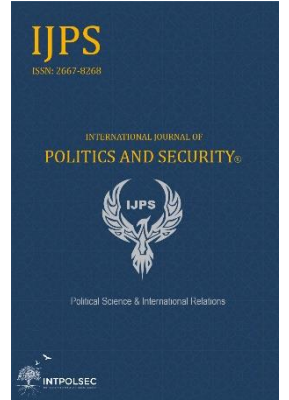


International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS)

ISSN: 2667-8268

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ijps>



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Source : International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS) / Vol. 4 / No. 3 / October 2022, pp. 251-270

DOI: 10.53451/ijps.952106

Date of Arrival : 14.06.2021

Date of Acceptance : 05.08.2022

To cite this article:

Kozanhan, Murat Kağan. “China's One Belt One Road Project and Its Effects on Mediterranean Security”. *International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS)*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2022, pp. 251-270, DOI:10.53451/ijps.952106

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China's One Belt One Road Project and Its Effects on Mediterranean Security

Murat Kağan KOZANHAN¹*

Abstract

As a rising power, China, by following globalizing policies, has strengthened its place through industrial production with cheap labor and has become an important actor through investments regional and overseas, noticeably reaching an effective position. In this frame, by this study, China's "One Belt One Road", which constitutes the most known example of international expansionism policy and is called as "Silk Road", was put under the scope, and the investments and constituted policies were examined. With that being said, the probability of the armament phases of the project and Turkey's position in this project were analyzed from the perspective of China's changing naval force strategy, and predictions about possible emergent opportunities for Turkey–China relations were made.

Keywords: *One Belt One Road, Mediterranean, China, Naval Force, Armament.*

1. Introduction

In the unipolar world order led by the United States of America (USA), formed after the Cold War, not only China protected its socialist state order, but also took effective steps for the transition multipolar world order and has been doing so by pursuing policies close to liberal views within the framework of economics and diplomatic.

In this direction, China, as a rising power, has noticeably reached an active position all around the world by encouraging corporations to invest overseas based on international expansionism policies in the recent past. In this process, China gained prestige and started to adopt a more holistic foreign policy.²

In 2012, the change in China's policies especially became evident along with Xi Jinping's presidency. The sagacious decisions made by the new administration, which efficiently analyses the benefits of globalization, transformed China into an influential and international actor that designs new projects in terms of economics. In September 2013, China's "One Belt One Road (OBOR)", which constitutes the most known example of international expansionism policy and is called as "Silk Road", was mentioned by Xi Jinping, the president

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Date of Arrival: 14.06.2021 – **Date of Acceptance:** 05.08.2022

² Stuart Harris, "Çin Dış Politikası", çev. Aslan Yavuz Şir, 1. bs (İstanbul: Matbuat Yayın Grubu, 2015), 70.



of China, in Kazakhstan.³ After the statement, the baselines of the project had gradually become evident with the published news file and the project's map.

According to the announced map, the overland "Silk Road", a part of the project, starts from China and follows on to Europe through Central Asia, Iran and Turkey, and after reaching the Port of Rotterdam ends in Venice by heading south. The seaway "Silk Road", on the other side of the project, follows a route down from the South China Sea to Kolkata then to the Indian Ocean and Kenya in Africa, and then it connects with the overland "Silk Road" by crossing the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.⁴

China often refers to the tradition of the historical Silk Road in the process of OBOR. The reason lies behind it is the effort to show the intention of maintaining the continuity of a mission that proved itself before. Thus, China internationally aims to make the OBOR process perceive more benevolent by referring to a historical trade route, which was positively imprinted in the memories of societies, and to contribute to the building of a reciprocal sense of trust. Fundamentally, the OBOR continuously expands its borders to new countries, it, on the other hand, offers economic benefits to the countries, that it crosses over. Thanks to these benefits, nearly the whole Asia continent and nearly half of Europe have already become a member of the initiative. It can even be said that China has become a neighbor of the European Union (EU).⁵ In this way, China tries to create a new, cross-continental sustainable economic zone between Asia and Europe, and to make the global economy happen in a Eurasia-centred framework with the OBOR.⁶

The OBOR project completely identifies with the term "soft power", which was propounded by Nye.⁷ Within the context of the project, China invests in participating states by providing unsecured loans, and channels other states to participate in the project by using principles of persuasion and appeal. In this way, it tries to extend its hegemonic power to a

³ Jeremy Page, "Çin kendisini yeni Asya düzeninin merkezinde görüyor", *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 10, 2014 1:52 am ET, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/cin-kendisini-yeni-asya-duzeninin-merkezinde-goruyor-1415602328> (03.04.2021).

⁴ Altay Atlı, "Çin ve Yeni İpek Yolu Projesi", *Analist Dergisi*, no. 4, (2014): 74.

⁵ Bülent Güner, "OBOR Girişimi'nin Coğrafyası", *Marmara Coğrafya Dergisi*, no. 37 (2018):121.

