

Iran and China's Foreign Policy Strategy in Eurasia

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Abstract:

China's foreign policy has undergone a real change since World War II. Since the economic recovery, Beijing has adopted a coherent and clear strategy for all regions, including the Eurasian macro-region. The research question is “what model can be used to analyze China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia and what is Iran's position in this strategy?” In response, China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia can be analyzed from the Western point of view according to the Hobbesian realist model, from the Russian point of view according to Locke’s competitive opportunity-threat model, and finally from the Chinese point of view according to the Kantian model of cooperation. The results also show that Iran is increasingly important in China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia, but Chinese pragmatism under the influence of international sanctions has made Turkey and Pakistan the main priorities in the country's strategy in Eurasia. The purpose of this research is to examine the patterns of analysis of China's foreign policy strategy in

Eurasia with an emphasis on Iran's position. The method of this research is case adaptation to the theory.

Keywords: Foreign policy, Eurasia, strategy, conflict, cooperation, Iran, China.

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Introduction:

China is an emerging world power that challenges the future of American hegemony. China's story begins when it acquires nuclear weapons in 1963, and during its disputes with the former Soviet Union, it rises to compete with the country over the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, which resulted in the 1969 border tensions. The result of the enmity with the Soviet Union was that the Chinese rulers realized with a strategic rationality that they could not be in tension with the two superpowers simultaneously, and this led to an attempt to normalize relations with the United States which Mao referred to this relationship as a tactical issue which is temporary. However, after Mao's death, China's second-generation elites began to think about fundamentally normalizing relations with the United States especially since they understood that improving relations with the outside world could lead to economic development in China. Of course, they first strengthened the foundations of domestic power and then entered into negotiations with the United States on bilateral issues, which the result can be seen today. Activating domestic

capacities and eliminating international challenges are two important factors that each country with the desire for the development should consider, which China did it. The situation in China has changed since Deng Xiaoping took the office. China's growing economic weight has led to its growing influence in the regional and global arenas, so that its presence beyond the Asian continent has become a major strategy in its foreign policy. One of the regions in which China is trying to consolidate its presence after the collapse of the former Soviet Union is Eurasia. The research question is 'what model was used to analyze China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia and what is Iran's position in the strategy?'. To answer the research question, the first part deals with the theoretical framework of the research, the second part deals with the review of research literature, the third part explores China's foreign policy strategy towards the outside world, and the fourth part specifically analyzes and evaluates China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia, the fifth part examines Iran's position in China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia, and at the end, a conclusion will be presented.

Theoretical Framework

An identity based on enmity which is rooted in the realism approach and thoughts of Thomas Hobbes sees international politics as an arena of struggle for power and its preservation, and since this world is the place of conflict of interest, moral principles can never be fully realized. According to this approach, international politics is an attempt to gain power in an anarchic system. Under these circumstances, due to the evil nature of man, there is a war of all against all and to maintain international peace and stability, there is no other way than a balance of power. For realists, the outlook for change in international relations is not promising because the forces that

govern the international system are innumerable and many of them have not changed. This is why they believe that there is no fundamental harmony between the interests of countries, and conversely, nation-states often pursue conflicting national goals, some of which may lead to war. In fact, trying to increase power may eventually lead to war, although it sometimes takes on the color of peace in the balance of power (Amouyi & Hossein Khani, 2010: 162). In this case, the decision is strongly associated with seeing the future badly and focusing on the worst situation. Therefore, the possibility of cooperation versus cooperative action is reduced. Since there is no certainty about the intentions of the other party, power becomes the key for survival.

Locke's competitive approach seems to be in line with the principles of neoliberalism as they shift competition from the politico-security to the economic spheres. In this formulation, governments perceive each other as competitors. Although force and violence are used here to strengthen interests, they seem to refrain from eliminating each other in Locke's approach. In this approach, the principle is to live and let others live, and the dominant role in this approach is competition. Although rivals are formed on the basis of representations of themselves and others in relation to violence, these representations are less threatening. Rivals, unlike enemies, expect each other to act in a way that recognizes their sovereignty. Therefore, a kind of self-limitation is applied by oneself and another, and international law, which is recognized by states, governs international relations. Thus, the end result is the level of conflict and violence that governments expect from each other. Sometimes violence is used to make conflicts, but in the context of "live and let others live." (Jokar & Tousi, 2010: 180).

