



## THE GEOPOLITICS AND IMPACTS OF CHINA'S "ONE BELT, ONE ROAD" INITIATIVES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper scrutinizes the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) of China, and its associated initiatives that affect the geopolitics with regards to the Horn of Africa. China's OBOR initiative connect countries like Somali, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti through Maritime Silk Road that promotes political ties between Africa and China and enhancing the geopolitical interests of Beijing. The statistical data analysis on the Geopolitics of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative as well as the reintegration of the Middle East and Africa into China's System of Accumulation has led to GBM (government business media) complex. This allows for regional and transactional relations between the governments of countries within the Horn of Africa and the Chinese government. China's One Belt, One Road studies show that those above five central countries located in the Horn of Africa have been impacted as they have infrastructural developments such as railways, Maritimes, and pipelines that connect them to Chinese ports clusters in countries such as Sudan. This has also left military connections and foreign debts between the countries.

**Keywords:** The Horn of Africa, One Belt One Road, geopolitics, foreign debt, military cooperation

### **1. Introduction**

According to Igbino (2017), the economic and socio-political aim of China had been diversely impacted by essential African strategies that made them create the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The infrastructural projects that connect various countries have reshaped the global engagements in terms of integral elements such as international economic and political transformations (Nantulya, 2019).<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> The FOCAC (the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) in 2000 as a form of improving the investment, security, political and trade association between China and Africa.

It also includes a new view of the realities in an economy and political systems. The OBOR (One Belt, One Road) initiative, which is a collection of the SREB (Silk Road Economic Belt) and China's MSRI (Maritime Silk Road Initiative). The two are responsible for infrastructural projects that connect various geographical locations through politics (Jean-Marc & Colin, 2017). According to Merwe (2019), the GBM (government business media), multiple connectivities forms a conglomerate and colluded governments who participate in transactional and political relationships with each other. In 2013, the SREB and MSRI were separately proposed. The schemes have drawn critical attention from countries, researchers and analysts to examine the impacts of the OBOR on geopolitical and economic systems in the Horn of Africa.

Ehizuelen & Abdi (2017) also argued that the Belt and Road initiative committed to assisting continents such as Africa and Asia on a new course based on human development and more significant growth through investment augmented trade and connectivity of infrastructures. The OBOR initiative also provides enormous opportunities for global economic collaboration, especially for African nations such as Djibouti, Eritrea, Somali, and Ethiopia. According to [Chang et al. \(2015\)](#), the One Belt, One Road Initiative in the Chinese government has made China evolve from closed market economy traders of agricultural products to second top international traders following the U.S economy over the past three decades. The international relations with countries in the Horn of Africa have led to the requirements of several new Maritime ports for purposes of economic and political growth (Styan, 2018).

## 2. Review of Critical OBOR Literature

Initially, the Silk Road was just used for trade of silk, which then expanded to the business of agricultural products such as tea. Over time, China has been reviving the Silk Road, which was later renamed as One Belt, One Road Initiative. As mentioned before that China's OBOR (One Belt, One Road) initiative has been developed to a collection of the SREB (Silk Road Economic Belt) and China's MSRI (Maritime Silk Road Initiative). The two have led to infrastructural improvements within the countries within the Horn of Africa, such as Djibouti, Eritrea, Somali, and Ethiopia. Duarte (2019) <sup>iii</sup> stated that in the Chinese emergence and reemergence context, the Belt and Road Initiative projects are based on China's interests to attain political, economic, and military powers for security purposes. China's OBOR helps them to sustain internal stability as well as assist in dealing with prospective economic uncertainties. The connectivity of countries within the Horn of Africa and China that led to the impacts on the Horn of Africa's economy and political system is as shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>iii</sup> The collection of the SREB (Silk Road Economic Belt) and China's MSRI (Maritime Silk Road Initiative) was proposed by the Republic of China for grand in geographic, economic, and financial scale as a scheme.