⁶ Taşkın Deniz, "Yeni Umutların Işığında Tarihi İpek Yolu Coğrafyası", *Marmara Coğrafya Dergisi*, no. 34 (2016):199.

⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1. bs (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.



global scale. However, it should not be forgotten that soft power may not always be sufficient for global hegemony. Besides economic power, military power is also to be used when it's needed.⁸

Within this scope, by the current literature that handles and analyzes the "OBOR" project of China, the main research question of the study is what the relationship between the development of the OBOR project and its security is, and what its effect on the Mediterranean security is. The purpose of the study around the research question is to examine the validity of the main arguments of the studies in the literature on this subject by addressing the security problem in China's OBOR project and thus contribute to the literature with up-to-date evaluations. In this context, China's expectations from the OBOR project will firstly be discussed, the geopolitical importance of the OBOR project will be touched upon, and the armament of the project by China will be examined within the framework of ensuring the security of the project's sea line and the strategic points on this line, the last step of the OBOR, the security of the Mediterranean, and its effects on Turkey will be evaluated in the study and the research will be ended. In this frame, primary sources and the descriptive analysis method have been used for this research.

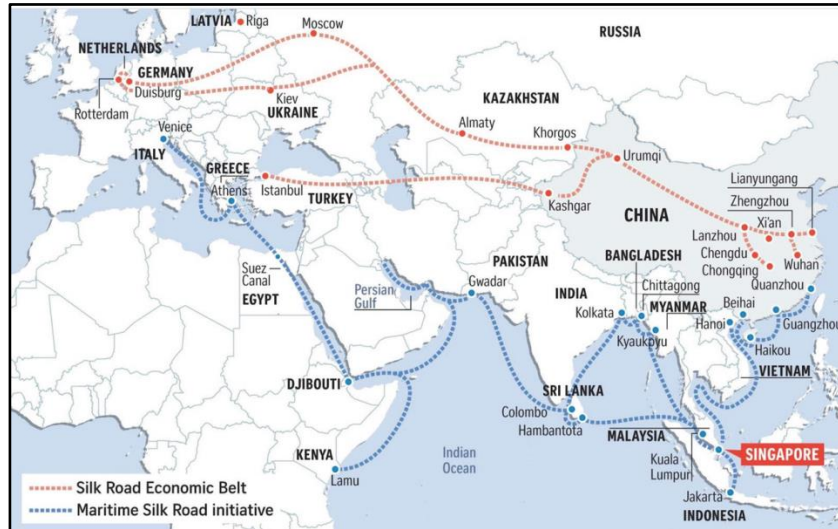
2. Expectations About the One Belt One Road Project

As it's shown on the OBOR Map – 1, it consists of the overland route, called as “Silk Road Economic Belt”, and the sea route, specified as the “Maritime Silkroad Initiative”. The overland route is divided into two from the north of China, one reaches Turkey from the south, and the other reaches Europe from the north. In practice, the belt gains importance on the overland route. Because China government prefers the rail system as it is faster than maritime trade.

⁸ Gülşen Aydın and Müge Yüce, “China’s Hard Power versus Soft Power in Central Asia: An Analysis of the One Belt-One Road Initiative as a Soft Power Instrument”, *Caucasus International* 8, no.8 (2018): 75-76.



Map - 1: One Belt One Road Project Route



Source: Feng YUAN, The One Belt One Road Initiative and China's Multilayered Multilateralism, Mapping China's 'One Belt One Road Initiative', (Ed.: Li Xing), Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019, s.91-116., <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92201-0>.

In fact, land transportation is riskier. Risks threaten maritime security and are directed at maritime trade, such as piracy and maritime terrorism, which take place in recently occurred threats on high seas, notably decreasing nowadays. As a possible view, the reason why China's preference was the overland route will be the decrease of overland risks, and the change of instability in the districts, where the route is, shortly. China will provide maritime security and regional stability to regions, which are on the "Maritime Silk Road's" route, by taking necessary measures against threats at sea with participating countries and the ones, which are on the sea route. The deployed naval force units around the Horn of Africa are one of the indicators of these measures that China takes to fight against piracy. China and participating countries, as cooperation whose interests are common and share the same fate, serve the national interest of China including China's security, and also improve China's soft power, and shape the international public opinion for modernization of its trade transportation.⁹

Whether China will succeed or not is a matter of debate in the literature. According to Krukowska, the OBOR makes Asia an important global actor as a source of regional integration and empowerment. As China grows, it affects the global order. It shows its economic impact

⁹ Liu Haiquan, "The Security Challenges of the 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative and China's Choices", *Croatian International Relations Review*, no. 78 (2017): 144-145.



all around the world and particularly in developing countries that have low costs of production and are dependent on loans. Therefore, it is indicated that Pekin's economic growth can have unforeseen impacts on the regional and global world order.¹⁰

