

**NIDS International Symposium on Security Affairs**

**Belt and Road Initiative and the  
Future of the International Order**

The National Institute for Defense Studies

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## **Belt and Road Initiative and the Future of the International Order**

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## Preface

This publication is a collection of papers originally presented at the International Symposium on Security Affairs “Belt and Road Initiative and the Future of the International Order” hosted by the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) on December 10, 2019. Brief biographies of the symposium’s presenters and the program are found at the end of this volume.

The growth of China, which is an important neighbor of Japan, brings significant changes to this region and the world. If we focus our attention on the direct implications on security, China’s expanding military capabilities and areas of activity will allow China to act more unilaterally, and there is concern that the neighboring countries will be unable to restrain them and consequently lose their vital interests. However, China’s growth extends across a range of fields, including the economy, technology, and diplomacy. If China and many countries work together successfully, this could potentially change the way international affairs are conducted. For example, emerging economies like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have made contributions in international norms, trade, and finance to complement the Western-led international order, and according to some discourse, could continue to reform the international community while avoiding clashes.<sup>1</sup> If these substantive changes take place, sounding the alarm only on China’s military issue may not resonate with countries partnering with China to reform the international community and may fail to create a more desirable international order.

A key concept in considering the possibility of such transformation of international order is China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the BRI, and discussions ensued domestically for its materialization. China announced the official contents of the initiative in 2015 and has since expanded them by adding other sectors and regions. The BRI also involves problems in its implementation, such as so-called “debt traps” and corruption in recipient countries.

To speak broadly, the BRI can be understood as China’s comprehensive strategic initiative encompassing culture, communications technology, and other sectors and is not confined to infrastructure development cooperation that was its starting point.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (Polity, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Alice Ekman, ed., *China’s Belt & Road and the World: Competing Forms of Globalization* (Institut Français des Relations Internationales, April 2019).

In terms of the Chinese political situation, some view that actors, including provincial governments and the State Oceanic Administration, take actions to appeal themselves while following the trends of the leadership.<sup>3</sup> Although it may be difficult to identify the BRI as a single consistent strategy, it is, indeed, touted by the Xi Jinping leadership, mobilizing considerable Chinese power in various sectors, and driving countries worldwide to take actions. This could shape the future of international order.

From this awareness of issues, NIDS organized this symposium and invited scholars of various disciplines from different countries to exchange diverse opinions and expertise regarding the BRI. Session 1 discussed how the BRI, which can have various meanings, is perceived from countries' strategic viewpoint. Su Changhe (China, Chapter 1) presented China's logic that connectivity created by the BRI goes beyond realist international relations, which are mostly based on confrontation, and tries to forge new international relations based on cooperation and respect. Victoria Panova (Russia, Chapter 2) valued the significance of cooperation under the BRI and BRICS for making the developed country-built international order fairer, mentioning the outcomes and problems of Russia-China cooperation. Kristine Lee (United States, Chapter 3) stated that much of the BRI project is fraught with problems, such as not being financially sustainable, failing to promote local interests, and interfering with the sovereignty of nations, and that it was necessary to improve the situation and shift to international cooperation that is beneficial to the parties. Iida Masafumi (Japan, Chapter 4) noted that the BRI has begun to cover major strategic aspects, including strengthening Xi Jinping's political authority and advocating reform of the international order, and that this has been accompanied by a tendency to make maritime forays. Sahashi Ryo as a discussant deepened the issues related to the BRI.

In Session 2, experts examined the economic and security situation of regions and countries in detail. Jeffrey Wilson (Australia, Chapter 5) explained about infrastructure development demand in the Indo-Pacific, the cooperation programs of China, Australia, the United States, and Japan, their characteristics, and their outcomes, noting the need for more transparent cooperation. Alessia Amighini (Italy, Chapter 6) stated that the European Union (EU) attaches importance to the value of economic cooperation with China, including infrastructure cooperation, but points to problems of non-alignment with intraregional norms as well as potential conflict of member state

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<sup>3</sup> Masuo Chisako, *Chugoku no Kodogenri: Kokunai Choryu ga Kimeru Kokusai Kankei* [China's Principles of Action: Domestic Tides Determine International Relations] (Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2019).

interests. Masuda Masayuki (Japan, Chapter 7) presented on China's new international cooperation approach for supporting the BRI, namely, increasing the capabilities of the law enforcement agencies of partner countries at the Lianyungang Forum hosted by the Ministry of Public Security. You Ji (Macau, Chapter 8) noted that, while the People's Liberation Army calls for protecting sea lanes to support the BRI, there is a gap between the maritime capabilities required for that purpose and those its navy has been actually building for operations in the western Pacific. A discussion by Akimoto Shigeki followed these presentations.

Session 3 consisted of an overall discussion. The discussions spanned a broad array of topics, including discourse on norms of international order, safety of digital technology, coordination mechanisms of economic cooperation, varied interests in the Arctic Ocean, and reform of the international financial system.

The world has changed dramatically since this symposium was held. In particular, in 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic fundamentally changed people's travel patterns and economic and social life globally. Nonetheless, the activities of countries have not stopped. We regularly see incidents scale up and become more serious, deteriorating Sino-U.S. relations, including Chinese maritime activities. China continues aggressive diplomacy amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and has invited negative reactions from some countries.

We hope readers will utilize this publication to understand not only the circumstances in December 2019 but also the evolving BRI and its implications, and to examine multiple possibilities for realizing an even better international order.

SHOJI Junichiro  
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NIDS

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