[Class]: Country

China Is Determined to Reshape the Globe

[Class]: Project

Eurasia is a single continent. The **Belt and Road** initiative seeks to recreate it in China's image.

By Hal Brands

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[Class]: Region

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Of all the factors that shape a country's global fortunes, geography is the most immutable. A country is where it is. The advantages and disadvantages that come with its location typically shift slowly, if at all. That's what makes China's bold effort to remake the strategic landscape of Eurasia so remarkable. Beijing is placing a trilliondollar wager that it can transform its strategic geography from a constraint into a

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powerful geopolitical asset. [Class]: Union

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This would be quite a turnaround, given all the liabilities of China's geography. On its maritime periphery, it faces U.S. treaty allies and strategic partners that provide a springboard for the projection of American power into the Western Pacific. To the north, there is an ambitious Russia, which has more often been an enemy than a friend. On China's western and southern flanks, there are countries such as Vietnam and India, which can be expected to oppose Beijing's rise, and the Central Asian states, which have traditionally been a site of competition with Russia. If the U.S. has the advantage of

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being surrounded by fish and docile neighbors, China has long been ringed by rivals.

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The geographical difficulties don't end there. Beijing's energy-guzzling economy is heavily dependent on oil and natural gas from the Middle East. These imports pass through maritime choke-points - the Straits of Tiran into the Red Sea, the Malacca Strait off Indonesia - that can be closed off by the U.S. Navy. Not surprisingly, Chinese leaders have realized that achieving Beijing's global potential requires changing the country's strategic geography.

[Class]: Strait

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This is the true meaning of China's Belt and Road Initiative - a collection of investment, trade and infrastructure programs spanning Eurasia and surrounding areas including the Horn of Africa, at an eventual total cost of perhaps \$1 to \$2 trillion. Belt and Road has been described as a lot of things: a financial boondoggle, a catch-phrase, a threat to the-U.S.-led world order. Yet at its core, it represents an effort to build a more integrated Eurasian geopolitical space - with China at its center.

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Investing in energy pipelines that run through Central Asia and beyond is not simply a way of keeping China's industries humming. It is also a way of establishing overland supply routes that cannot be so easily disrupted by the U.S. Promoting deeper trade, investment and infrastructure ties with countries from Cambodia to Central Europe is a way of drawing them into China's geo-economic and geopolitical orbit — or at least making them less resistant to Beijing's power. Where China's money goes, its diplomatic and military influence will follow.

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[Question]: If U.S. will close straits, will China block U.S. oil supply from Saudi Arabia as well?

[Question]: What marine power is required to prevent U.S closing straits? What history tells about this?

[Question]: Why U.S. wants to disrupt supply routes to China?

[Class]: Future Model

Similarly, expanding economic relations with countries — particularly authoritarian [Class]: Future Model countries — throughout Eurasia offers the possibility of creating a China-centric [Class]: Future Model <mark>economic and technological order</mark>, at a time when <mark>Washington</mark> and <mark>Beijing</mark> are undergoing a slow-motion divorce. And by pursuing a cooperative relationship with [Class]: Tension Russia — an initiative distinct from, but closely related to, Belt and Road — China is building an authoritarian bloc that spans much of the Eurasian landmass. [Class]: Union Although Chinese officials might not put it this way, the ultimate goal seems to reflect [Class]: Concept the ideas of Halford Mackinder, the British geographer who in the very early 20th century helped popularize the notion of Eurasia as a geopolitical space. Mackinder [Class]: Person [Class]: Threat warned that the world's maritime powers must prevent any hostile state from dominating the Eurasian landmass. China is not seeking to do so militarily, in the [Class]: Concept manner of the totalitarian powers of the 20th century. Rather, Beijing is using its geo-[Class]: Future Model economic leverage to seek preponderant influence across Eurasia, thus creating a [Class]: Concept strategic hub from which it can project power far and wide. The question is whether this will actually work. Strategic geography is not easily reversed, and although China seems ascendant right now, there are many difficulties lurking. [Class]: Project [Class]: Person For one thing, China's Eurasian project will work only if Russia remains a partner rather than a rival. So far, President Vladimir Putin has surprised many U.S. observers by [Class]: Company allowing China to be the rider, and Russia the horse, in the authoritarian coalition. Moscow even gave the Chinese telecom giant Huawei Technologies Co. a leading role in [Class]: City developing Russian 5G networks. But Russian officials can presumably see the long-term danger in abetting the rise of an acquisitive superpower on their own frontier. Indeed, [Class]: Goods Chinese inroads in Central America, one of the fruits of Belt and Road, are surely driving [Class]: Project home the fact that Beijing's ambitions sometimes come at Moscow's expense. There are also reasons to doubt Belt and Road's financial viability. Chinese banks have [Class]: Losses invested heavily in its projects, but many of these loans are already underperforming. [Class]: Threat U.S. officials tend — not wrongly — to see this as a dangerous situation for the West, [Class]: Infrastructure because countries that cannot repay what they owe may have to surrender to Beijing control of ports and other strategic infrastructure. Yet the other edge of this sword is the potential that bad loans could destabilize China's financial system, just as that system is grappling with a huge debt bubble. [Class]: Threat [Class]: Think Tank Additionally, as my Johns Hopkins-SAIS colleague Daniel Markey writes, Belt and Road is [Class]: Person where grand geopolitical designs meet messy local realities. Much as America's Cold-[Class]: War War endeavors entangled it in nasty political struggles in countries throughout the Third [Class]: Concept World, Belt and Road is enmeshing China in the corruption and instability of countries such as Uzbekistan and Pakistan. China will reap greater influence from its ambitious [Class]: Country Eurasian plan, but it will also reap plenty of diplomatic and economic headaches. [Class]: Threat Finally, there is the matter of how the reigning superpower will respond. The U.S. has every incentive to prevent Beijing from realizing its objectives, and many of China's

[Question]: Which exact incentives U.S. has to prevent Beijing from realizing its objectives?

[Question]: What will happen if Russia will fully support and cooperate with China in Belt in Road project?

Eurasian neighbors, particularly the democratic ones, realize that their autonomy will be compromised if China achieves primacy.

So far, however, the Donald Trump administration has been better at warning about that prospect than developing meaningful alternatives for countries that need capital, infrastructure and technology. It has also demonstrated little of the skill and steadiness required to rally a countervailing coalition.

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precisely the economic running room China needs. By squandering its own influence in the Middle East, it is opening the door to greater Chinese sway there. Washington could have a great deal to say about the fate of China's Eurasian project, but only if it first manages to stop self-destructing.

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[Question]: Which countries there need capital, infrastructure and technology? Uzbekistan and Pakistan? Which else? What U.S. can offer them?

[Question]: What influence in Middle East U.S. is squandering? Iran's deal? Exit from Syria? What else?

[Question]: What is the nature of most important China activity in Middle East? Trade with Iran? What else? What China offers those countries?

[Question]: What exact development/future model U.S. proposes in Afganistan? Iraq? Libya? Yemen?