Consequently, it is expected that the OBOR project will leave a bigger mark than the Marshall Plan or the expansion of the European Union. With the OBOR's entrance into the economic system, a three-centered structure will occur meanwhile there are two big commercial-economic centers in the world. However, to the realization of this scenario, it is required that China shall not be a hegemony, which enforces its rules, methods, and ideology, instead, it shall help its partner countries to industrialize, develop and improve their living standards.¹¹ On the other hand, China shall strive to increase investments in the topics such as infrastructure, energy, etc. with economic motivation in Central Asia, and to create conditions, which facilitate regional trade. With this perspective, its policy, aimed at Central Asia countries, seems quite successful.¹²

China's developments, created with the OBOR, are important within the frame of global rivalry with the USA. Thus, Henry Kissinger identified the hegemony wars between the USA – China as follows:¹³

“By working consonantly, China and Russia aim to demolish the world order, whose architecture was created by the USA. If the USA and EU, which are two different sides of the Atlantic Ocean, dissent from each other, China will be able to realize its centuries-old dream by taking the control of this region and including it with Eurasia. If China includes Europe with the geography of Eurasia, the USA must be up against as a big island which, is surrounded on both sides by China, and this situation will end the hegemony of the USA.”

From these statements, it is possible to say that one of the OBOR's aims is to surround the USA in the Atlantic Ocean, which China is a neighbor of the USA in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁴ In a similar way to this opinion, Chinese strategist Yan Xuetong asserts that the USA's

¹⁰ Monika Krukowska, “China's ‘One Belt One Road’ Strategy and its Implications for the Global World Order, *International Business and Global Economy*, no. 35/1 (2016): 157.

¹¹ Sarmiza Pencea, “A look into the Complexities of the One Belt, One Road Strategy”, *Global Economic Observer*, University of Bucharest, June 5, no (1) (2017): 155-156.

¹² Ümit Alperen, “Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Girişimi ve Çin'in Orta Asya Politikası”, *Bilge Strateji* 10, no.19, (2018): 35.

¹³ Cüneyt Başaran, “Ticaret Savaşları: Yeni Bir Safhaya Geçerken Geçmiş Hatırlamak”, 2018. <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/cuneyt-basaran/2511300-ticaret-savaslari-yeni-bir-safhaya-gecerken-gecmisi-hatirlamak> (02.04.2020).

¹⁴ Berkan Karamurtlu, “Kuşak Yol Projesi Bağlamında Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin Küresel Hegemonya Girişimi”, *Doğu Asya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 6 (2020): 76.



global hegemony ended after the cold war, and China came back to play this super-power part, therefore it's probable that an interesting war between China and the USA will erupt, and this situation can turn into chaos in the future.¹⁵

The OBOR has an ideological component as well as an economic one. This component is the opposite of the economic model, which represents western states that emphasize reforms in sectors such as education and health, yet avoid public infrastructure. The fact that China has started to shape the international system according to its interests has led other states, especially the USA, to see China as an increasing security threat. It is obvious that this situation will lead to intensifying global rivalry.¹⁶ It emphasized the rivalry between these countries in the recently published Marine Force strategy document of the USA. In the aforementioned document, it is stated that China reached a level where it can execute an operation on the Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, and South-North Poles by emphasizing that the OBOR reinforces China's units' operational capability away from its mainland thereby improving China's logistics and base capability.¹⁷

If it is put aside the USA's concerned about global rivalry, it is deemed to be expected that the OBOR increases the improvement of intercountry cooperation, co-investments, and cultural communication. Nonetheless, there are also some concerns about whether the project will succeed or not. In fact, the OBOR emerged at a time when traditional globalization was opposed and criticized. The OBOR emerged at a time when traditional globalization was opposed and criticized. Although China is centered in the OBOR, the investment cost of the project is high, therefore, it principally necessitates the support of the participating states. However, whether the participating countries will assume this economic responsibility is a controversial issue. In return, both economic and political power empowerment of China on the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea with this project, the reaction of the USA and other global/regional powers are of capital importance.¹⁸

¹⁵ Osman Tekir ve Nesrin Demir, "Çin'in İpek Yolu Girişimi ve Küresel Ekonomik ve Siyasal Sistemi Dengeleyebilme Olasılığı", *Yönetim ve Ekonomi*, no.1 (2016): 273.

¹⁶ US Navy, *Advantage At Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, (December 2020): 4.

¹⁷ Esme Özdaşlı, "Çin'in Yeni İpek Yolu Projesi ve Küresel Etkileri", *Turkish Studies*, no. 10/14 (2015): 594.

¹⁸ Özdaşlı, "Çin'in Yeni İpek Yolu Projesi ve Küresel Etkileri", 594.



