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CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AMID OBAMA'S NEGLIGENCE AND TRUMP'S PESSIMISM

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Since the inception of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2014, its relations with the United States have entered into a new phase of rivalry and defiance in an eclectic array of political, economic, and security issues and concerns. In examining the BRI factor in US-China relations, this paper juxtaposes the Barak Obama administration's mild China policy and its cold response toward BRI as well as Donald Trump's administration's harsh China policy and its pessimism toward the initiative. In particular by studying and comparing Obama's presidency (2009–2017) as a Democrat and his approach to the inception of BRI in 2014 by China to that of the Republican candidate and president Trump (2017–2020) we can observe variant approaches, policies, rhetoric and stance on how to deal and respond to it. It then draws on realist and liberal theoretical frameworks, to identify cooperative and confrontational tendencies in US-China relations, thereby offering an assessment on how the US receives BRI. These two variant approaches are significant in understanding the numerous objectives and justifications of internal and external policies on the overall US response to China's recent growing political, social, and economic clout and influences. This article, therefore, argues that although Obama and Trump have a united voice against BRI, both presidents represent two variant political and party objectives, policies, and approaches towards BRI and China in general.

Keywords: Belt Road Initiative (BRI), China, US-China relations, Barak Obama, Donald Trump

Introduction

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not a new endeavor. Since 1990 China has initiated several projects in Central Asia and Eastern Europe [Shepard 2016]. To some extent, BRI pursues the same policies of regional connectivity and integration and seeks to finish or expand some uncompleted projects throughout Eurasia. Therefore, BRI injects a new spirit into the existing policies and opens up new horizons for future projects, such as Oil and Gas pipeline networks [Ghiassy and Zhou 2017]. The inception of BRI traced back to two important speeches made by President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan and Indonesia respectively. The initiative consists of two arms, which seek to connect the land and the sea and eliminate the borders between the countries. On 7 September 2013, during a speech at Nazarbayev University, President Xi proposed the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB) which as he put it, would help China and Eurasian countries to cooperate in a large joint project to enhance infrastructure development such as highways, railways and technological networks [Mitrovic 2018]. Similarly, on 3 October of the same year at a speech in the parliament of Indonesia, he put “twenty-first-century maritime Silk Road” (MSR), which would connect China with Asian, African and European countries through the seas [Mitrovic 2018].

On March 28, 2015, Beijing released an official document sketched out basic ideas and policies of BRI. Conforming with the principles of the UN Charter, BRI highlights five “cooperation priorities” for the member countries: “Policy coordination”, “Facilities connectivity”, “Unimpeded trade”, “Financial integration”, and “People-to-people bond”. In order to facilitate these five priorities, Beijing proposed six economic corridors along SREB; namely, the Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC); the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); the New Eurasia Land Bridge (NELB); the China, Mongolia, Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC); the China Central Asia economic corridor (CCAEC); and the China Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (IPEC) and several sea lanes under the name of the MSR.

There has been much conjecture about the priorities and underlying motivations of BRI, notably with respect to its political and economic interests. Encapsulating the ultimate aims of BRI, John Parker, editor of *The Economist*, notes that it has a two-pronged motivation on the international and domestic levels. On the one hand, BRI seeks to enhance domestic issues, such as finding new markets for Chinese products and infrastructure firms, and balancing China's excess capacity in some industries such as cement and steel. On the other hand, BRI would make Eurasia an economic hub to rival US Transatlantic Economic Zone [Parker 2017]. Furthermore, it could alleviate the potential tensions in Western Xinjiang and Tibet by creating a stable neighborhood [Parker 2017]. While some scholars consider this initiative as “a new global strategy” which could serve “as an engine of globalization” and promotes the idea of “connectivity” [Abdollahpour 2018], some others label BRI as a geopolitical tool in order to expand China's influence in the world, or consider it as an “economic weapon” to marginalize US interests [Mitchell 2018; Ebeling 2018]. Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus among both American and Chinese pundits that BRI would connect all the countries in the world, which could deeply influence the Eurasian markets in general and China's own market in particular [Economy 2018; Grabow 2017; Wang 2015; Cheng 2015].

BRI involves 138 countries and 30 international organizations till the end of January 2020 which indicates its significant role in determining economic and political dynamics in the global governance. After president Xi Jinping's 2014 proposal of this grand initiative, which underlined “win-win cooperation”, a great deal of concern was aroused among US authorities and scholars. Indeed, they believe that Chinese leaders do not clearly delineate the underlying motivations behind this initiative [Chance 2016]. In other words, Americans assume that China could challenge the existing economic and political order through its BRI and consequently undermine US position in the world. China's assertive behavior, especially in the South China Sea, its increasing military budget and

military modernization have been a cause for concern and create a climate of suspicion and mistrust towards the Chinese initiatives such as BRI and AIIB. Their Chinese counterparts, however, hold US responsible for deterioration of Sino-US relations, and consider Washington's harsh stances towards China "as the predictable behavior of a declining power trying to hold a rising power" [Hass 2018].

The scholarly literature and policy analyses on the BRI have been growing steadily. Much attention has been paid to the underlying motivations of the BRI, but US responses toward BRI over the courses of Barack Obama and Donald Trump's tenure in the White House, have been less discussed. This study aims to rectify these deficiencies by providing a general picture of Obama and Trump's policies toward China and thereby elucidating their responses toward BRI. To achieve a more comprehensive analysis of US response toward BRI, it is necessary to go beyond a mere US response and analyze the cooperative and confrontational tendencies – engagement and containment policies – in their relations, and take into consideration the perceptions of Chinese scholars and high-ranking officials of this initiative. The roots of how to approach China traced back to Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong's meeting in 1972 which represented a watershed in the history of US-China relations. This incidence influences the cooperation patterns of Sino-US relations, in which "Chinese leaders pragmatically seeking cooperation for practical reasons having to do with international and domestic circumstances" [Sutter 2010, 4]. Since then US has taken engagement policies towards China, for instance, under the George W. Bush administration, China was labeled as a "strategic competitor", but after 9/11 terrorist attack the US established a cooperative relation with China and created the Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED). The Obama administration also took cooperative stance toward China to deal with some global issues such as climate change and lethal pandemics [Mori 2019]. However, there is a broad consensus within the Trump administration that China does not meet with the expectations and precepts of US-led world order. It criticizes previous US administrations for pursuing engagement policies vis-à-vis China, and depicts China as a revisionist power and a strategic competitor which seeks to "erode American security and prosperity" in political, economic and military spheres [Cordesman 2017]. The paper specifically focuses on China's BRI, US Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and Obama's Pivot to Asia – which was abandoned by Donald Trump, and argues that since their inception, mutual suspicion and distrust have overshadowed Sino-US relations. Exploring the differences and similarities between these initiatives, the paper looks at major factors that shape Sino-US relations. While Barack Obama resorted to his Pivot to Asia in order to contain the increasing rise of China, Donald Trump proposed his Indo-Pacific Strategy to compete and isolate China in Asia. His Strategy thus pursues the same goals, Obama took against China. However, unlike Obama who dismissed Chinese initiatives and didn't take any effective measures to deal with them, Donald Trump openly criticizes BRI and notes that one of the major goals of his Indo-Pacific Strategy is to balance the growing economic and military influence of China in the region. He is not sanguine about the role of BRI in Sino-US relations and gives priority to trade issues, such as reducing US-China trade deficit.