Finally, Kant's cooperative approach is rooted in liberalism, which views man as a being of a good nature, is optimistic about international relations, and war and instability in the international system resulting from its bad structure. This idealistic approach, which originated from the intellectuals of idealism such as Hugo Grotius, Rousseau, and Kant, is optimistic about human nature and emphasizes international obligations and law. From the idealists' point of view, it is possible to resolve the war on the international stage by strengthening international rules, regulations and institutions. They believe that there is a kind of coordination of interests between governments and that governments have freedom of action in making international policy. From the idealists' point of view, the most important factor of war is the existence of weapons and tools of war on the one hand and the bad structure of the world international system on the other; It therefore seems necessary to establish an international organization to resolve disputes peacefully and to strengthen common interests between states and to monitor public disarmament. In this culture, governments act as friends towards each other and do not use force to advance their individual goals, but appear as a group or team against security threats. (Daneshnia, 2015: 58)

But in addition to the above approaches, pragmatism can be used as one of the approaches in the analysis of foreign policy of countries. This approach in foreign policy, by accepting the existing realities, seeks to make maximum use of the current situation in its own interests. The three general principles of this approach include accepting the existing international order, the real and reasonable benefits and costs, and the ability to achieve the desired goals. Therefore, a pragmatic foreign policy requires setting and defining goals based on the realities of the international system, prioritizing economic development over ideology, prioritizing national development and ensuring the

well-being of citizens over other goals and calculating rationality in defining interests and relations with the outside world. A pragmatic foreign policy requires setting and defining goals on the basis of providing intellectual, political, economic and social contexts at home, accepting and interacting with the existing international system, expanding and deepening relations with countries and international organizations and institutions, presenting a favorable image to the world, avoiding tensions and confrontations with the international system, welcoming the entry of the global economy and maximizing use of the capacity of international institutions for development and preventing from the personal and radical decisions. Since foreign policy is the link between the country and the international environment, if this relationship is weak, it will not be possible to advance the development goals of any country in the today world. (Handbani & Afshari Moghadam, 2020: 83-84)

I-China's Macro Foreign Policy

In general, the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China since its founding in 1949 has experienced two main paradigms: firstly, the ideological view under Mao, and secondly, the pragmatic view after Deng Xiaoping came to power. The foreign policy of the People's Republic of China was initially influenced by two events, according to which Beijing's initial conception of the international system manifested itself in the form of a pessimistic and conflicting perception of the international system. First, its unsuccessful attempt to identify itself as the true representative of China to the United Nations instead of the previous government (China Nationalist Party), which was transferred to Taiwan and second, the war between the two Koreas (1953-1950), which Mao believed was an imperialist war for greater dominance over

Asia and control of China, and as a result, China strengthened North Korean forces. Accordingly, China's international approach at the outset was based on distrust and confrontation with the international system which led the outside world to be considered as a source of threat to the country. To avoid foreign threats, it turned to a foreign power, the Soviet Union. The country initially leaned toward the Soviet Union with an economic approach to rebuilding itself but with the coming to power of Khrushchev, relations between the two countries darkened in the 1960s. The blurring of relations with China led to the 1969 war (Fallahi and Omidi, 2018: 1397). This is the time when China faced two enemies, one in the east and the other in the west, the United States. The reason for this was that China alone could not confront the two powers, and eventually turned to cooperating with one, the United States. Of course, for Mao, the relationship with the devil, what he called the United States, was only a temporary tactic, yet this tactic enabled China to overcome the most important challenge facing its foreign policy apparatus. Under Deng Xiaoping, relations between the two countries improved. It should be noted that as a result of rivalry between supporters and opponents of Mao's approach, Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1967. From then on, efforts to improve relations with the outside world, including the United States, became a serious agenda in the foreign policy of China's second-generation leaders. This trend led to changes in foreign policy approach and China's active entry into international relations. From this point on, an attempt was made to de-ideologize foreign policy, and this was done successfully. During this period, Xiaoping tried to redefine China's strategic position in the international arena, as China was growing, and this required a different strategy. Therefore, membership in institutions such as the World Trade Organization was put on the agenda as a goal, and from this point on, economic issues