The project poses some risks along with the resultant structural changes and social content of the project. Due to China's fluctuating economic indicators, the OBOR's global impact has not completely become evident yet. The existence of state establishments decreases the profitability of private enterprises and this issue spoils the appetite of entrepreneurs, in addition to the fact that China's provided financial support for participating countries cannot provide stability and safety in some participating countries due to local opponents, corruption, and judicial inconsistency.¹⁹

It is obvious that asymmetric threats will affect the safety of the project and participating countries. The weaknesses of the countries on the overland and sea route of the OBOR project have the potential to pose a threat. Besides China, it is important to provide a safe environment for the participating countries in the project. Thus, the Republic of China Armed Forces may be necessary to be deployed in regions, which are away from China's mainland, for national interests' protection.²⁰ Consequently, China's increasing activity in the surrounding seas has caused problems, perceived as China's increasing use of military and political power, about a reasoned change of policy or a reaction to various developments including the USA-China rivalry.²¹ Another component of the aforementioned concerns arises from the possibility of China's resort to military force during economic investments, especially in unstable regions.

3. The Geopolitical Importance of the One Belt and One Road, and the Armament of the Project

The OBOR both works as economic leverage and provides an advantage to China in geopolitical rivalry. Thus, with the effect of the global geopolitics race, armament and arms trade has started to become prominent within the context of the project. Since October 2013, the date China declared the OBOR, China has started to trade arms with countries, with which it did not have any commercial relationship before. The maintenance of military equipment and its ammunition supply gradually cause the deepening of military relations between these countries and China, and also China provides loans to these countries for these sales, which will buy military equipment and weapon. Accordingly, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,

¹⁹ Sebastian Gebauer, "China Heads West: 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative", *Gdanskie Studia Azji Wschodniej*, no.11 (2011): 57.

²⁰ Andrzej Bujak, "Global Aspects of Security Environment – 'The One Belt, One Road' Project", *Economia I Prawo. Economics and Law*, no. 4 (2016): 449-450.

²¹ Stuart Harris, "Çin Dış Politikası", 188.



Belarus, and Ukraine have taken place in the countries, to which China exports arms, since the realization of the OBOR. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Egypt, Malesia, Kenya, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan are the countries, which buy arms from China. In a sense, the OBOR has started to become a tool for China to justify the improvement of its defense relations.²²

The acceleration of China's military modernization program, improvement of the navy, and acquiring ports on a global level concern western states about the role of the OBOR in China's security strategy. Despite the rarely used ports on the Indian Ocean, the building of developed ports calls the possibility of being used for military purposes rather than commercial ones to mind.²³ In this context, when China's presence in the Indian Ocean is examined, one of the most prominent overseas military bases is the logistics support facilities located in Djibouti, in the Bab el-Mandap, which connects the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, on the other hand, is not used for commercial traffic despite the great investment made, and it is not expected to generate profits for many years.²⁴ Similarly, Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which will connect the oil coming from the Persian Gulf with tankers from the Persian Gulf, where most of China's oil imports are met, to China through a pipeline, is far from currently hosting both tankers and merchant ships that will provide sufficient profitability.²⁵ The fact Because the specified ports do not provide economic benefits, the aim of China to hold these ports should be evaluated within the framework of regional geopolitical goals rather than commercial purposes.

It can also be said that China has been making an active effort for the construction and development of the ports included in the OBOR project for military and civilian purposes and dual-function use. These ports also cover the choke points in the transport network, starting from the mainland of China, extending to the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, and the Middle East. The Chinese even gave these ports a special name: "strategic

²² James Daniel, "China's One Belt, One Road Initiative and Its International Arms Sales", *Military Review*, no. September-October, (2019): 108-109.

²³ Daniel Russel ve Blake Berger, "*Weaponizing the Belt and Road Initiative*", Report, (Asia Society Policy Institute, 2020): 5.

²⁴ Lain Marlow, "China's 1 Billion White Elephant", *Bloomberg*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-17/china-s-1-billion-white-elephant-the-port-ships-don-t-use>, (09.04.2021).

²⁵ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "China-Pakistan Gwadar Port Runs into Rough Weather", *The Economic Times*, September 10, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/pakistan-china-gwadar-port-runs-into-rough-weather/articleshow/71041565.cms>, (09.04.2020).



maritime hub".²⁶ The current five-year plan of the National Development and Reform Commission of China, emphasizes the need to build a strategic maritime hub on the OBOR project and states that they should be included as part of the strategy to keep maritime trade routes open.²⁷

China's concept of strategic maritime hubs is flexible. Ports can have different configurations and their properties can change according to many factors. One of these factors is the strategic value of the port, which depends on its distance from critical nodes and maritime trade routes. Another factor is the amount of Chinese government and private sector investment in the port and how much control they have over the operation of the port and the surrounding facilities. The level of tolerance shown by the host country and its people to China's presence in the region is also important.²⁸

The strategic maritime centers of China in the OBOR can be used in quite different ways in terms of military. For example, civil fuel ships located at commercial ports that can provide indirect support to the Chinese Armed Forces can provide supply support to ships belonging to the Chinese Navy. However, the logistic support facilities in Djibouti clearly give the appearance of a port used for military purposes.²⁹ Four-port projects in the Indo-Pacific region are shown by Chinese strategists as potential strategic maritime centers. These ports, each of which has a different development level in terms of military use, are Pakistan's Gwadar Port, Cambodia's Koh Kong Port, Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, and Myanmar's Kyaukphyu Port.