What is US response toward China's BRI? What are the major motivations behind BRI? Should US join BRI or merely confront with it? And what is the importance of BRI for Sino-US relations? This study seeks to answer such compelling questions by delving into American policy documents, official statements and speeches, relevant academic piece and publications from American think tanks since the inception of BRI till president Donald Trump's tenure in the white House.

US concern of BRI

Since the inception of BRI up until mid-2017, US authorities under the Obama and Trump administrations discussed BRI in benign terms. For instance, Barack Obama remarked that "Asia needs infrastructure... so to the extent that China wants to put capital

into development projects around the region, that's a good thing." Similarly, Trump administration in its early months recognized the significance of China's BRI and determined to send a senior official to the upcoming Belt and Road Forum [Wuthnow 2018]. In addition to their positive overtones toward this initiative, both Obama and Trump administrations focus on some priorities in their relations with China – such as North Korea's nuclear crisis and trade issues – which to some extent give “a degree of legitimacy on the BRI and protect it from the negative effects of more significant US opposition” [Wuthnow 2018]. But we have witnessed a sudden change in the Trump administration's stance towards BRI. In November 2017, at the APEC CEO Summit, President Trump implicitly criticized BRI, and asked for establishing alternative development finance institutions to enhance investments and development in the regional economy and infrastructures of Asia [Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit... 2017]. Similarly, Rex Tillerson, former US Secretary of State, in an October 2017 speech mentioned that by participating in BRI, countries would face with huge amount of debt and long-term dependency [CSIS 2017]. On November 15, 2018, at the APEC Summit, Mike Pence took a step further and sharply criticized China's BRI for its “unsustainable and poor quality” in infrastructure development and its subsequent debt trap diplomacy which sought to drown the countries “in the sea of debt” [Geddie and Aravindan 2018].

US appraisal of BRI as a security challenge has been more explicit in the report entitled *World Wide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence community* released by DNI (Director of National Intelligence) on January 29, 2019, in which China was depicted as a threat to the US security. The report suggests that Chinese leaders seek to expand their global economic, political and military influence through overseas infrastructure and energy investments under Belt and Road Initiative to diminish US influence [Coats 2019].

US scholars are suspicious about China's BRI, and frequently raise similar concerns. Alek Chance, Research Fellow and Program Coordinator at the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, notes that economic and political aspects of BRI are clear in China, but it is not clear how BRI affects Sino-US relations [Chance 2014]. On April 17, 2018, a report was released by Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), in which the authors noted that China's infrastructure investments in the BRI countries were driven by strategic interests. Furthermore, they highlighted the position of BRI's Maritime Silk Road components which could afford China an opportunity to have access to the vital sea lines communications and ports, and thereby increasing its influence in the BRI countries [Thorne and Spevack 2017].

In addition to economic and geopolitical motivations behind BRI, some American analysts focus on domestic aspects of this initiative. Nadège Rolland, Senior Fellow for Political and Security Affairs at the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), considers BRI as a response to its external and internal economic and strategic challenges which would serve a “stimulus package” that can revive Chinese economy [Rolland 2018]. Christopher K. Johnson, senior advisor in China Studies at the CSIS, also perceives BRI as a response to the failures of China's past administrations in developing the domestic economy of China. He notes that while Jiang Zemin focused on the development of Western part of China, Hu Jianto sought to develop northeast regions to enhance the economic conditions of poor regions in China [Johnson 2016].

Chinese perceptions of BRI

Mirroring US perceptions of BRI, it is necessary to address Chinese perceptions of this initiative to narrow the growing perception gap regarding BRI. Win-win cooperation, joint efforts and development to achieve mutual benefits and prosperity are the recurring themes that could be found in most Chinese officials' statements regarding BRI. The report released in March 2015 by the National Development and Reform Commission of China also takes the same stance and depicts BRI as “an ambitious economic vision of the opening-up and cooperation”, “a systematic project”, “Silk Road Spirit” which aims

to create “a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility featuring mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness” [Vision and Actions... 2015]. At the opening ceremony of the “Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation” held in May 2017, President Xi Jinping reiterates that BRI seeks to promote inclusiveness, connectivity, innovation and mutual learning to strengthen the ties between civilizations, boost economic growth and establish peace and prosperity. Being cognizant of China threat narrative, Chinese officials prefer to call BRI as an initiative rather than “strategy” or “plan” and reject full ownership of the initiative [Vision and Actions... 2015; Gang 2020]. Liu Xiaoming, Chinese ambassador to Britain, also argues that China is not seeking to dominate Eurasia through its BRI [Liu 2015].

Unlike Chinese authorities who prefer to elucidate BRI in general terms which focus on its global benign visions, Chinese scholars make reference to its domestic and international aspects that shed light on economic and geopolitical implications of BRI. For instance, Shuaihua Wallace Cheng, the Managing Director of ICTSD (International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development) in China, notes that BRI helps Beijing to deal with US Pivot to Asia and extends its sphere of interests. Moreover, it would lead to development in Eurasia and increase China’s “access to food and energy, lessen dependence on the US dollar and improve representation of developing nations in global affairs” [Cheng 2015].