became the main priority of the country's foreign policy in the international arena (Shariatnia, 2013: 63). From now on, China's main national interests seem to be economic development and maintaining its sovereignty and unity. Economic development is in fact "fundamental interests" and maintaining the sovereignty and unity of the country is "vital interests" of this country. According to Chinese leaders, they should continue to rebuild and modernize China's economy as much as possible until the conditions of threatening the country's integration have not been met. Of course, in this context, defense construction should also be seriously considered and China, which is known as the largest army in the world, should always put the expansion of defense forces on the agenda. In this regard, entering the international market, the continuous expansion of foreign trade, the growing expansion of foreign policy and the attraction of foreign capital were all inevitable (Pouranjafi and Shariati, 2015: 140).

China's growing economic power has made it feel more responsible for shaping the international economic order in a globalized world and, as far as possible, join international economic organizations and coalitions. The most important manifestation of this tendency can be found in the presence of this country in the group of emerging economic powers including India, Russia and Brazil. China's membership in these initiatives is important because, first, the BRICS, as a transcontinental coalition, is a new structure for the world economy and politics. Consequently, it is the only powerful global coalition without the participation of Europe and the United States that has the capacity to be a strong voice in important international economic and political forums and debates, and to challenge the dominance of the current ruling order. Second, the two BRICS countries, China and Russia, are permanent members of the Security Council, and the other three

countries, India, Brazil and South Africa, claim permanent membership in the Security Council and reform of global political and financial structures. Third, from an economic point of view, by 2030, three of the world's four major economies will be members of the BRICS. Thus, China's presence in such forums reflects its macro-strategy for the future of the world order, especially since the members of the bloc now have the capacity to influence global financial and economic changes, based on the size of their economies. All these three factors can be traced back to confrontation with the US-led Western domination and efforts to establish an economic order in the international system. This ultimate goal of BRICS is in fact one of the economic components of China's foreign policy (Talebi Arani, 2016: 27). In addition to the BRICS, China has sought to develop specific strategies for vital areas of the world, including Eurasia, which will be referred to later in this writing as the country's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia.

II- China's Foreign Policy Strategy in Eurasia

Traditionally, the land of Eurasia and the emerging powers became a challenge to existing hegemony, often referred to as the conflict between ground-based Eurasian power and Atlantic naval hegemony, mainly in the works of Mackinder and Brzezinski. Both thinkers refer to the region as a challenge against hegemony. Thus, it seems that once again a power has risen up against American hegemony, which seeks to consolidate its position in the international system with the "Belt and Road initiative" which is a Chinese creativity. In 2013, China's leadership clarified the future direction of China's foreign policy; The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), officially called the One Belt One Road. The 'belt' refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt, which focuses on bringing together China, central Asia, Russia and Europe, linking China and the Indian

Ocean with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through central Asia. It consists of a network of overland routes and railways, oil and natural gas pipelines, and power grids. "Road" refers to the 21st century maritime silk road, which runs from the coast of China to Europe via the South China Sea in one direction and from the coast of China to the South Pacific through the South China Sea on the other. It consists of a network of ports and other coastal infrastructure projects. In the years since its official launch, some 60 countries across its Eurasian area have expressed their interest in partnering with this BRI program. To date, it is unclear what exactly such 'partnering' involves, but it is clear that expressions of interest in projects are welcomed and that Chinese investments are expected. A strategic initiative launched from the highest level of government; the BRI is backed by substantial financial as well as political firepower. The initiative serves as a precise statement and as part of the country's previous vision, including a "harmonious world" and "peaceful development." As a result, many believe that this initiative will determine not only the future direction of China, but also the future of the whole world, so that China will rise to an increasing level of power and wealth. Under this plan, the Chinese are pursuing national goals in the form of networked capitalism. Network capitalism serves the national interest, and this shows that the power of networking can be used to advance the goals of national units. In the form of the BRI, China has defined itself as the axis of world politics, and this Chinese narrative is representing the global politics in its favor and, of course, considering the interests of other entities. With this idea, China seeks to show a better leadership in the world than the United States. The winners of this policy and strategy are Eurasia and the Chinese Communist Party. The losers are countries that do not take the

BRI, even if it is the United States of America. (Nordin & Weissman, 2018: 234-235).

