regional countries and by neighbouring Turkey, changes the common

conception of the BRI as single-handedly conceiving and constructing all the infrastructure needed for east–west continental trade. Chinese mapmakers have included many routes on their maps of the BRI which were in fact financed and constructed by others. This has caused consternation among the countries slighted and has led many analysts to overestimate the scale of China’s involvement with the region and to underestimate both the role of the international financial institutions, like the Asian Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and of regional countries themselves. This reality in turn plays a role in Americans’ evaluation of the BRI and helps us to understand the calm spirit in which they have received it.

### **The New Silk Road Strategy**

One might even ask if the Chinese project was not an expanded version of the ‘New Silk Road Project’ that Secretary of State Clinton announced in Chennai, India, in 2011. The prospect she offered was grandiose, featuring easy links by rail between India, Afghanistan and the other states of Central Asia (Clinton, 2011). Unfortunately, Clinton neither staffed nor funded the project adequately, and it gradually died.

A further and equally serious shortcoming of Hillary Clinton’s ‘New Silk Road’ is that it connected the Indian subcontinent with Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia but failed to extend its roads and railroads to the western shore of the Caspian and thence to Europe. This stunning failure may be traced to the fact that all the countries involved with Clinton’s project fell under the Department of State’s Bureau of South and Central Asia Affairs, whereas the South Caucasus fell under the jurisdiction of the European Bureau. Rather than solve this bureaucratic problem, the Secretary capitulated before it. Her Silk Road project was a flop the moment it began.

It has been suggested that the fact that the Chinese took the name of the failed American project and applied it to their own initiative might have caused opposition to the BRI in Washington. It is true that President Xi announced the Chinese ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ in a speech at Nazarbayev University in September 2013, and that at least a few in Washington were surprised that he would so brazenly appropriate the term. But by this time, Clinton and her State Department were eager to forget their own Silk Road project. This was all the easier since the President Obama never so much as mentioned it publicly. Given the failure of its own ‘New Silk Road’ project, the US State Department knew it was in no position to criticize the Chinese for attempting to do the same thing, albeit in improved form, or for pilfering the title it had used. Therefore, no one in Washington raised so much as a peep about the issue.

A second possible source of American opposition to the BRI arose from concerns over China’s decision to ignore environmental concerns when undertaking megaprojects. But this issue scarcely surfaced for a simple reason. As has been noted earlier, back in the period 1998–2003, Russia had pushed very hard to divert the main east–west rail line from crossing Kazakhstan to running instead from

Urumqi northwest to Siberia, where it was to connect with Russia's Trans-Siberian Railroad. However, Russian environmentalists complained bitterly that this would corrupt a pristine ecological zone and campaigned successfully against the proposal in Moscow. This would have enabled Chinese officials, if challenged by the USA, to boast that their own project had averted an ecological disaster. Therefore, the issue never gained traction.

There was a sufficient reason behind this. On the one hand, Washington sought cordial relations with Beijing. On the other hand, it saw the BRI as potentially strengthening China's ability to check Russia's neo-imperial aspirations in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. For these reasons, it therefore responded calmly and in a guardedly positive manner to China's project. It has maintained this position fairly consistently in spite of rising tensions between the USA and China over the South China Sea and Indian Ocean and over tariffs.

## Regional Economic Interests

A further reason for Washington's moderation was that it assumed that the major products transported along the new corridor would be European or Chinese, not American. The United States' economic interest in the project was linked more closely to its hopes for the economies of the former Soviet republics and of Afghanistan than with its own economic prospects. To be sure, American logistics firms dominated transport between Europe and Afghanistan during the fighting there, but none is in a position to compete at such a distance with such European giants as Maersk, let alone their Chinese counterparts. By reinforcing the new links between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and both China and Europe, the USA will help those countries reduce their dependence on Russia and thus limit somewhat Russia's ability to shape their internal and foreign affairs. The American government did not see these as trivial concerns. Washington remembered Putin's words from April 2005 that the collapse of the USSR had been 'the greatest geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century' (Sanders, 2014). It had watched with horror as Putin continued to stir the Karabakh conflict in the South Caucasus, as he invaded both Georgia and Ukraine, and as he pushed the Kyrgyz Republic to open new military bases there. As long as the BRI strengthened the economies of these and other regional countries, Washington was going to offer no serious opposition to it.<sup>5</sup>

But what about the role of Iran in the BRI? Early maps issued by the Chinese government routed all traffic to the West through Iran rather than the South Caucasus. A number of Western students of the BRI reproduced these maps, which were like a red flag to Washington.<sup>6</sup> However, before Washington had a chance to object, China reversed course and routed traffic from the Caspian ports through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey as well as through Iran. This deft move averted what might otherwise have been a moment of conflict.