Both Pakistan's Gwadar Port and Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port are located on China's supply routes to the Indian Ocean and the Middle East. Gwadar is at the entrance of the Persian Gulf, and Hambantota is in the Indian Ocean near the world's busiest trade route. Myanmar's Kyaukphyu Port and Cambodia's Koh Kong Port are right next to the Strait of Malacca, which

²⁶ PRC National Development and Reform Commission, "The Thirteenth Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the PRC (2016-2020)", Central Compilation & Translation Press, Part XI, Chapter 51, Section 2, https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease_8232/201612/P020191101481868235378.pdf, (09.04.2021).

²⁷ PRC National Development and Reform Commission, "Chapter 51, Section 2.

²⁸ Peter Dutton vd., "*Djibouti: China's First Overseas Strategic Strongpoint*", Report, (Newport: US Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute, 2020), 1.

²⁹ Daniel Russel ve Blak Berger, "*Weaponizing the Belt and Road Initiative*", 23.



is a critical sea node and an important security concern for China. All these ports meet the criteria of strategic maritime centers due to their geopolitical importance.³⁰

As it is known, the most important challenge for China is that it is dependent on Middle Eastern and African countries in terms of energy. The fact that energy imports pass through maritime trade routes and at critical junctions such as Hormuz and Malacca also brings along an important security risk for China. For this reason, Beijing establishes close relations with the countries in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and tries to increase the number of projects that improve the maritime trade infrastructure. For example, the Kra Canal built in Thailand is seen as an alternative to the Malacca Strait.³¹ On the other hand, the OBOR causes the Chinese Navy Strategy to transform and operate in a wider area by going beyond its existing borders. The expansion of the area of operation of the Chinese Navy also facilitated the realization of China's goal of increasing its regional influence.

One of the critical needs in achieving success in this strategic struggle is the construction of overseas bases and ports in the countries that cooperated. It is clear that the OBOR is an important part of the goal of "turning the Chinese Navy into a global player", which is China's higher-level strategic effort.³² When the activities of the Chinese Navy are examined in the last decade, it is seen that it has started to operate and show presence in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Baltic Sea, The Arctic, and Antarctica regions³³. China has made long-term port agreements with Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Djibouti, Tanzania, Mauritius, Namibia, and Greece to cover the whole world. It also negotiates with these countries for the operation of some ports in China, Maldives, Scandinavia, and Greenland.³⁴

³⁰ Daniel Russel ve Blak Berger, "Weaponizing the Belt and Road Initiative", 24.

³¹ Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu ve Cenk Özgen, "The Relationship Between The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative and Chinese Naval Strategy", *Alanya Academic Review Journal*, no. 2 (2020): 298.

³² Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu ve Cenk Özgen, "The Relationship Between The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative and Chinese Naval Strategy" 299.

³³ Craig Hooper, New Polar Strategy Must Focus On China's Long March To Antarctica, *Forbes*, 10 January 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/craighooper/2021/01/10/new-polar-strategy-must-focus-on-chinas-long-march-to-antarctica/?sh=188cae1763e3> (12.04.2021)

³⁴ James Fanell, "Asia Rising: China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure", *US Naval War College Review*, no. 1 (2019): 18.



4. The Impact of One Belt, One Road Project on Mediterranean Security and Turkey

Considering the economic potential of the OBOR project, the cooperation between Mediterranean countries and China becomes more prominent. For this reason, the Mediterranean can be characterized as having a special position in terms of OBOR. In the region where investment and credit opportunities are mostly provided by China, countries look at events from different angles due to regional problems caused by the competitive environment. At this point, China's position and strategies for the region gain importance.³⁵

Looking at the developments in the Mediterranean, it is seen that China is trying to create an alternative to the influence of the USA on Europe with the bilateral and multilateral agreements it has made with the EU and its member states. China has divided Europe into geographical and economic regions within the scope of the OBOR. These consist of a total of four regions: Baltic, Northern, Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe. China, which has an effective position in the transportation sector on the line starting from Greece to Portugal in Southern Europe, increases its share in import, export, and customs trade.³⁶ The westernmost branch of the OBOR is the Mediterranean region. China's investments in ports and other maritime infrastructures in the region are also shaped within the framework of OBOR. In recent years, China's naval presence in the Mediterranean has also attracted attention. For example, two frigates belonging to China and an auxiliary class ship conducted naval operations in the Mediterranean with Russia in 2015.³⁷

China is gradually getting stronger in the region economically, politically, diplomatically, and strategically. However, China prefers to develop bilateral cooperation with countries instead of a holistic strategy in the Mediterranean.³⁸ For example, the 25-year lease of Israel's northern port of Haifa Port is interpreted by China as a reflection of the US-China

³⁵ Meryem İlayda Atlas ve Deniz İstikbal, "Rusya ve Çin'in Doğu Akdeniz Politikaları", *Doğu Akdeniz ve Türkiye'nin Hakları*, ed. Kemal İnat, Muhittin Akman ve Burhanettin Duran, 1. bs (İstanbul: SETA Yayınları, 2020), 186.