Regarding China's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia, three different views have emerged among Western, Russian, and ultimately Chinese analysts, which can be partly analyzed by Hobbesian realist, Locke's competitive, and Kantian cooperative approaches.

III-China's Presence in Eurasia

European and Western analysts in terms of realistic view believe China, by considering its role in Eurasia, is regaining its position in this strategic region of the world. Also, Russia's current geopolitical situation in the form of a political view to the east, especially China, has brought Moscow closer to Beijing than Berlin. This is reflected in Bruno Macaes' view, although he does not directly address Mackinder's theory and China's role in Eurasia, but it can be argued that the researcher's idea of Eurasia as a convergent union between Moscow and Beijing is reminiscent of Mackinder's concern about the alliance between Germany and Russia. Macaes describes Chinese strategies to the game of Go and cites Sun Tzu's maxim of 'winning without fighting', both of which characterize China's current approach to foreign policy. While Macaes emphasizes the importance of the Eurasian concept and the recovery of China's role in the region, it is necessary to examine how China seeks to reshape the traditional Eurasian concept through the initiative of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In this regard, Thomas Zimmerman believes that this initiative has provided the necessary opportunity for China to establish its desired political order in the world. Zimmermann emphasizes the economic dimension of the plan and believes that the emerging power intends to gain access to the markets of Europe, the Middle East and Africa through this initiative,

which revives the spirit of the old Silk Road, that previously pursued such a goal. He believes China's commitment to the initiative is so serious that it has made huge investments. He also believes the plan seeks to contain China from US-controlled Middle East oil imports. This, of course, is attributed to what Beijing perceives as an effort by Washington to contain China, which has been demonstrated by the policies of the Trump administration. (Zimmerman, 2015: 6)

The BRI seems to be a Eurasian initiative, and this has also been the focus of Chinese foreign policymakers, that is why China has now become the largest investor in Eurasia, challenging Russia's traditional position and role. This has happened since 2009 and has indeed posed a serious challenge to Russia's role. However, in the post-Cold War period, the level of harmony between Russia and China has increased and the two countries are increasingly moving towards more cooperation which is a threat to their enemies. The same challenge that the Nixon-Kissinger era posed to the US-led Western bloc with the US-China alliance is once again challenging US hegemony in the international arena today. However, this alliance faces serious challenges because in the long run Russia is concerned about the powerful China, especially as part of the intellectual community and even the Russian elites assert their Western identity. The United States has previously ignored China's presence in Eurasia, especially its role in establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as the primary hub for China's presence in Eurasia, which has been neglected by the US decision-makers. The concept of Eurasia did not exist in this particular sense during the 1990s, but was considered in the war on terrorism as a special interest of the United States in the region. This view of Eurasia by Moscow and Beijing was seen as a move by the United States to be present in and around their neighboring areas. Due to this

view, the two countries established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to take the lead on the region. Nevertheless, such strategies and as well as Barack Obama's "Asian Axis" strategy became one of China's motivations for Eurasian initiatives, including the BRI. The plan, along with the creation of an "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", especially because China's lack of veto power in the International Monetary Fund, is all aimed at making China's voice more heard by the United States, a voice that has never been heard before. The creation of this institution is intended to replace the Bretton Woods institutions, also, the BRI aims to create a desired international order in the shadow of existing global institutions. This dimension of the issue has become a serious challenge to the existing international order.