Wang Yiwei, professor of Renmin University notes that BRI strengthens China’s position in the global order by realizing three missions, including “common modernization of countries along the routes, common revival of civilizations as well as inclusive globalization”, to create “the community of common future integrating civilization, international and civil order” [Wang 2017, 25]. Liu Wei, associate professor in the School of Public Administration and Policy at Renmin University of China, takes a bit strong stance and notes that under BRI, Chinese leaders pursue assertive leadership which can help them to achieve “great renaissance of Chinese nation”. He further argues that by extending its projects to other countries, China addresses its overcapacity problems and “imbalanced domestic development” [Liu 2018].

Furthermore, some observers analyze BRI within the framework of globalization and attach great importance to its role in shaping the life of humanity. For instance, Wang contends that with the inception of this initiative, China has turned from being a sole participator to a shaper of globalization and sought to “create new standards” [Wang 2016, 19]. Other scholars assert that BRI could offer humanity an opportunity to create a supercontinent mindset – an amalgamation of Eastern and Western mindsets – to deal with contemporary challenges. Therefore, the emergence of such supercontinent mindset would create a neo-Renaissance era that affects the foundations of human knowledge, thereby leading them to a rosy future [Feng 2020].

Reflections on Obama’s China policy

During Barack Obama’s tenure, US-China relations witnessed an unprecedented expansion in their economic ties and no longer restrictions on the issues such as “bilateral trade, cross-strait relations, the RMB exchange rate, and the Tibetan issue” [Li 2016]. Realizing that he shouldn’t repeat the mistakes of his predecessors by pursuing an assertive agenda against China, Barack Obama took cooperative stance immediately after assuming presidency [Garrison and Wall 2016]. For instance, in February 2012, Barack Obama mentioned, “I have always emphasized that we welcome China’s peaceful rise that we believe that a strong and prosperous China is one that can help to bring stability and prosperity to the region and to the world” [Remarks by President Obama... 2012]. This amicable stance was also depicted in Obama’s National Security Strategies of 2010 & 2015 in which US expressed its eagerness to establish cooperative and constructive relations with China to promote peace and security in the world [National Security Strategy 2010; 2015].

Moreover, Barack Obama resorted to some mechanisms such as Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), holding various meetings at presidential level, highlighting China's role in global governance and seeking to strengthen military ties to broaden and deepen Sino-US relations [Saunders 2014]. He acknowledged China's key role in the international system and "sought to encourage a more active international role for China in line with existing global norms and rules" – much like Robert Zollicks' "responsible stakeholder" [Garrison and Wall 2016].

However, the increased presence and influence of China in the international arena, and the US abortive attempts to manage strategic differences with China, convinced President Obama to have a second thought on his China policy and adopt tough measures against Beijing. A prime example of this was his Pivot to Asia, which was initially mentioned by the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her 2011 article entitled "America's Pacific Century" published in *Foreign Policy* magazine. She noted that after more than a decade of involvement in the Middle East, the US realized that it should focus on the "Asia-Pacific region" [Clinton 2011]. After the announcement of Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia on November 17, 2011, the US aimed to refocus its "diplomatic, economic and military attention to the Asia-Pacific region" [Rapp-Hooper 2016], to retain stability and security, bolster existing alliances and enhance new partnerships in this region [Löfflmann 2016]. Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was considered the economic component of Pivot to Asia, which played a significant role in bolstering the US position in the region by deepening economic and diplomatic ties between the US and its Asian partner [Clinton 2011]. From an American perspective, TPP was not to exclude China, but to compel it to play in the US-led world with American rules which would affect the economic architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. In vain, some scholars, such as Robert Sutter, contended that Obama's Pivot policy did not aim to contain China, since Barack Obama was cognizant of the issue that such a stance would lead to a new Cold War which would not be to the benefit of the US [Sutter et al 2013].

In fact, from the outset this initiative had been subject of debate among American and Chinese officials. Barack Obama's reluctance to define a position for China in Pivot to Asia influenced his previous attempts of establishing constructive relations with China. While Americans contended that Pivot to Asia sought to enhance diplomatic, economic and military ties in the Asia-Pacific region [Rapp-Hooper 2016], their Chinese counterparts considered it as an attempt to contain the rise of China [Wei 2012].

Indeed, Chinese scholars voiced their strong concerns about US Pivot to Asia. Ruan Zongze, a leading Chinese expert on US foreign policy and the Deputy Dean in the China Institute of International Studies, contended that the major motivation of Barack Obama's rebalance strategy was to contain the rise of China [Ruan 2014]. Yuan Peng, Vice President of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations and Director of its Institute of American Studies, also noted that the US rebalance strategy challenged China's interests in security, diplomacy and economic spheres [Peng 2013]. Economically, it disrupted the economic integration in the region, and strategically, the US increasing presence in the region, challenged China's security environment in the region and overshadowed its diplomatic relations with the neighboring countries [Peng 2013]. Chen Xiangyang, deputy director of the Institute of World Political Studies in the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), also reiterated that US presence in the region and its involvement in the South China Sea would merely fuel the suspicions between China and ASEAN [Glaser and Billingsley 2012].

While most Chinese scholars consider Pivot to Asia as a threat to China, since it could escalate the confrontation with China in the region, Wang Jisi put his "Pivot to the West" in October 2012, approximately one year after the US proposal of Pivot to Asia, which he believed would balance US-China relations and develop their strategic trust [Wang 2012]. He further noted that while the US and China could face zero-sum situations in the East Asia,

they would have win-win relations in the Eurasia, which covers Central Asia, the Middle East and South Africa [Wang 2012]. To some extent, it is obvious that Wang’s argument was motivated by Obama’s strategy in Asia. In this case, it seems that China’s BRI served as push back against US influence in the region and was an indirect consequence of Barack Obama’s Pivot to Asia.

US annual report to Congress on 16 August 2010, further deteriorated Sino-US relations, in which China’s growing military capabilities and its aggressive behavior in the East China Sea and South China Sea were highlighted. In response, Chinese authorities criticized the report and noted that such statements would be “an obstacle to the improvement and development of military relations between US and China” [Nikkei 2010].

