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Der Lange Marsch 2.0

Chinas Neue Seidenstraßen als Entwicklungsmodell

In Kooperation mit Stiftung Asienhaus
VSA: Verlag, Hamburg 2018

The Belt& Road Initiative, aka "New Silk Roads" builds on the former significance of the "Middle Kingdom" and at the same time creates a blueprint for making China great again. The expansion of transport infrastructure, energy supply and economic corridors between Asia, Africa and Europe is to initiate a "new Golden Age of Globalization".

Domestically, this is an attempt to maintain growth within China and to secure the legitimacy of the government through a stimulus program promoted by corporations and supported by the state. In terms of foreign policy, Beijing has thus taken the lead in the global development discourse, at least in Asia and Eurasia. Economic modernization, the security of raw materials supply, especially energy, and access t sales markets as well as the creation of new multilateral institutions geared to China mean a further increase in power.

The book traces central aspects of the discourses on geo-economy, geopolitics, multipolar world order, hegemonic competition and globalization, which have been triggered by this initiative. It questions the extent to which this development strategy is compatible with democratic conditions, social and ecological justice, respect for human and minority rights and the elimination of conflicts. And it examines the assurances of the Chinese leadership, that it does not to pursue global hegemonic, let alone imperial ambitions with the initiative.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Ways out of the crisis

The financial crisis ten years ago exposed internal and global limits to further expansion and accumulation of China’s hitherto successful development strategy. Thus its function of legitimising State and Party is also being challenged. Following the "Go West" strategy of developing domestic expansion spaces in the name of regional balancing, the Belt&Road Initiative will increasingly open up global expansion spaces, which shall not only improve access to markets and resources, but also support the economic restructuring and modernization process initiated by the Government (Made in China 2025).

Chapter 3: Infrastructure development as growth strategy

With its "New Silk Roads" initiative, the Chinese government promises substantial investment resulting in economic growth for the countries involved. The focus is on infrastructure development and economic corridors. However, the initiative also carries numerous economic, social and environmental risks and uncertainties, especially for the poorer and weaker countries on the land and sea routes.

Interview with Korinna Horta, urgewald: *"The AIIB derives international credibility from the membership of Germany and other non-regional countries."*

Chapter 4: Opportunities and risks in Central Asia

At Nazarbayev University, named after the president of Kazakhstan, in September 2013 Xi Jinping made the first official presentation of the Silk Road Initiative. Kazakhstan plays a key role as the western neighbour of Xinjiang province, with access to Central Asia and beyond, as a supplier of oil and a potential location for outsourcing Chinese production facilities. However, the Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan are also part of Russia's sphere of influence, which it seeks to retain, inter alia with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). For the sake of B&R, Beijing has to come to terms with Moscow.

Chapter 5: Limits to ecological civilisation

A key aspect of the initiative is to secure supplies for China's growth-driven economy of raw materials and energy, especially fossil fuels. Therefore resource rich regions in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Africa, in the Bay of Bengal and the Arctic, new supply routes and investments in power plants and hydropower dams are cornerstones of the new Silk Roads. An example is the economic corridor with Pakistan (CPEC). At the same time, this strategy externalises China's environmental problems, strengthens resource plunder in other regions and an extractive growth model. China's policy operates with different standards: In the country itself, comprehensive environmental protection regulations have been created and an energy transition initiated. For foreign investment, however, such guidelines and rules are largely absent or non-binding.

Interview with Sukhgerel Dugersen, OT Watch: *"I am afraid the momentum for an alternative development path for Mongolia was lost with embarking on a mineral extraction based economic development policy."*

Chapter 6: Top dog in Southeast Asia

Intertwined in the conflict in the South China Sea are overlapping territorial claims of various riparian states, control over trade and access to resources, and Beijing's ambition to return to China's "historic greatness." While Beijing is increasingly underpinning its claims with military presence and nationalist campaigning, the Silk Road Initiative also acts as a tool to buy political support from other countries in Southeast Asia for its position in the conflict. Even though Beijing has so far promoted its economic and political interests abroad mainly with money, investment and diplomacy, the conflict illustrates how closely economic and geostrategic interests are linked.