³⁶ İrem Osmanoğlu, "Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Projesi ve Avrupa Birliği", *Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Projesi: Kavramlar, Aktörler, Uygulamalar*, ed. Serdar Yılmaz, 1. Bs (Ankara: Astana Yayınları, 2019) 143-147.

³⁷ Michael Paul, "Partnership on the High Seas: China and Russia's Joint Naval Manoeuvres", *SWP Comment, German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, June, no. 26 (2019): 2.

³⁸ Slobodan Radojevic, "Political and Strategic Changes in The Mediterranean", *The Review of International Affairs*, no.1179 (2020): 69.



strategic competition.³⁹ In addition, within the framework of diplomatic initiatives initiated by China toward European countries, on October 14, 2014, China signed a financial and trade agreement worth eight billion Euros with Italy.⁴⁰ This step taken with Italy served as a starting point for China to develop its relations with other countries. China not only established economic partnerships with Italy but also signed cultural agreements. Opened language and culture centers, student affairs desks at universities, quotas reserved for students to do internships in Chinese companies after graduation, and the popularity of Chinese in the private sector are also a reflection of the soft power elements implemented by China.⁴¹

The relations between Hungary and China, which played an important role in the OBOR project, were initiated long before the project in the field of academics and education. Education agreements between the two countries brought along cultural and economic cooperation. In addition, China is on the way to having a say in inland waterway transport in Europe, thanks to the agreements it has made on transportation on the Danube River. China's developing relations with Hungary also strengthen Hungary's place in the EU.⁴²

In the OBOR project, Greece's Piraeus Port is in an important position as it is the first entry point to Europe. China, which leased 2/3 of Piraeus Port for 35 years in 2009, continues to grow its investments and gain advantages. With the agreement signed between the two countries on August 27, 2018, Greece is trying to increase its influence on the EU, while China aims to strengthen the Port of Piraeus with these connections since it has the ports it has invested in Italy, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, and the Baltic. In addition, China has taken initiatives with the Greek Cypriot Administration to establish oil transmission lines and liquefaction facilities.⁴³

However, EU-China relations could not maintain the initial rate of expansion and even started to shrink gradually. It can be said that there are two reasons for the decrease in the

³⁹ Roie Yellinek, “*US-Chinese Competition over the Haifa Port*”, Perspective Paper No: 1,071, (The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2019).

⁴⁰ Valbona Zeneli, “Italy Signs on to Belt and Road Initiative: EU-China Relations at Crossroads?”, *The Diplomat*, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/italy-signs-on-to-belt-and-road-initiative-eu-china-relations-at-crossroads/> (23.04.2020)

⁴¹ Osmanoglu, “Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Projesi ve Avrupa Birliği”, 143.

⁴² Osmanoglu, “Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Projesi ve Avrupa Birliği”, 144.

⁴³ Burak Şakir Şeker, “Deniz Enerji Güvenliği: Doğu Akdeniz’deki Güncel Gelişmelerin Jopolitik Dengelere Etkisi”, *Turkish Studies*, no. 7 (Winter 2018): 221.



effectiveness of EU-China relations.⁴⁴ First, the EU's internal problems stemming from the crisis in the eurozone and the immigration problem, and its conflict with Russia over the Ukraine crisis weaken the EU's global leadership capability. The second is that China's rise has diversified its diplomatic needs.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, EU countries are trying to take part in the project individually, if not as a community, and seize the opportunities that arise.

Turkey, which is an important transit country in the Black Sea, Aegean, and Mediterranean maritime transport and land transport between Asia and Europe, is one of the prominent countries in the OBOR. The fact that Turkey neighbors many countries with rich underground resources and is close to hydrocarbon resources discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean and the OBOR project pass through Turkey will make it easier for Turkey to enter new markets. Within the OBOR project, it is expected that the investments to be made in the middle corridor, which includes Turkey, will reach eight trillion dollars, and the investments to be made only for transportation roads are expected to reach 40 billion dollars.⁴⁶ The OBOR project, which is on the agenda with infrastructure works in Turkey, includes cultural and financial cooperation beyond the trade corridor.⁴⁷ Turkey is an increasingly important country within the scope of the project in terms of its young population, economy, and geopolitical position. Turkey offers an ideal geopolitical resource for the project, which adopts the principle of covering a wide area.⁴⁸ After joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is the main financial institution of the OBOR project, in 2015, and after the "Silk Road Initiative Memorandum of Understanding and Draft Agreement" was adopted in 2016, Turkey was officially involved in this process.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ersan Bocutođlu, "Çin'in Bir Kuşak-Bir Yol" Projesinin Ekonomik ve Jeopolitik Sonuçları Üzerine Düşünceler", *International Conference on Euroasian Economies*, Session, 1C Bölgesel Çalışmalar, (2017): 270.