Although president Obama expressed his concerns about China’s military activities and its increasing presence in the disputed territories [Brunnstrom and Martina 2015], he did not officially take side in the disputes between China, Taiwan, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Japan. However, then secretary of Defense Ash Carter stated that any Chinese attempt to inhibit US freedom of navigation in the region would be totally unacceptable, and “the US will fly, sail, and operate whenever international law allows... and the South China Sea is not and will not be an exception” [Remarks with Secretary of Defense... 2015]. Furthermore, Barack Obama sought to develop “strategic partnership” with India in order to deepen Indo-US relations on establishing security in the region, fighting with terrorism and above all containing the rise of China [Löfflmann 2016].

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the casual mechanisms that better explain Obama administration’s China policy. During Obama’s tenure in the White House we witnessed both strategies of engagement and containment in his China policy. The prime example of Obama’s engagement strategy toward China was his establishment of Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&D), which sought to bolster Sino-US relations in military and economic arena. Moreover, Barack Obama sought to enlist Beijing’s cooperation on some global issues such as Climate Change, economic crisis and North Korea’s nuclear program. With respect to his containment strategy, we could refer to increasing presence of US in the South China Sea, and establishing economic and strategic ties under Pivot to Asia in order to contain the rise of China among some other tough measures that Barack Obama adopted during his presidency.

Table 1: Barack Obama’s Engagement Strategy



Source: The Authors

Table 2: Barack Obama's Containment Strategy

x	Causal mechanism (Containment)			Outcome
Obama's containment strategy vis-à-vis China	US decision makers realized that engagement strategy was no longer effective in resolving US-China disputes, therefore, they pursued tough measures to deal with China	US decision makers believed that containment strategy would pressure Beijing to act within international rules and norms	US government resorted to 'pivot to Asia' to create a balance and hedge against the rising China	US containment strategy which was encapsulated in 'Pivot to Asia' sought to prevent China's economic and military ascendance and encourage China to acknowledge US primacy in the Asia-Pacific

Source: *The Authors*

Reflections on Trump's China policy

During his first months in the White House, Donald Trump mentioned that he would have great relations with China, which suggested the conventional China policy of his predecessors – engagement with China [Zhou 2017]. Similarly, Xi Jinping reiterates that “there are thousand reasons to make the China-US relationship work, and no reason to break it” [Xi says ready to boost China-U.S. ties... 2017]. Furthermore, the Trump administration and China took some steps to bolster their relations. For instance, they reached an agreement to “establish four high-level mechanisms” for top ranking leaders of two nations, namely, “the diplomatic and security dialogue”, “the comprehensive economic dialogue”, “the social and people-to-people dialogue”, and “the law enforcement and cyber security dialogue” [Sutter 2019]. Therefore, it seemed that like his predecessors, Donald Trump sought to stabilize and develop Sino-US relations. Nobody expected that US-China relations would enter a dangerous period under the Trump administration.

Due to his unorthodox methods in foreign policy and lack of political experience, Donald Trump's policies toward China have been complicated and unpredictable. In fact his paradoxical China policy is taking Sino-US relations in a new direction, the results of which fuel the mistrust between them. Some scholars consider this policy shift as “a more open embrace of conflict and competition” [Economy 2019]. Unlike his predecessors who sought to develop engagement with China and avoid confronting with it, Donald Trump gives priority to countering China's “adverse practices” without any concern of jeopardizing Sino-US relations [Sutter 2019].

Furthermore, the Trump administration's National Security Strategies released in 2017, rejected this belief that engagement with Beijing and its “inclusion in international institutions and global commerce” would turn it into a benign partner. The report also addressed China as a strategic competitor which challenged US “power, influence, and interests”, and attempted “to erode American security and prosperity” [Cordesman 2017]. China was also depicted as a revisionist power which sought to “shift regional balances of power in its favor” through using technology and information and thereby challenging US in political, economic and military spheres [Cordesman 2017]. Therefore, unilateralism, protectionism and “America first” approaches have a profound influence in shaping Donald Trump's China policy [Dollar et al 2019].

To an extent, this approach was also depicted in Mike Pence's speech on October 4, 2018 at the Hudson Institute in which he accused China of pursuing policies that were in

violation of free trade and practices such as “tariffs, quotas, currency manipulation, forced technology transfer, intellectual property theft, and industrial subsidies”. Highlighting China’s “debt diplomacy”, Pence noted that Beijing sought to increase its influence in Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America [Pence 2018].

During President Trump’s tenure in the White House, US-China military cooperation and joint exercises are limited which was clear in US decision not to invite China to the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercise [Bader 2018]. Notwithstanding such skeptical views towards military-to-military relations with China, Trump administration is cognizant of the fact that in order to manage potential crises and reduce risks, it should design sustained military ties with China in a way that serve to the interests of US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific region which would not only ensure US primacy but also promote security and stability in the region [Pillsbury 2020].

Taking a step further, President Trump accused China of interfering in US midterm election during a speech at UN General Assembly, in September 2018. In response, Chinese foreign minister rejected such unfounded accusation and said bluntly, “China has all along followed the principle of non-interference”, and “will not interfere in any country’s domestic affairs” [Borger 2018]. The same year, Terry Brandstad, US ambassador in China and former governor of Iowa, criticized China for its influence operation in Iowa. Moreover, Mathew Pottinger, Senior China official, Mike Pompeo, and John Bolton openly criticized China. Several sanctions were also imposed on China due to its purchasing weapons from Russia. The administration also severely criticized Xi’s BRI for its “self-serving and predatory ambitions” [Hass 2018].

Waging a trade war with China, President Trump sought to compel Beijing to have a second thought on its supposedly unfair trade policies, which adversely influence the economy of both sides. On 22 March 2018, Donald Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum regarding “China’s economic aggression”, and imposed some tariffs on Chinese products [Remarks by President Trump... 2018]. In response, China also pursued the tit-for-tat policies and leveled some tariffs on some US products [Buckley and Wee 2018]. Indeed, Donald Trump considers world of politics in general and US-China relations in particular a transaction, which encourages him to pay more attention to trade issues and resort to “pressure and confrontation” to achieve maximum benefit [Wu 2018]. Due to these approaches, he succeeded to bring China to the negotiation table and put the ongoing economic conflicts on pause since he assumed power. In January 2020, both US and China signed the “phase one” trade deal, in which, China agreed to increase its imports from the US estimated to be \$200bn. However, the coronavirus outbreak, which emerged in Wuhan in December 2019, has influenced the implementation of this deal. The future US presidential election in November also added to the uncertainty of this deal [Colback 2020].

