

The “Roads” and “Belts” of Eurasia

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Editor

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INTRODUCTION

It is commonly thought that the twenty-first century will be the century of Eurasia. It is here, to the vast expanses of the Eurasian continent, that the center of the world's political and economic activity is shifting. The nineteenth century was dominated by Europe and the twentieth century, particularly the post-WWII period, was dominated by U.S. attempts to build a "Pax Americana"—an effort that has now clearly failed and led to what well-known U.S. researcher and contributor to this collection Andrew C. Kuchins has called "the end of the end of history."¹ A new period of history is beginning, one in which the Eurasian states will play an important, if not central, role in world affairs.

Eurasia's growing role in the world is a result of the trend towards multipolarity. That trend is itself a product of the relative decline in the power and influence of the U.S. and its Western allies—which, as recently as the 1990s, claimed the right to world domination—and of the growing strength of such non-Western centers of power as China, India, Russia, Brazil, and others. Most of these new centers are located in Eurasia. This is why the idea of a "Greater Europe" stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok that gained currency in the 1990s, or the "Asia-Pacific Century" that was widely discussed early in this century, is increasingly being eclipsed by the concept of a "Greater Eurasia."

This work, "The 'Roads' and 'Belts' of Eurasia," is a unique publication that brings together in one volume works by leading researchers from a wide variety of countries. They all share an interest in the current state of the Eurasian continent and the political and economic processes taking place there. They are not inclined to consider Eurasia's fate from the

standpoint of a mythological search for the roots of the peoples living there, the outdated theory of “Eurasianism,” or abstract geopolitical constructs such as are found in the writings of Halford Mackinder or Nicholas Spykman. Our goal is more specific and prosaic: to present the opinions of leading world experts with regard to the Eurasian continent’s current condition and prospects for development as well as the political and economic processes unfolding there. On that basis, we will draw several conclusions as to whether, in fact, Eurasia will soon play a leading role in the world and how the Eurasian states can strengthen cooperation and accelerate their economic development. Hence, this work devotes considerable attention to various national and international projects for developing transport and economic infrastructure, trade, economic and investment cooperation, the strengthening of political stability, and the improvement of the quality of life and human capital.

The book is divided into two parts. The articles of the first part are devoted to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and to how different states and regions of the world regard it. In fact, Eurasia’s growing role in the world is largely due to the unprecedented growth of China’s economy and political influence. This is why the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)—first announced by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in the fall of 2013 and usually referred to collectively as the BRI—hold particular importance for the fate of Eurasia. The book opens with a chapter by a Russian Sinologist Igor Denisov that provides a general description of the Chinese initiative, the history of its conceptual development, and a look at the first five years of its implementation. In the second chapter, Sergey Luzyanin, Director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences evaluates the importance that the Chinese initiative holds for Russia, for the development of its Siberian and Far Eastern regions, and for the processes of Eurasian integration that Russia supports. The latter concerns primarily the project to link the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) with the SREB. In the third chapter, researchers Ruslan Izymov and Nargiza Muratalieva of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan respectively consider the opportunities and risks that the BRI holds for the states of Central Asia.

The authors of the fourth chapter, Indian international affairs experts Nandan Unnikrishnan and Uma Purushothaman, analyze their country’s approach to the Chinese initiative and to other ideas for cooperation in the region. In the fifth chapter, College of Europe in Bruges Professor Jing

Men evaluates the connectivity of the Chinese and European rail systems. In the sixth chapter, U.S. researcher Jeanne L. Wilson examines her country's attitude towards the "Chinese challenge" in light of Washington's desire to achieve regional dominance in Asia. And finally, in the seventh chapter, Japanese Sinologist Chisako T. Masuo examines new trends in Tokyo's global diplomacy in response to the BRI.

The second part of the book, more general in nature, is devoted to other national and international projects aimed at the development of Eurasia. It opens with a chapter written by Maxim Vilisov and the author of this Introduction and is devoted to the issue of Eurasian integration and its role in developing Asiatic Russia and the Russian Far North. It examines the successes and failures of various projects for developing Asiatic Russia from the late nineteenth century to the present. The authors also propose measures for linking the accelerated development of the infrastructure of that part of the country with that of other parts of the Eurasian continent within the framework of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership, the linkage between the EAEU and SREB, economic cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the above-mentioned project to create a "Greater Eurasia."

The ninth chapter, written by the leading Chinese expert on Russia, Dean of the School of International Relations of the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and President of the Chinese Association of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, Li Yongquan, evaluates the prospects for linking the "One Belt, One Road" initiative with the Greater Eurasian Partnership that nearby states are developing.

The tenth chapter, that Russian academic, statesman, public figure, and former President of the Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin co-authored with Maxim Vilisov, argues that "roads" and "belts" refer to two concepts for implementing infrastructure projects. The first seeks to facilitate international transit, primarily by implementing cross-border infrastructure development projects ("roads"). The second promotes domestic socio-economic development through the creation of new production capacities and the equalization of the capabilities of different regions within a single country ("belts"). The countries of the EAEU already make use of both concepts in formulating official policy. Understanding the specific characteristics of each makes the prospects more distinct for linking the Chinese initiatives with projects of the EAEU.

The author of the eleventh chapter, former SCO Secretary-General, academic and Tajikistani diplomat, Rashid Alimov, thoroughly analyzes that organization's role and contribution to the development of the Eurasian space. In the twelfth chapter, Indian Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis researchers Meena Singh Roy and Rajorshi Roy attempt to answer the question of how New Delhi's various initiatives for Central Asia will contribute to the restoration of India's economic and political ties with that region. In the thirteenth chapter, American University of Central Asia President Andrew C. Kuchins writes on how the U.S. views Eurasia's growing importance to the world. In the final and fourteenth chapter, Russian Higher School of Economics researcher Dmitry Novikov details the significance that various Asian and Pacific mega-economic projects have for Eurasia and their connection to national and international infrastructures and to the region's investment and integration initiatives.

It is my hope that this book—the result of collaboration between the International Laboratory on World Order Studies and the New Regionalism (of the National Research University Higher School of Economics) and the Center for Crisis Society Studies (Centro), which is a Russian independent think tank—will be of interest to specialists in international relations and the world economy, experts on the Eurasian region and its constituent states, and everyone interested in the political structure of the world and the global economy.

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NOTE

1. Andrew C. Kuchins, "The End of the End of History", *Strategic Analysis*, 40(6), pp. 458–460.