⁴⁵ Jinghan Zeng, "Does Europe Matter? The role of Europe in Chinese Narratives of 'One Belt One Road' and 'New Type of Great Power Relations'", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, no. 5 (2017), 1172-1173.

⁴⁶ Soner Esmer, "Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Projesinde Türkiye'nin Önemi", *ÜTİKAD*, 2017, <https://www.utikad.org.tr/Detay/Sektor-Haberleri/14489/bir-kusak-bir-yol-one-belt-one-road-projesinde-turkiye-nin-onemi>, (06.05.2021)

⁴⁷ Ahmet İkiz, "Tek Kuşak Tek Yol Projesi ve Türkiye'ye Olası Etkileri", *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 72, (2019): 1698.

⁴⁸ Varis Çakan, "Yeni İpek Yolu Projesi: Beklentiler, Sorunlar ve Gerçekler", *Asya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no.1, (2017), 45.

⁴⁹ Bülent Güner, "OBOR Sürecinde Türkiye: Beklentiler ve Sorunlar", *Sosyal, Beşerî ve İdari Bilimlerde Akademik Araştırmalar*, no. 32 (2018): 70.



Within the scope of the OBOR project, many studies have been carried out in partnership with Turkey and are planned to be carried out. One of these projects is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway project.⁵⁰ The arrival of the train from China to Turkey on 5 November 2019 and the opening of the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) on 30 November 2019 show that Turkey has high expectations for the project.⁵¹

Looking at the developments in terms of sea, Chinese companies, especially COSCO, have also invested in Turkish ports since 2015. In this context, Kumport, Çandarlı, and Mersin Ports were the ports they were most interested in.⁵² Kumport has formed the most important pillar of the OBOR project in Turkey with the acquisition of 65% of its shares by three major Chinese state companies on November 14, 2015.⁵³ At this point, the Çandarlı central port project, which is under construction in the Aegean Sea with an annual capacity of 12 million TEU, is an important alternative for China to choose for transportation to Europe.⁵⁴

Considering the additional uncertainties that the OBOR project may bring to the Eastern Mediterranean, it is predicted that Turkey can be an important balancing power between Western countries and rising Asia in terms of maintaining stability in the region. In this context, it is of vital importance for the Turkish Navy to assume a role that enhances stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey currently carries out important tasks in the surrounding seas to contribute to regional maritime security. Operation Black Sea Harmony in the Black Sea, situational awareness, and present activities are carried out in the Aegean Sea, and Operation Mediterranean Shield is carried out uninterruptedly in the Mediterranean.

The balance Turkey has established in the Black Sea between the non-riparian Western countries and Russia, depending on the Montreux Agreement, has been an indicator of stability

⁵⁰ Bahar Yiğitel, *Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Projesi ve Türkiye*, ed. Serdar Yılmaz, 1. Bs. (Ankara: Astana Yayınları, 2019): 160.

⁵¹ Enver Günay vd., “Tarihi İpek Yolundan Modern İpek Yolu Projesine: Türkiye-Çin Ekonomik İş Birliği Çerçevesinde Orta Koridor ile Bir Kuşak Bir Yol Girişimi”, *Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi, İİBF Dergisi*, no. 9 (2019): 172.

⁵² Saldıray Türkkan, “Çin’in Kuşak ve Yol Girişiminin Akdeniz ile Türkiye’ye Yönelik Ekonomik Yansımalarının İncelenmesi”, *Deniz Gücü ve Güvenliği İncelemeler*”, ed. Murat Kağan Kozanhan, 1. Bs. (İstanbul: Millî Savunma Üniversitesi Basım evi, 2020): 119.

⁵³ Kumport Liman Hizmetleri ve Lojistik Sanayii ve Ticaret A.Ş., “*Kumport Sürdürülebilirlik Raporu*”, 2017, http://www.kumport.com.tr/resources/files/documents/surdurulebilirlik_raporu_v2.pdf, (03.05.2021)

⁵⁴ Cem Gürdeniz, “Çin-Türkiye Deniz İpek Yolu İş Birliği”, 2018, <http://ankaenstitusu.com/cin-turkiye-deniz-ipek-yolu-isbirligi>, (04.05.2021)



in the region. With the implementation of China's OBOR project, Turkey will be able to play a similar role in the Mediterranean. In this context, Operation Mediterranean Shield, carried out by Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, stands out in terms of reducing risks and threats in the region and increasing stability and security. The scope of the Mediterranean Shield Operation, which has been carried out since 2006, is trying to be transformed into an international platform by expanding the crisis environment caused by the mixed environment in Syria and the increasing activities of non-regional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean. The first participant of Operation Mediterranean Shield, which became friend and ally country Pakistan in 2019, is continuing with the participation of Albania, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Georgia, Libya, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Jordan.