Seeking to formulate an effective and coherent strategy, Donald Trump proposed his Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) – mainly targeted China – to set the stage for his comprehensive Asia-Pacific strategy, which addressed “the region’s economic, political, cultural and security affairs” and highlighted “transparency, anti-corruption, and responsible financing” [Pompeo 2018]. Not surprisingly, US considers this Strategy enormously important for balancing power in the region, and is fully aware that if it “loses its economic base and presence in Asia, its military and diplomatic involvement with the region will inevitably weaken” [Funabashi 2018]. But now this question arises that what are “Free” and “Open” in Donald Trump’s FOIP?

In July 2018, Mike Pompeo described these concepts in the FOIP as below:

When we say “free” Indo-Pacific, it means we all want all nations, every nation, to be able to protect their sovereignty from coercion by other countries. At the national level, “free” means good governance and the assurance that citizens can enjoy their fundamental rights and liberties. When we say “open” in the Indo-Pacific, it means we want all nations to enjoy open access

to seas and airways. We want the peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes. This is key for international peace and for each country's attainment of its own national aims. Economically, "open" means fair and reciprocal trade, open investment environments, transparent agreements between nations, and improved connectivity to drive regional ties – because these are the paths for sustainable growth in the region [Pompeo 2018].

The reactions of most of US scholars towards FOIP echo longstanding Chinese misgivings about this strategy. Michael Swaine argues that President Trump's FOIP seeks to contain the rising China, which could lead to "provoking Beijing, alarming other Asian nations, and driving the region toward a highly tense, zero-sum competition" [Swaine 2018]. Storey & Cook also note that one of the objectives of FOIP was to provide the Asia-Pacific region an alternative vision of China's BRI which seeks to establish a Sino-centric order in Asia [Storey and Cook 2018].

Bonnie S. Glaser, however, does not consider FOIP as an "anti-China or Anti-BRI" strategy; rather, she views this initiative as a positive vision that could bolster US position in the Indo-Pacific region [Shi and Churchill 2018]. Further, Glaser points to the main features, such as "quality of investment, loans based on each country's need, high-skilled labor and the protection of the environment" which would distinguish US initiative from China's BRI [Shi and Churchill 2018].

From the outset, Chinese scholars and authorities perceive Donald Trump's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP) suspiciously. In March 2018, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, maintained that the FOIP would be another "headline-grabbing idea" [Wang 2018]. He further added that all such ideas "are like the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate" [Wang 2018]. Pang Zhongying, the director of *Centre* for the Study of Global Governance at Renmin University, believes that the new economic vision of US-FOIP – is a direct response to China's BRI and would complicate Sino-US relations [Shi and Churchill 2018].

Similarly, Jia Xiudong, senior fellow at China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) points to the Janus-faced nature of FOIP which focuses on unilateral policies to isolate China. Therefore he concludes that this strategy is not what it appears to be [Jia 2018a]. He further argues that US fully concentrates on military and security aspects of FOIP which would not only jeopardize the stability in the international system but also send US-China ties into a tailspin [Jia 2018b].

Furthermore, in November 2017, *The Asean Post*, considered President Trump's new Indo-Pacific Strategy as "a direct contrast to Chinese dream", and a leverage to encourage US allies in the region such as India, Japan, Australia and South Korea, to contain the rising China [Gnanasagaran 2017]. Similarly, Dingding Chen considers Indo-Pacific Strategy as a response to China's rise, and an attempt to reshape alliance system in the region [Chen 2018]. In this regard, the majority of Chinese scholars believes that China's rise and its consequential geopolitical changes lead to the emergence of Donald Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy which is an updated version of Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia and seeks to "hedge against China's foreign and security policy behavior" [Chen 2018].

Table 3 encapsulates US China policy under President Donald Trump administration. Generally there is not adequate evidence that supports this belief that Trump administration pursues engagement strategy to deal with China. Although there was some cooperative gesture during President Trump's first years of presidency such as holding various meetings most of which ended in failure and without any achievements. Concerning with President Trump's containment strategy vis-à-vis China, which constitutes a great part of his China policy, we can refer to his tough measures against China, such as putting great pressure on China by imposing various tariffs, using harsh tone against China in his policy documents, limiting military cooperation with China and proposing Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, all of which seek to contain the rise of China.

Table 3. Donald Trump’s Containment Strategy

x	Causal mechanism (Containment)				Outcome
Trump's containment strategy vis-à-vis China	US decision-makers consider China as a 'strategic competitor' which sought to challenge US 'security and prosperity'	US decision makers prioritize containment strategy over engagement since they realize that engagement strategy could not turn China as, a 'revisionist power' into a benign partner	US government resorts to its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy to deal China in general and its BRI in particular by undermining Chinese initiatives, and thereby bolstering US position in the Indo-Pacific region	US government pursues tough measures against China such as waging trade war, to pressure it to have a second thought on its 'adverse practice'	US pursues containment strategy, which was mainly echoed in its FOIP to counter the rise of China and enhance its position in Asia, which was overshadowed by Trump's withdrawal of TPP

Source: The Authors

Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy Vs. Pivot to Asia

Barack Obama’s Pivot to Asia and Donald Trump’s FOIP heavily influence their policies toward China in general and BRI in particular. There is a general consensus among the scholars that both of them cause deep fear of containment in Chinese minds and escalate rivalry and distrust in Sino-US relation. The major aims of both FOIP and Pivot to Asia are to contain the rise of China in its own backyard, and maintain the primacy of US in the Asia-Pacific. Both of them address economic and security affairs of Asian countries. For instance, as Michael Dalzell Swaine, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and one of the most distinguished American analysts in Chinese security studies, notes that both of them assume China as a serious threat for the security of “Asian nations, open regional free trade and the integrity and validity of core features of the international order in Asia” [Swaine 2018]. But unlike Pivot to Asia, Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, he maintains, does not aim to “reassure China on critical regime legitimacy issues (such as the long-lasting US ‘One China Policy’ toward Taiwan”, or fortify US-China cooperation on some common issues, such as “climate change, counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism” [Swaine 2018].