Since 2013 China's economy has continued to soar, but its trade policies and business practices have increasingly aroused concern in the West, and particularly

in the United States. Various reprisals have been undertaken, including increased tariffs on certain Chinese goods. However, as of the time of writing, the US government had not raised objections to Chinese practices in Central Asia concerning the BRI. The reasons for this are: (a) no trade problems have yet arisen with respect to the BRI and (b) recent developments within Central Asia and the South Caucasus make the BRI and China generally all the more important as a balance to Russia. These developments include a potentially epochal set of reforms in Uzbekistan and the related emergence of Central Asia as a geopolitical reality on the world stage.

Even before he was elected President in 2016, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, then Uzbekistan's Prime Minister under President Islam Karimov, had launched what has turned out to be a remarkable series of reforms. Internationally, he lifted bans on intraregional transport and trade, resolved decades-old disputes over territorial claims and rushed around the region building goodwill with the other leaders. On the domestic front, he launched a programme of massive reform. He made the currency fully convertible, instituted habeas corpus, reformed and expanded the defence bar, gave entrepreneurs the right to seek investors abroad and to invest abroad, removed thousands from lists of suspected religious extremists and gave the public the right to lodge complaints against bureaucrats at all levels (Starr & Cornell, 2018a, 2018b).

Of course, there is a distance between the cup and the lip: some of these reforms may never be instituted in practice. But they immediately elicited positive responses from the USA, Europe as well as Japan, India and so on. To the extent they are implemented, they will increase the interest of the USA and other democratic countries in trade with Uzbekistan, which will deepen their interest in the BRI. If other regional countries imitate some of Uzbekistan's reforms, they could deepen America's engagement and that of the other countries noted earlier with most or all of the BRI countries, and hence with the BRI.

Uzbekistan's outreach to its neighbours, including Afghanistan, has already removed many of the interstate tensions that previously racked the region (*The Tashkent Times*, 2017). Trade within Greater Central Asia has greatly expanded, as has trade across the Caspian to Azerbaijan and Georgia. The presidents of the five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan have begun meeting regularly and have organized conferences on sensitive topics such as water and hydroelectric energy. Outside powers, including Russia, China, Europe and the United States, participate only as observers. Beyond this, in June 2018, the region's governments drafted a resolution for the UN's Security Council, supporting the emergence of Central Asia as a region capable of taking charge of its own economic and social development and even its security without the interference of outsiders. It passed the General Assembly, with China, Russia and the USA all supporting it (United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia [UNRCCA], 2018).<sup>7</sup>

Thus, something akin to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Nordic Council is being born in the region of Greater Central Asia. While this remained a distant dream as recently as 2 years ago, it is today being actively discussed not only among the Central Asian states themselves but also with existing

regional entities in order to glean from them ‘best practices’. Reinforced by expanded east–west interaction across the Caspian, it is clear that the influence of this new regionalism will spread to encompass most of the BRI countries between Turkey and China. This new regional spirit is also increasingly associated with more open forms of government, as seems to be happening in Uzbekistan.

Because of this, one can expect in the coming years for the West to take a deeper interest in the Belt and Road region as a whole and to champion the interests of the transit countries in the event of tensions with China. Indeed, the EU has recently grown more active in the South Caucasus and is working on a new strategy for Central Asia. And for the same reason that they may take a deeper interest in the region, the USA and Europe will surely seek to resolve quickly and quietly any issues that may arise with respect to the BRI and not allow them to fester or become public.

## **From Hard to Soft Infrastructure**

It should be stressed that the entire discussion of the BRI up to now has occurred during the period when hard infrastructure was being planned and constructed. Because it centred on the delineation of specific routes that affected large populations, this inevitably called forth discussions of the geopolitics of the project and led to proposals to redraw certain routes or to supplement them with others. Such concerns were inevitably the responsibility of governments, which addressed them through the normal channels of diplomacy.

However, we noted, at the outset, that as the BRI advances towards realization, the focus will shift from hard infrastructure to soft infrastructure, and from governmental concerns and negotiators to the concerns of private industry and trade, as well as to the businessmen whose are most intimately concerned. Rather than asking how the roadbed will be defined and constructed, discussion will focus on which logistics firms and freight forwarders will utilize the new routes, what companies will offer insurance to shippers and who will construct and manage storage facilities and hotels. Henceforth, it will be the realities of the private sector that will cause the BRI either to flourish or fail, with governments being cast increasingly into the role of supporting players to the business folks.

The chief demands the private sector will make to those who manage the BRI will pertain to the speed of border crossing, costs per mile, taxation and the maintenance of roadbeds.<sup>8</sup> Shippers on all sections of the BRI’s infrastructure will be in touch with one another and will voice together their demands to governmental managers of the BRI when they deem it necessary. Moreover, they will do so on the basis of exhaustive hour-by-hour data and in full cognizance of the comparative cost of alternative routes, that is, shipping by sea. This will provide an austere market discipline to all those who may wish to return the BRI to its earlier geopolitical identity.