Turkey has turned into a noticeable power in the region with the effect of the development of the defense industry in recent years. Turkey, which will reinforce its regional power position with the power transfer capability it will gain with the entry of TCG ANADOLU into the inventory, will be among the countries that provide the greatest support to NATO in the Eastern Mediterranean, beyond the protection of national rights and interests, and will make significant contributions to the peace in the region.

It will be inevitable for Turkey to cooperate with China on maritime security, with the effect of China's increasing interest in the Eastern Mediterranean due to both the ports it has acquired within the framework of the OBOR project and its rich hydrocarbon reserves. For this reason, initiatives should be taken to develop educational and training activities with political and military cooperation between Turkey and China. Planning joint exercises and training activities to improve the interoperability of the Turkish Navy and Chinese Navy elements at every opportunity will be appropriate to increase bilateral relations.

In this direction, within the framework of contributing to the stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, military relations with the countries of the region should be developed, bilateral and multilateral exercises should be carried out, and training and capacity-building activities should be continued. Organizing port visits to countries in the region within the framework of naval diplomacy will also strengthen Turkey's leading position in the region.



5. Conclusion and Evaluation

The OBOR project, which emerged as a result of the economic development of China, revitalizes the historical Silk Road from Asia to Europe and causes great hopes for the future economically for China as well as for the countries on the route. Although the landline side of the OBOR project is progressing faster, it is observed that China made significant investments, especially in the Indian Ocean regarding the sea line part. This momentum gained in China's economic development with the OBOR project caused concern in the aftermath of the Cold War, thinking the United States, the dominant actor of the unipolar world order, fell behind in the competition.

On the other hand, some concerns about the project have also surfaced. One of these is the risk that countries that borrowed large amounts from China within the framework of the project will become dependent on China by having difficulties in repayment. Another concern is that the US sees the project as a threat to itself and efforts to prevent it. In addition, there is the possibility that stability and security problems along the route of the project will constitute a basis for the use of the project by China for military purposes.

The fact that China has increased its arms sales to the countries involved in the project, and that some ports that are considered to be used within the framework of the project are defined as strategic maritime centers and also serve military purposes, show that the USA and Western states are not unfair in these concerns. China's goal of turning its navy into a global player inevitably coincides with these concerns.

Europe, which is located on the route of the OBOR project, has a very important place as it creates a border zone. Even though the EU's view of the project is doubtful, China has established bilateral relations with European countries and has ensured the successful execution of the project so far. Considering this situation as an opportunity, Greece has been included in the project with Piraeus Port. Turkey, on the other hand, is a country of critical importance for the OBOR project due to its geopolitical location between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Supporting the OBOR project with studies of different aspects, Turkey draws attention to Kumport Port and Çandarlı Port in terms of maritime, which are planned to be opened in the future.



The impact of the OBOR project on maritime trade is expected to increase exponentially, in today's world where logistics transportation is preferred mostly by sea due to lower costs in the global economy. But for this, the necessity to protect the maritime trade arises, and it is foreseen that China's trade fleets and naval forces operate in coordination with each other. China's expanding economy needs natural resources in different parts of the world, and the delivery of its products to the markets of other countries means the necessity of ensuring security on the transportation route.

It is not expected that the armament works initiated by China in the countries along the OBOR project route in Asia will be needed in the Mediterranean today. However, there is also the possibility that China's future interests in the OBOR project may be damaged due to risks such as the failure to reach an agreement between the countries of the region, especially on maritime jurisdictions, the increase of irregular immigration, and the continuation of civil wars in riparian countries. In such a scenario, China will want to apply its armament policy in Asia to the Mediterranean, which may cause instability in the region. At this point, the most obvious risk for Turkey can be considered as the Piraeus Port of Greece. However, as long as Russia's increasing presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and its interests with China in the region coincide, it is clear that this situation will create a leverage effect for China. However, it should be kept in mind that the hesitations experienced by the EU in its holistic view of China may cause pressure on Greece regarding Piraeus Port at any time. In such a scenario, the alternative for China in the region will undoubtedly be Turkish ports.

On the other hand, the Eastern Mediterranean, which has undergone a great change with the effect of hydrocarbon discoveries and has increased geopolitical importance, may become an area of the struggle of global powers with the effect of China's OBOR project. The countries where China meets its increasing energy needs today are mostly Gulf countries in the Middle East. However, the high energy potential in the Eastern Mediterranean is capable of meeting some of China's needs thanks to its articulation with the OBOR project in the future. Turkey, which has the longest coasts in the Mediterranean, is considered to be in a critical position in terms of sustaining lasting peace and stability in the region and realizing the economic potential of the region.



In this context, the Mediterranean Shield Operation carried out by Turkey in the region is an important activity, therefore, it is important to continue the efforts to ensure the participation of other countries by making the operation international. The aforementioned operation can play a stabilizing and balancing role for the countries in the region and NATO as well as for China's OBOR project.

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