Beyond these admittedly significant differences, the two strategies could be explained from three fundamental aspects: trade and economic growth, attitudes towards alliances and commitments towards global governance and institutions.

While Barack Obama’s Pivot to Asia bolstered US economic ties and its presence in Asia, President Trump’s FOIP sought to fill the gap created by his withdrawal from TPP, which also weakened its economic, diplomatic and military positions in the region. Like Barack Obama’s Pivot to Asia, Donald Trump’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific puts emphasis on economic growth. But while Obama’s administration resorted to multilateralism to realize economic goals, Trump’s administration prefers bilateral trade and investment pacts in its relations with Asian partners [Cronin 2017]. Since he believes that it is much easier to identify losers and winners in bilateral negotiations. Trump Administration’s strong preference for bilateral rather than regional and global negotiations could be understood by focusing on his new office of ‘National Trade Council and Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy’ which is giving priority to bilateral deficit reduction negotiations in US economic relations with China, Japan and South Korea [Mastanduno 2020].

Obama and Trump administrations have taken different stances towards their allies in the region. While Barack Obama “treat[ed] alliances as ends in themselves”, Donald Trump considers “alliances as means for achieving common ends” [Cronin 2017]. In fact, Donald Trump believes in reciprocity and fair rules in establishing relations with US allies and partners in the region. For instance, in the security realm, he expects his Asian partners to pay for their defense in the region. That means that his free and open Indo-Pacific would not be free unless the member states shoulder some responsibilities and pay the cost of their own security.

Trump Administration's FOIP, indeed is predicated on establishing US alliance system in Asia to contain the rise of China which is seemingly the continuation of Obama's Pivot to Asia. However, the most significant differences between Obama and Trump lies in their attitudes toward global cooperation and governance. While Obama showed strong commitment toward multilateralism and global governance, Donald Trump questions these elements, undermines global institutions and gives priority to unilateralism, and nationalism which create new sense of unpredictability in US foreign policy and escalate strategic rivalry and competition among the states.

Some scholars contended that BRI was proposed to counteract Washington's Pivot to Asia, which pursued anti-China tendencies. However, it is wrong to attribute the inception of China's BRI to Obama's Pivot to Asia. Indeed, China put this initiative to deal with its domestic economic problems, although its geopolitical and geostrategic incentives should not be overlooked. As for Donald Trump's FOIP, which has been considered as an attempt to counteract China's BRI, US authorities under the Trump administration mention that what distinguishes FOIP from Chinese BRI is its “transparency, anti-corruption, and responsible financing” [Pompeo 2018].

American Reactions to BRI: Threat or Opportunity

Lack of trust in Sino-US relations, and Chinese reluctance of delineating the future plans and objectives of their initiatives, sow the seeds of suspicion and distrust in the minds of American elites and authorities about China in general and its initiatives such as BRI in particular. Confrontational and cooperative approaches – or containment and engagement strategies – are ubiquitous themes in Sino-US trajectory and could affect American perceptions of Chinese initiatives. Traditionally, the attitudes of “realist camp” and “liberal camp” illuminate US China policy under different administrations. On the one hand, “realist camp” is suspicious of establishing cooperative ties with China, especially in economic sphere. In other words, as the proponents of this camp put it, considering the huge size of its economy and the increasing size of its population, one day China may restore its historical position as the world's leading economy and would jeopardize US primacy in the international system. They further note that as the capabilities of the states increase, their leaders tend to expand their influence and interests in their territories and beyond [Friedberg 2005]. Belonging to this line of thinking, Donald Trump prioritizes economic issues in his China policy.

Linking “economic security” to “national security” [National Security Strategy 2017], the Trump administration goes to great length to address some sensitive economic issues in US-China relations, and resorts to some tough measures, such as imposing various tariffs on Chinese goods, and restricting Chinese investments in order to reduce US-China trade deficit [Bader 2018]. The origin of such tough economic measures against China traced back to the ideas and influences of Peter Navaro, director of White House National Trade Council, and Robert Lighthizer, US Trade Representative [Wu 2018]. It seems certain that economic issues have become one of the defining features of US-China relations under the Trump administration.

On the other hand, the proponents of “liberal camp” deem it necessary to pursue cooperative policies toward China, since it would help to make China a responsible and

cooperative state through engaging it with international institutions which could be controlled and monitored by international system and regimes [Keohane 1984]. Unlike the “realist camp”, they believe that economic growth will make China a status-quo power, and that China does not seek to subvert the international system, since it is satisfied with it [Lampton 2007]. Liberals, therefore, consider China’s rise as an attempt to integrate into “peaceful world system through economic and diplomatic engagement and a web of normative obligations” [Xie and Page 2010], which would not only protect the interests of all the countries in the world – through institutions, precepts and laws – but also control the rising China [Ikenberry 2008].

To an extent Barack Obama looked at Sino-US relations from a liberal perspective. During his first year of presidency he made several good will gestures towards China. For instance, he refused to meet with the Dalai Lama, an exiled Tibetan leader, who came to the US in October 2009 [No Time for the Dalai Lama 2009]. The same year, James Steinberg, former United States Deputy Secretary of State, in a speech, put forth a “strategic reassurance policy” towards China which depicted Barack Obama’s China policy tone in early 2009 [Watanabe 2017]. Nevertheless, he had to resort to some tough measures to confront partially with China over the issues that Washington and Beijing fail to reach a consensus – which were discussed above. Striking a balance between the above-mentioned lines of thinking, the Obama administration tended to approach China selectively. His administration, indeed, sought to deepen its cooperation with China “where the interests converge” and countered China where it aimed to “impose direct or indirect costs on the US” [Hart 2015].

The majority of American elites and authorities stress the economic and strategic implications of BRI, which help China to expand its influence in international order and challenging US primacy. In other words, they consider BRI as a geo-economic initiative which offers Beijing an opportunity to achieve its strategic purposes through economic power [Rolland 2018; Cavanna 2018; Ebeling 2018]. Such anti-BRI sentiments are greatly heightened to the extent that some scholars depict a darker picture of this initiative. Thomas J. Shattuck complained that through BRI, China pursues “debt trap diplomacy”, which offers predatory loans to the poor countries in Africa, Central Asia and South Asia and when they cannot afford to pay back the loan, China takes control of “a key port or area with valuable natural resources”. Thus under the guise of “infrastructure development projects” China expands its influence across the world [Shattuck 2018].