Locke's Competitive Analysis (Opportunity-Threat) of China's Presence in Eurasia: While China's growing presence in Eurasia has been hailed as a serious threat to the West by many analysts in this area of civilization, in Russian literature, which views the issue with a competitive threat-opportunity approach, there is a complexity in strategy regarding the China's foreign policy specifically the BRI. This is because, in their view, how an initiative such as BRI aligns with Russia's foreign policy goals in Eurasia, especially as it can impede US progress in the region and at the same time challenge Russian established hegemony in this area. The prospect of a Chinese presence in Eurasia and its consequences for Moscow was first considered by Alexander Dugin, who pointed to the close ties between Beijing and Moscow, which was a kind of avoidance of Cold War enmity. He linked the issue to the inevitable geopolitical developments in the region since the post-Cold War period. According to Dugin, the first threat to North America is a united Eurasia that could be formed according to Mackinder's theory. Dugin's understanding of the concept of a united Eurasia, which

is based on Russian-Chinese alliance, is a departure from the idea of Russia sole dominant over Eurasia. The complex perception of the Chinese initiative for Russia stems from Shankhal Abilov's idea of the rivalry of the great powers in the Caspian region. Referring to Mackinder's hypothesis, Abilov claims that the Caspian region overlaps with the notion of Mackinder's Heartland, which is, of course, part of the path includes the BRI, and this shows the geopolitical importance of the region. While Abilov argues that there is an overlap between the goals of Russia and China, he believes that this overlap is initially associated with security concerns because Moscow sees China as a potential challenge, especially with fears of expanding Chinese economic hegemony in Eurasia. Allison also emphasizes Abilov's view because he believes that China is a short-term ally and a long-term challenge for Russia (Abilov, 2012: 31).

Antonia Hobova believes that the "One Belt One Road" initiative has the potential to lead to a great strategic Sino-Russian relationship, especially since the two countries initially have many common interests. He claims that the possibility of a Sino-Russian alliance in Eurasia has become a source of serious concern for Washington, as the researcher believes that the initiative is intended to overshadow the US presence in Eurasia. The potential benefit of Chinese initiatives for Russia has been highlighted by Nikita Lumogin, who believes that Russia may also consider China's state capitalist model. This dimension of China's development is a challenge to the dominant paradigm, especially according to the liberal notion that democracy and capitalism are intertwined. In this sense, Chinese development and initiative have attracted the positive attention of the Russians, and Russia's Asian resources are of paramount importance to China, that makes China minimize its dependence on oil imports from the Middle East which relies

mostly on the sea. From this perspective, there is some alignment between “Mackinder’s Heartland theory” and “the One belt, One Road initiative” theory, where China seeks Eurasian oil and gas resources to minimize its vulnerability to maritime blockade (Lomagin, 2015: 137)

Kant’s liberal Approach to China’s Presence in Eurasia:

Finally, it should be noted that the Chinese view of the country’s presence in Eurasia which is mainly in the form of a cooperative and interdependence view. This comes in the invocation of the Silk Roads rather than the common notions of the Great Game and the Cold War, which have played a role in shaping the Western and Russian images of Eurasia. That is why the Chinese emphasize that the initiative of a belt and a road reflects the Chinese view of the world order, which not only is rooted in the “Peaceful Rise Doctrine” and is not a threat to Russia and Europe, but also Europe and Russia are among its main foundations (Lomagin, 2015: 137).

That is why Xing Li and Wan Wang, two important Chinese thinkers, believe that China’s Eurasian strategy in the form of BRI seeks to connect Asia to Europe. Both argue that high-speed rail and land lines have more advantages than trade by sea. The challenge was also referred to by Mackinder as the “speed of rail routes in challenging Britain’s maritime hegemony”. Mackinder’s theory is largely reflected in Xing and Wan’s view where they claim the route of the BRI and that of the old Silk Roads is consistent with the Heartland depicted in the Geographical Pivot of History, which underlines the continuity of Mackinder’s vision for the geopolitics of the 21st century. The roots of the BRI are mentioned too by Tan Wei Lim, who claims that the initiative is simply a continuation of China’s previous policies in Eurasia under the ‘Go West’ slogan during the early years of the 21st century rather than being a new project set in 2013. Lim argues that the BRI, along with