Interview with Wolfram Schaffar, Stiftung Asienhaus: *"The idea of democracy has be discredited."*

Chapter 7: China rule the waves

Chinese corporations are systematically expanding their presence on the maritime Silk Road. One of the aims is to strengthen control over maritime trade, in which Western nations as a relic of colonial times still dominate. 'Rule the waves' is therefore an essential part of the efforts to push back the 'Christian seafaring' and to bring China back to former glory not only as a territorial power but also as a maritime power. In this strategy, Sri Lanka has a strategic position. At the same time, India is concerned that the ports could serve as bases for a strengthened Chinese navy, diminishing its own claim to domination in the Indian Ocean.

Chapter 8: Tensions in South Asia

Looking at the B&R maps, one can get the impression that India, since more than half a century involved in border disputes with China, is being encircled. Chinese presence is growing with economic corridors and trade and investment agreements that China is negotiating or has already concluded with many countries in the region, that India views as its economic and political sphere of influence. The most contentious issue is the economic corridor between the Pakistani port city of Gwadar and the western Chinese province of Xinjiang (CPEC) and the massive economic and military cooperation with the 'archenemy' Pakistan. As a counterbalance, the New Delhi government is struggling with numerous initiatives for regional alliances, infrastructure projects, and market access - without being able to compete with China's financial strength and strategic-diplomatic 'soft power' game. Therefore, there are voices in India that view the initiative as an opportunity for economic and political rapprochement between the two countries and even for detente in the whole region - provided India is recognized by China as an equal partner.

Chapter 9: A Bridge to Africa

A milestone in the recent history of China in Africa was the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (*Tazara*), a symbol of the support of Communist China for the postcolonial independence of African countries. In the decades that followed, China's contribution to development was primarily building infrastructure, the exchange of loans for commodities, cheap consumer goods, and development aid. However, this did not bring any broad sustainable development. There were also numerous protests, conflicts, hostilities and failed projects. In the last few years, Beijing is attempting to renew relations with the extension of the maritime Silk Road, initially in East Africa, by establishing economic zones for Chinese and other foreign investors.

Chapter 10. Investors on the Balkan route

Initially, the takeover of the Greek port of Piraeus by the state-owned shipping company COSCO has received attention in Europe mainly in the discussion about the sale of Greek silverware by forced privatization. But the move provides the B&R Initiative with control of a crucial endpoint of the maritime Silk Road and with another gateway to Europe. Additionally, Chinese infrastructure plans, investments and diplomacy are aimed at many other countries of the European periphery in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The EU, for its part, still lacks a comprehensive strategic approach to respond to the advance and/or to implement cooperation projects such as the EU-China Connectivity Platform.

Interview with Frans-Paul van der Putten, Clingendael Institute: *"The EU should engage with China and other countries to jointly build the new Silk Road."*

Chapter 11: Outline of a new hegemony

With B&R, China has captured the discursive hegemony over the further development of globalization. At the same time, Beijing is clearly re-positioning itself against rivals for regional and global hegemony. Already, the close alliances with authoritarian regimes are striking. Whether it is aiming at re-building an Empire beyond geo-economic ambitions is still hotly debated. But there are indicators that with B&R China could be on a slippery road towards an increasing involvement in internal or regional conflicts, including security and military engagements to safe B&R from failure. Because such a failure, which is quite possible because of the scope, the complexities and risks of the initiative, could have a backlash on the internal economic, social and political situation in China itself, challenging the legitimacy of the State and the Party based on continuous growth, prosperity and recognition as a global power.

Interview with Au Loong Yu, Hong Kong: *"It is hard to imagine that Xi can ever exterminate all his opposition within the party".*