From this view point, the harshest criticism against BRI comes from US authorities under the Trump administration. David Malpass, Under Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, in a conference regarding CELAC group and their cooperation with China, noted that China’s invitations to join BRI would be more to China’s benefit rather than the countries in the region [Remarks by David Malpass... 2018]. Displaying deep pessimism about China’s intention to enhance the infrastructure development, Tillerson also stated that: “China offers the appearance of an attractive path to development, but in reality [is] trading short-term gains for long-term dependency” [Dodwell 2018]. In this vain, Mark Esper, US Secretary of Defense, notes that China seeks to expand its economic ties in the Indo-Pacific region and Europe to make the countries dependent to the Beijing. Therefore, the “more dependent a country becomes on Chinese investment..., the more susceptible they are to coercion and retribution when they act outside of Beijing’s wishes” [Cronk 2019]. Admiral Philip Davidson, head of America’s Indo-Pacific Command, also considers BRI as China’s attempt to “shape a world aligned with its own authoritarian model while undermining international norms such as the free flow of commerce and ideas” [Advance Policy Questions... 2018].

Notwithstanding such threatening perceptions, some American scholars believe that it’s a grave miscalculation to rally against China’s BRI, which could provide economic benefits for the countries [Kamphausen 2017]. Gal Luft, co-director of the Institute for

the Analysis of Global Security (IAGS), recommends US to participate in BRI, since he believes that US engagement in this initiative will help to tackle with the poverty in the Asia. Furthermore, it would also help American companies to have access to the markets which are difficult to reach [Darger 2017].

Similarly, as Susan L. Shirk, an expert on Chinese politics and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State during the Clinton administration, notes, US should not oppose with China's regional initiatives such as BRI, rather encourage China "to channel its ambitions into economic and diplomatic initiatives" and prevent its aggressive military ambitions [Koo 2016].

As a result, US participation and presence in BRI would not only provide an opportunity to enjoy the potential and long-term benefits of BRI, but also enable Washington to monitor and avoid any aggressive behavior that China may pursue. Considering its vast economic and strategic scopes, BRI could offer US and China an opportunity to tackle with some global issues such as financial crisis, terrorism, poverty and infrastructure gap, thereby building up the mutual trust that has been absent in Sino-US relations.

Considering all the above-mentioned issues, it should be taken into consideration that "having a bigger economic footprint does not necessarily translate into greater political influence" [Grabow 2017]. US could identify the convergent and divergent areas in Sino-US relations, within the framework of BRI and thereby taking the best strategy as to how approach this initiative.

From Barack Obama's Negligence to Donald Trump's Pessimism

After the proposal of BRI in 2013, the Obama's administration received it coldly. In fact, during his tenure there wasn't any congressional hearing to deal with BRI. The same is true for US-China Economic and Security Commission expected to monitor economic and security aspects of US-China relations. Even in some cases US sought to deliberately undermine this initiative [Luft 2017]. However, former Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken, mentioned that US would welcome BRI on the condition that it is fully compliant with international standards and norms, but if it's not, the initiative "could actually undermine the very goals it's seeking to achieve" [Blinken 2015], which implied that there was deep distrust of China and its initiatives in the Obama administration – albeit his acknowledgement of China's global responsibility in establishing prosperity and peace in the world. Thus it should come as no surprise that the Obama administration dismissed BRI out of hand and was not sanguine to participate in Chinese initiatives. Alek Chance ascribes the roots of this pessimism and uncertainty to the following factors. Firstly, China avoided explaining clearly the future plans and motivations behind its initiatives and policies which aroused deep concerns of Americans. Secondly, US regarded BRI as "an element of a broader strategic competition", which prevented both Americans and Chinese from identifying areas of cooperation in this initiative, and finally, China's assertive behavior in the South China Sea, which suggests that China gives high priority to its national interests and low priority to the interests of other countries in the region, which is in marked contrast with Beijing's claim of "win-win cooperation" in its initiatives such as BRI [Chance 2016].

On the contrary, under the Trump's administration, BRI has occupied a prominent place in US China policy. Taking an ambivalent posture towards BRI, the Trump administration sent its Senior Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, Matthew Pattinger to the 2017 BRI Forum in Beijing [Smith 2018]. Gradually, US approach regarding the viability of this initiative in establishing development and connectivity underwent a considerable change. For the first time in October 2017, James Mattis, former U.S. Defense Secretary, stated that US was seriously concerned about BRI. In fact this initiative faced a barrage of criticism for its standards, intentions and plans under Donald Trump administration. At the 2017 Atlantic Council-Korea Foundation Forum, Rex Tillerson criticized BRI on the ground that it violated international norms and rules and

replaced them with their own precepts [Tillerson 2017], which casted serious doubt on the fundamental principles and priorities of BRI. Similarly, during a hearing before US Senate, Mattis mentioned that “In a globalized world, there are many belts and many roads, and no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating ‘one belt, one road’”. This stance was also echoed in Senator Gary Peters from Michigan who considered BRI as a strategy “to secure China’s control over both the continental and maritime interests, in their eventual hope of dominating Eurasia and exploiting natural resources there” [On OBOR... 2017]. In fact, strategic and geopolitical ambitions of BRI are of great concern to the Trump administration. According to the report released by U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in 2018, BRI would justify China’s overseas military presence which could pose serious security problems for the US and its allies beyond China’s maritime periphery [Report to Congress... 2018].

In response to China’s BRI and its pervasive influence in international economy and global infrastructure development, the Trump administration announced plans to reform US “development finance institutions” and support “private sector investments”. He also asked International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to “dedicate greater resources to large-scale infrastructure projects” [Kliman 2018]. In this vein, the Trump administration seeks to establish and deepen cooperative ties with its allies and partners to deal with the challenges BRI might pose [President Donald J. Trump’s Visit to Japan... 2017].