other Chinese initiatives, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), reflects China's vision for global governance. Lim also demonstrates the continuity of Mackinder's vision by claiming that China's primary target in Eurasia is Central Asia, which echoes the depiction of the Pivot Area. In fact, China pursues its geopolitical goals in a geo-economics framework. As a result, China's plan to transfer energy from Central Asia was approved by the Chinese People's Congress in 2004, which includes a 4,200-kilometer pipeline from China's western province of Xinjiang to its east coast in Shanghai. In fact, the Congress forced the policy-makers to move westward to access the energy of Russia and Central Asia. That's why China's attention to Central Asia has grown since the 9/11 attacks, but its focus on regional energy has increased since 2003, when Japan entered the region. Another factor that drives China's presence in Central Asia is the reduction of its dependence on on-shore oil transmission lines, as any terrorist attack or action could lead to a crisis in the region. The discovery of huge oil resources in Kazakhstan's Kashagan field is another factor in the country's presence in Central Asia. It should be noted, however, that 60 percent of China's energy resources come from the Middle East and four-fifths from the Straits of Malacca. So, China's presence in Central Asia is not just a matter of energy considerations, but also of ethno-political issues, as nearly 400,000 Uyghurs live in Central Asia. Influence in the region and trying to limit America's role in this area are two China's motivation to enter the region. Lim also suggests that the BRI is an example of how China perceives its' role in Eurasia and beyond by drawing links between the BRI and the Silk Road of the Tang dynasty, an image that Beijing has been keen to reassert. He defines China's foreign policy goals as more political in nature, which contradicts the notion that the country's foreign policy pursues more economic goals.

This idea emphasizes the principle of the Chinese initiative is more indicative of the possibility of its leading role that Beijing could play, implying a broader meaning in the form of a BRI. This initiative can serve as a framework for global cooperation at a level beyond Eurasia. This view sees the BRI as a reflection of China's vision of globalization rather than a vision of capitalism (Weismann, 2016: 156). The Chinese claim that the BRI is open to all countries, although the vision specifically refers to connecting the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, and refers to the rest of the world only as an example. They emphasize that the initiative is also open to partnership with American countries. However, the most important absenteeism of BRI design seems to be the United States. As a general conclusion, this initiative is part of China's diplomacy, which has been on the agenda since 2013; Others see it as a gravity of power toward Asia that replaces the European and American order that governs the international system, or a new direction for rebalancing China's relations in Asia, Africa, and Europe (Challahan, 2016: 22)

Finally, to summarize the contents of this part, it should be noted that the success or loss of BRI largely depends on the continuous development of this initiative in the context of the global economy or success in advancing its various components. Of course, this does not mean that BRI is not a successful initiative. This initiative means the successful influence of the Chinese characteristics in Eurasia to demonstrate a new experience of economic order. The BRI, along with its participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization alongside Russia and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, will certainly increase China's influence on the Eurasian chessboard, something that has raised concerns even among Russians.

IV-Iran's Position in China's Foreign Policy Strategy

Diplomatic relations between Iran and China have been established since 1971. With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, the relationship between the two countries tended in a certain direction. While both superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, supported Iraq, the Chinese provided Iranians with some essential military items, which led to a positive view of China among Iranian officials, a view which is continuing in the format of looking toward east. In order to be present in the Middle East, China has to recognize Iran's position as a regional power. As for Central Asia, Iran is concerned about the growing Chinese power in the region. However, and especially after the Arab Spring, Iran has shown that it is a reliable actor in the region and can be a reliable partner for China, because since 2010 Iran has gained influence more than any other regional power in the Middle East. Iran has managed to expand its influence in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, and since 2017 has divided the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council into two parts. However, an important obstacle to the expansion of relations between the two countries is the lack of common values and ideology. Establishing a strategic alliance between a communist and an Islamic state is almost unrealistic. Nevertheless, both countries are interested in cooperating and bilateral relations between them have the necessary complexity and dynamism. The formation of a practical alliance between the two countries can be justified by Western political pressure and the economic needs of both sides, as both Iranians and Chinese see the US presence in Asia as a strategic threat to their national security. That is why Iran and China have taken initiatives that could reduce the US presence in areas such as the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia and South Asia which BRI is one of them. In addition, this is one of the reasons why the policies of both sides are attractive to Russia. This powerful

