Building the New Silk Road
Space, Capital and Prosperity
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What is the Belt and Road Initiative?

The Belt and Road Initiative is a Chinese foreign policy initiative launched in October 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The policy aims to increase trade and investment connectivity between China and the countries traversed by the historic Silk Road trade route that connected Europe, Africa and Asia many centuries ago. China has launched numerous financial institutions aimed at funding infrastructure projects across Europe, Asia and Africa to augment the flow of goods, services, capital and people along the land-based “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the sea-based “21st Century Maritime Silk Road.”

Perspectives on the Belt and Road

Belt and Road Initiative as Periphery Policy

The Belt and Road places special emphasis on connecting, developing and enriching China’s northwestern Xinjiang region (populated by ethnic Uyghurs) and the Central Asian states. Xinjiang has been the site of growing ethnic tensions (between the indigenous Uyghur population and a growing Han Chinese population) and separatist violence. Some scholars have proposed that the Belt and Road’s emphasis on building prosperity in Xinjiang and greater Central Asia is an attempt to placate would-be separatists and secure PRC sovereignty in the state’s peripheries.

Belt and Road Initiative as a Solution to Slowing Demand

After decades of soaring economic growth, the expansion of China’s economy is beginning to slow. China’s productive economic capacity in steel, cement and other secondary commodities is beginning to outstrip effective demand for these commodities. Many scholars and commentators have understood the Belt and Road as a response to this phenomenon, usually referred to as “excess capacity.” By investing in the creation of roads, railways, ports and other infrastructure, the Belt and Road will stoke demand for Chinese commodities as a means of solving China’s “excess capacity” problem, some scholars argue.

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