As the shift to such concerns moves forward, it is likely that the American role will diminish from the current level, which is defined more by geopolitics than by economics, as will be the case in the future. This is quite separate from

the US stance towards the BRI as a whole, which is already growing more sceptical on account of its proposals for Southeast and South Asia, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. European and Chinese logistics firms will be the chief actors in this new game, not diplomats, whether Chinese or American, whose level of activity will have declined from the time when the main focus was on hard infrastructure.

Stated differently, the period of America's greatest concern over the BRI was at the planning stage and in the early phase when the focus was on the financing and construction of hard infrastructure. It quietly encouraged certain routes and cautioned against others. As the shift to soft infrastructure begins, it may well champion some of its own firms to play a role in one area or another. It is also likely that it will caution the weaker participating countries to be cautious about taking on too much debt on the false assumption that it will eventually be forgiven.<sup>9</sup> For Washington was genuinely concerned in 2015 when China announced the formation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with 57 countries as members and an initial capitalization of US\$100 billion (of which only US\$30 billion came from China). US officials feared that Chinese money and standards would undermine the work of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, both of which Washington strongly supported. But even this negative response faded when it turned out that many years would be needed before the institution could pose a serious threat to the existing development banks, and by that time some channels for cooperation might have been opened (Economy, 2015).

Even when the USA offers advice on debt and other matters pertaining to the BRI, it is likely to work mainly with Central Asian officials rather than with the Chinese themselves. It will stop far short of playing a leading role in the enterprise as a whole.

We have already noted that the US response to the BRI in the South Caucasus and Central Asia may differ from its more sceptical response to the programme's announced intentions in Southeast Asia, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. This is quite normal, and it explains why the US position on the BRI in the heart of Asia might be stated obliquely rather than directly and why it may prefer to deal with the BRI with and through the states of the region rather than over their heads with China directly.

## **Conclusion**

Some have wished for the United States to take an unequivocal stance in favour of the BRI's actions in the South Caucasus and Central Asia or in opposition to them. After all, it has responded emphatically to the BRI's programme in the South Pacific region by convening a quadrilateral diplomatic effort involving Japan, Australia, India and the United States that called for a 'free and open Indo-Pacific region'. Neither will happen for three very good reasons. First, as we have seen in this overview, in contrast to the situation in the South Pacific and Indian

Ocean, the BRI in this region offers several positive features to both the USA and its regional partners in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The negatives are real and pertain mainly to the unknown future. Second, because of these benefits to its partners in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, the USA will, in all likelihood, maintain its current stance towards the BRI, knowing that a change will only punish its regional partners and benefit Russia.

And third, however important the BRI in Central Asia and the South Caucasus may be to China, Europe or the transited countries, it is at best a secondary concern of the United States. Indeed, the same can be said of the South Caucasus and Central Asia as a whole, with the sole exception of Afghanistan. It is true that the Trump's administration has already devoted far more attention to Central Asia and the South Caucasus than did the Obama's administration. For example, it is actively supporting the reforms in Uzbekistan and the efforts at regional integration now going forward. But there are limits to this interest, and these have to do with world politics as a whole and not with the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

This reality will place constraints on the extent to which Washington will engage with the BRI and with the various participating countries of the region. Both can hope to advance to the top of Washington's list of secondary concerns, but it is unlikely that they will rise further among America's priorities without the stimulus of some new geopolitical crises in the region. At that point, however, it is more than likely that Washington will respond carefully, yet vigorously, in support of the sovereignty and self-determination of the regional states.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

This article will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming book *The Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Maximizing the Positive Impacts and Minimizing Risks* (provisional title) to be published by the Oxford University Press.

### **Funding**

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### **Notes**

1. See Fingar (2016), Linn (2016) and a series of reports drafted in 2015–2016 by Andrew Kuchins and Jeffrey Mankoff on how regional governments in both Central Asia and the South Caucasus were treating the new integrative projects. All of these papers were published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington.
2. For more on CAREC, see the program's excellent website <https://www.carecprogram.org/>
3. Kuchins, Sanderson, and Gordon (2009) advanced this notion as early as 2009.
4. For an excellent overview of the fate of this strategy in Kazakhstan, see Clarke (2015).
5. This approach is to be contrasted to that of Michael Emerson and Evgeny Vinokurov of Russia's Eurasian Development Bank, who focus on steps to engage Russia more directly in east–west transport. See Emerson and Vinokurov (2009).
6. See, for example, Devonshire-Ellis (2015).
7. For details, see United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2018).

8. These will be comparable to the detailed data already being collected by the International Road Transport Union in Geneva. See <https://www.iru.org/>
9. This danger is discussed by Dahir (2018).

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