tripartite alliance is capable of blocking any Western political influence in Asia. In addition, China exports military equipment to Iran, and the two countries cooperate on some security issues. In January 2016, during President Xi Jinping's visit to Tehran, he stated that Iran and China are natural partners and that it is reasonable for them to work together to implement the BRI. In this regard, He also called on the parties to expand cooperation in the areas of infrastructure, land and rail networks, energy and production capacity. In response, the Iranian Supreme leader stated that Iran seeks to expand strategic cooperation with China. Immediately after Xi's visit to Tehran, 17 multibillion-dollar agreements were signed between the two countries. However, Iran was not present in the summit at the One Belt One Road Initiative to Expand International Cooperation in Beijing in May 2017. Although 29 heads of state and government came to Beijing to discuss the issue with President Xi Jinping, Iran attended the summit at the lowest level. Ali Tayebnia, Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, chaired the country's delegation. It is worth noting that even Kenya, the Czech Republic, Argentina and Chile attended the summit at the presidential level. Of course, this does not mean that Iran is not interested in the project or does not want to participate in it, but the absence of President Rouhani was significant, especially since Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the summit. However, on the sidelines of the summit, the Chinese Finance Minister made it clear that Iran would not only participate in the implementation of the project within its borders, but as one of the committed agents, would try to launch the New Silk Road initiative in other countries. In response, Ali Tayebnia stated that Iran's position in Xi Jinping's initiative to revive the Silk Road is special and ideal. Therefore, Iran wants

to play an effective role in the implementation of this plan (Iran's role, 2017).

At the UN General Assembly in September 2017, Rouhani stated: "We have talked several times with President Xi Jinping about the Silk Road and the new plan that China is considering, and Iran is willing to cooperate and participate in this project. This plan can serve the interests of all countries that are part of this project. We welcome this initiative and have had bilateral talks with the Chinese rulers in this regard." Such a statement indicates that Iran has abandoned its initial hesitation and is considering its commitment to the BRI. The Chinese are also aware of the geopolitical realities of Iran and want to implement parts of the BRI because, according to many thinkers, Iran and Pakistan can play an irreplaceable role in providing access to the global economy gateways for China's western areas. (Garver, 2006: 288). Therefore, it seems that any success of the BRI without the presence of Iran, especially from a geopolitical point of view is almost difficult. Assuming the vulnerable situation in Afghanistan, China loses the only known route to the Southern Corridor, the BRI and the possibility of connecting Central Asia and the Middle East without Iran. That is why steps were taken by China in the period before the US withdrawal from the JCPOA with the aim of making Iran an integral part of the One Belt and One Road Initiative. The first significant step in this direction took place in February 2016, when the first direct train from China arrived in Iran. This freight train came directly to Tehran from Xinjiang. The route took about 14 days and was 30 days less than the sea voyage from China to Iran. Iran wants to establish itself as a regional railway hub so that Chinese trains can reach Europe through its territory. Iran also has the potential to be part of the trans-Caspian transit route, which uses Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine as another route to Europe (Putz, 2018).

However, there are important obstacles in the way of Iran. One of these is related to border control. In this regard, Iran should seek customs assimilation with its neighbors to facilitate the passage of goods across borders. In addition, the governments of Central Asia and Iran must find solutions to some technical issues, especially regarding the size of the rails. While the railway system of Iran and China is the standard system which is 1435 mm, it is larger and reaches 1520 mm for the Central Asian countries. Due to this reason, trains on the Shanghai-Tehran route must change wagons. In addition, Iran should try to expand its export routes and seek to increase trade with Central Asian countries. The BRI opens up new opportunities for China and Iran. Both countries have common political and economic interests in implementing the Chinese initiative. Iran is trying to minimize US influence in the Middle East, which, of course, is in line with Beijing's expectations and foreign policy goals. It is clear that the BRI not only brings cooperation, peace and trade to Eurasia, but also limits and challenges US sphere of influence and its naval supremacy (Przemyslaw, 2018: 220). However, Iran faces a strong rival in this regard, Pakistan and its port of Gwadar. China's insecure and costly trade through the Straits of Malacca (under US influence) and India's possible dominance in the Indian Ocean are among China's concerns about building the port of Gwadar, as it provides a cheaper, safer and shorter route for China and strengthens its influence in Eurasia (Shaofeng, 2010, 10). China imports its oil from the Middle East via the Dubai-Shanghai-Urumqi Ocean Route (approximately 10,000 km). The port of Gwadar helps to reduce this route by about 3,600 km; Thus, Sino-Pakistani relations have turned into multilateral cooperation. This project has provided many opportunities for the new Silk Road, known as the "String of Pearls" strategy in the Indian Ocean. For Pakistan, this could lead to development

