

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) across the Indian Ocean: Activities and Repercussions of China's Strategic Initiative from Southeast Asia to Africa

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) consists of the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Both roads pass through Southeast Asia and further interlink the region with its main trading partners. A main part of this strategic initiative concerns numerous countries along the historical Maritime Silk Road, from Southeast Asia to Africa. This panel invites contributions that focus on specific experiences of individual countries and/or regional organizations, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), or on a comparative analysis, discussing, among others, the perceptions, opportunities and challenges of this strategic initiative for other players in the region and beyond.

Concerning Southeast Asia, Beijing collaborates in general closely with ASEAN. So far, it accepts ASEAN's regional centrality and the multilateral institutions and governance mechanisms ASEAN created in Southeast and Northeast Asia, e.g. the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or the East Asia Summit (EAS). However, is China still willing to respect the existing governance structures in Southeast Asia and other regions along the Silk Roads? Or does Beijing intend to establish its own norms, rules and institutions, e.g. the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). A possible concrete case study is China's behavior in the South China Sea and how it impacts on the Southeast Asian claimant nations and ASEAN's regional centrality: Does Beijing remain opposed to a multilateral resolution of the territorial disputes and respecting International Law? Can the MSR project promote multilateral cooperation that can contribute to a peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes in the South China Sea?

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