In sum, it seems that the Obama administration didn’t take any practical measures to deal with BRI and chose a policy of negligence towards this initiative. Lack of references to BRI in its policy documents regarding Sino-US ties signals the inertial qualities of Obama’s strategic policies towards BRI. Barack Obama had a holistic view of Chinese initiatives including AIIB and BRI, and refrained from focusing exclusively on them since he assumed them as US China policy in General. Furthermore, the Obama administration pinned its hope on Pivot to Asia, and expected that it would strengthen US alliance system, a factor that Barack Obama thought would contain the rise of China in general and its initiatives in particular. On the other hand, since Donald Trump assumed power, he has concentrated on strategic challenges and competition in US-China relations and explicitly questioned the desirability of BRI which could pose serious challenges to the US in every economic and geopolitical domains. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Trump administration looked at BRI pessimistically.

Conclusion

The paper contributes to the ongoing debate about the role of BRI in Sino-US relations by investigating Barack Obama and Donald Trump’s China policies in general and their perceptions of BRI in particular. It also shows that although Americans are cognizant of the important role of BRI in international order, and its potential benefits to the US, they still receive it coldly. Hence, the future participation of US in this initiative remains under a cloud of suspicion. In fact, both Barack Obama and Donald Trump seem uncomfortable to play in a game whose rules are set by China. Casting suspicions on Chinese initiatives, Barack Obama and Donald Trump contend that China does not act within international acts and precepts. As a result, they tend to engage with China selectively on the areas that are more to the benefit of US.

The paper also suggests that US China policy is heavily influenced by “realist camp” and “liberal camp”. On the one hand, cooperating with China is considered as a threat to US primacy. Thus BRI is perceived as a means of challenging US in economic, political and strategic spheres, which set the stage for President Trump’s zero-sum and unilateral China policy that has been strongly favored by economic issues. With saying this, it is hardly likely that US and China could establish cooperative ties against the backdrop of BRI. Unlike Barack Obama, Donald Trump tends to develop a strong strategic response to BRI. A prime example is his proposal of FOIP which seeks to deal with rise of China in general and BRI in particular.

While Donald Trump's FOIP seeks to follow US interests in Asia-Pacific region on a country-by-country basis which highlights the commitment to bilateralism rather than multilateralism, Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia sought to suggest big vision of America's regional policies in Asia-Pacific region to maintain US primacy in the region.

On the other hand, the "liberal camp" in US administration promotes establishing cooperative ties with China, and displaying China as a responsible state that could play significant role in the global affairs. This camp believes that Beijing's integration in international system would contain and balance the rise of China. Seeking middle-ground in his China policy, Barack Obama completely resorted neither to tough measures of "realist camp" nor soft measures of "liberal camp". In other words, he sought to strike a balance between his soft and tough policies to deal with China. On the one hand, there were some key figures in his administration, such as Jeffrey A. Bader and Evan Medeiros, who advocated increasing cooperation with Beijing and integrating it into international system – albeit its increasing power [Larus and Hargis 2017]. On the other hand, Barack Obama haunted with the current strategic distrust between US and China, which has been existed in Sino-US trajectory since Nixon administration. This mentality, thus guided him to take conservative stances toward Beijing. The existence of deep strategic distrust in Sino-US relations, lack of transparency in specifying the future objectives of BRI, and considering Chinese initiatives as a strategic competition convinced Obama to dismiss BRI.

Regarding the importance of BRI in US-China relations, the paper reiterates that US China policy since the inception of BRI is premised on a combination of cooperation and competition. Analyzing the initiative to identify such elements could help US and Chinese decision makers to manage frictions and strategic rivalry in their relations.

From a policy perspective, this study has some key takeaways. US authorities need to be pleased with China's attempts at shouldering global responsibility of establishing peace, security and prosperity, epitomized by BRI. Moreover, US hawkish policies vis-à-vis Beijing would merely pave the way for hardliners in CCP to extend their influence in China's foreign policy, which makes establishing constructive and amicable relations too difficult. Collaborating with China within the framework of BRI, US would have an eye on the rise of China and enjoy the economic and strategic benefits accruing from the development of this global initiative. China does not exclude US from participating in this initiative, which could be understood from Chinese heavy emphasis on the inclusiveness and openness of BRI. In order to avert potential crisis in their relations with China's BRI, US authorities could have a second thought on their decision of not to take part in this initiative. Global infrastructure gap, for instance, is a natural place for US and China to work together. BRI could be a perfect mechanism to meet this demand and need throughout the developing and developed countries.

The road to eventual success of BRI will be long and bumpy. It looks good on paper but could become costly on the ground. Chinese leaders thus need to prioritize transparent diplomatic engagement to allay current mistrust regarding their foreign policies and initiatives.

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**Ініціатива Китаю “Один пояс – один шлях”
між недбалістю Обами і песимізмом Трампа**

Відтоді як Китайська Народна Республіка започаткувала у 2014 році ініціативу “Один пояс – один шлях” (BRI), її відносини із США увійшли в нову фазу суперництва і викликів у спектрі різноманітних політичних, економічних і безпекових питань і проблем. Для дослідження фактору цієї ініціативи в американсько-китайських відносинах, у статті зіставляються м’яка політика щодо Китаю адміністрації Барака Обами, і її холодна відповідь на “Пояс і шлях”, із жорсткою політикою щодо Китаю адміністрації Дональда Трампа та її песимізмом стосовно цієї ініціативи. Зокрема, досліджуючи та порвнюючи президентство Обами (2009–2017) як демократа та його підхід до започаткування КНР ініціативи “Один пояс – один шлях” у 2014 р., і підхід кандидата від Республіканської партії та президента Трампа (2017–2020), ми спостерігаємо різні позиції, політику і риторичку щодо того, як реагувати на неї.

Стаття спирається на реалістичну та ліберальну теоретичні основи, щоб визначити тенденції співпраці та конфронтації в американсько-китайських відносинах, таким чином пропонуючи оцінку того, як США сприймають “Один пояс – один шлях”. Ці два варіанти підходів є показовими для розуміння численних цілей і обґрунтувань внутрішньої та зовнішньої політики загальної реакції США на нещодавнє зростання політичного, соціального і економічного впливу Китаю. У статті стверджується, що хоча Обама і Трамп обидва висловлюються проти ініціативи “Пояс і шлях”, вони представляють два різні варіанти політичних і партійних цілей, підходів і політики щодо цієї ініціативи і Китаю загалом.

Ключові слова: ініціатива “Один пояс – один шлях” (BRI), Китай, американсько-китайські відносини, Барак Обама, Дональд Трамп

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