in the deprived province of Baluchistan; Therefore, it is believed that there is a win-win situation for both sides because Pakistan is also benefiting from China's large investment in the project. What has made Pakistan more successful than Iran as part of the BRI is the international sanctions against Iran, which have made it difficult for Iran to link to the initiative. The three main goals of China's development in Pakistan are: First, Pakistan is a small economy with cheap labor, and China is trying to take advantage of these benefits to increase production and sales. Second, it wants better access to the West and Central Asian markets for energy imports and export of Chinese products. Third, China seeks to gain the support of minorities living in its western provinces through strengthening the economic activities with the Central Asian countries. For China, maintaining peace and economic growth in its western provinces is possible only through the cooperation with Pakistan. (Vaid & Maini, 2013)

Finally, Iran's position in China's foreign policy strategy in the Eurasian region seems to be affected by two issues, both of which stem from Chinese pragmatism: The first is China's global strategy and implications for the Middle East, as China is concerned about the United States' widespread response to its presence in the Middle East, so it is looking at the region with concern. The second issue concerns the role of international sanctions. International sanctions imposed on Iran again after Trump took office have become a serious obstacle to expand Iran's relationship with the international system, including China. Accompanying international sanctions implies China's acceptance of the existing international order which is one of the principles of pragmatism. In the period before the economic sanctions, the Iranians thought of increasing the volume of economic exchanges between the two countries from \$ 50 billion to \$ 600 billion in 2026, which shows the growing desire

of the Iranians for strategic cooperation with China. However, the shadow of international sanctions has become an important obstacle to the expansion of Iran-China relations, especially in the context of China's Eurasian strategy. This has largely discouraged China from Iran's route to implement the BRI. As a result, geopolitically, China is shaping its relationship with Pakistan to make the port of Gwadar the strategic hub for its Strategic Regional Maneuvers through BRI, although Iran has recently offered China and Pakistan to expand the Chabahar port. But despite the international sanctions, the two countries are pessimistic about this and have not provided a positive response to Iran's proposal (Behboodi Nejad and Ali, 1399).

On the other hand, the implementation of the middle corridor plan- which is Turkey's initiative-to increase its geopolitical and geo-economic weight has been welcomed by the Chinese. Turkey can increase its role and influence in the region by linking the "Belt and Road Initiative" with the "Middle Corridor", without depending on a specific country. On the other hand, considering the crucial role of Turkey in the BRI, it's better economy and currency situation compared to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Chinese government can expand its relations with Turkey imperceptibly and at the same time, unlike the relationship with Iran, Chinese do not need to be worry about the impact of this cooperation on the resentment of Western powers, especially the United States (Mousavi, and Shariati, 1399).

Conclusion

China has defined a presence beyond Asia since it emerged as a world power. In fact, China has tried to go beyond the status of a regional power and play the role of a great world power. The link between the continents of Europe and Asia is at the heart of China's grand Eurasian strategy. It should be noted that

in the post-Soviet period, the country first tried to define its role in Central Eurasia in the form of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, then by defining BRI, especially since 2013, has considered a role beyond Asia for itself. As analyzed in the text, it seems that the BRI has led to the formation of three types of views on this country. At first glance, Western scholars analyze the initiative in the form of a realist school approach, and pessimistically believe that it should be interpreted as a rivalry between land and naval power. The second view, presented mainly by the Russians, is in the form of a competitive approach, which they look at with a bit of complexity. Finally, the Chinese approach to the country's foreign policy strategy in Eurasia suggests that the Chinese view the issue with a Kantian and cooperative approach, believing that it will bring economic benefits to all countries. But it seems that Iran's position in China's macro-Eurasian strategy, although well defined in Chinese documents, is still influenced by its approach to Iran's role due to international sanctions, and China is currently tending to Pakistan and Turkey for achievement of its goals in Eurasia which the implementation of a part of the Middle Corridor project with a focus on Turkey indicates this fact.

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