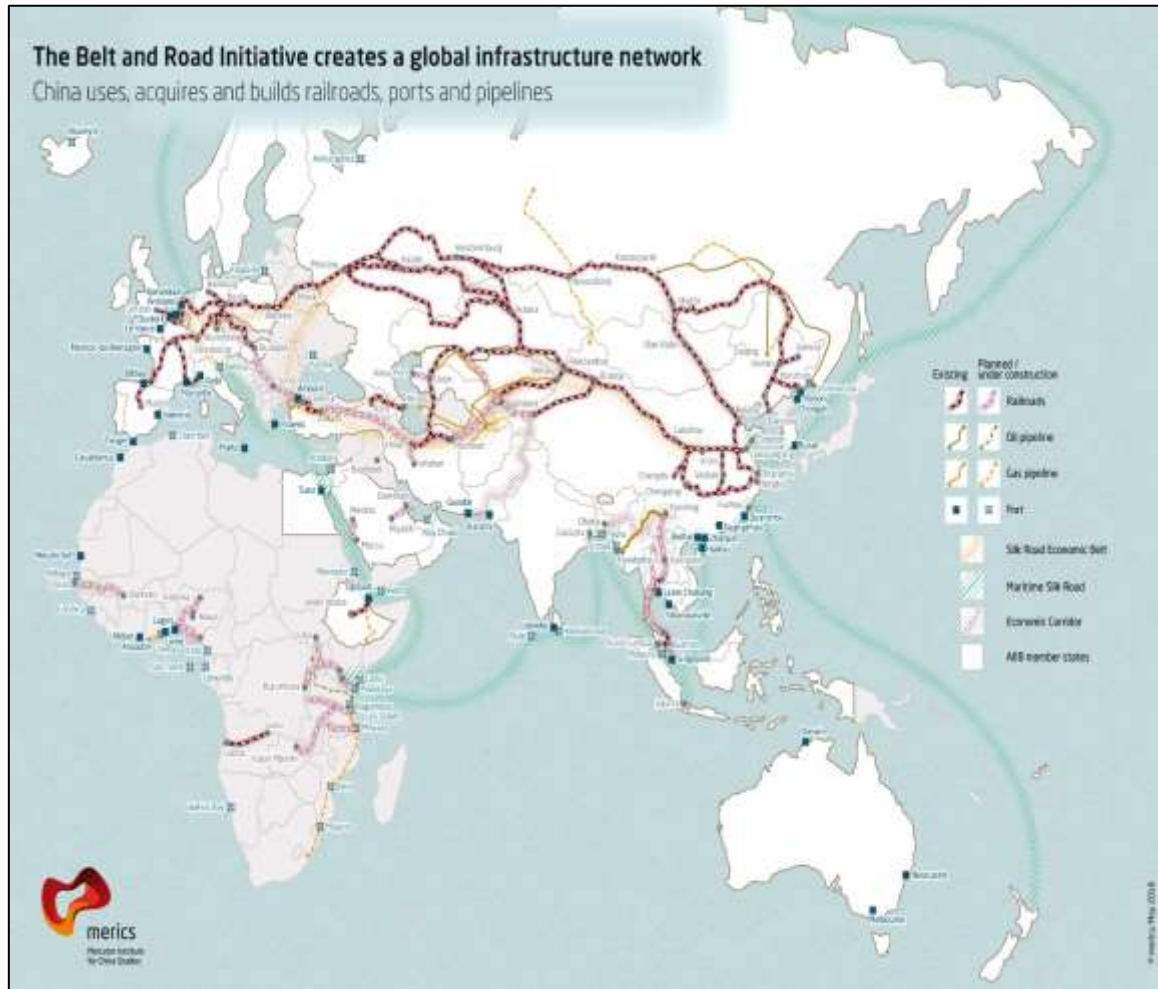


Figure 1: Belt and Road Initiative Network Infrastructure by Nantulya (2019)

### 2.1 China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI)

Figure 1 above shows the established infrastructure that connects countries in the Horn of Africa using the nodes in the Maritime Silk Road. The states are connected using finished and planned power plants, railways, pipelines, and ports established and funded by investors and companies in China. China created its initial overseas navy base and possessed posts related to in-depth seaport strategies in Djibouti. They found an electric railway from Djibouti, which is connected to Addis Ababa. The Maritime Silk Road from Djibouti links planned and finished Chinese port high populated in Namibia, Angola, Cameroon, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea, Gambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Mauritania, and Sudan. Another rail route connects Djibouti to Hong Kong, Myanmar, Colombo, Hambantota, and Gwadar (Nantulya, 2019). Russon (2019) reported on the upcoming ports to be constructed where Somaliland had ports expansions made to support massive vessels. She further illustrated that Ethiopia was warming the association with Eritrea, where it was expected for there to be a rise in competition for exports from Ethiopia at Massawa port in Eritrea. In the Horn of Africa, the initiatives are based on China's Belt and Road Initiatives funded by China and funds monitored by Central Bank. The connectivity was to invest in infrastructure, technology, power plants,

and oil generated in those countries (Nantulya, 2019). According to Jean-Marc & Colin (2017), the studies have been done to view almost all the possibilities of China conglomerate with other countries in regards to policies, politics, investment patterns, and individual people interactions regionally and internationally. This study has found that China had two plans; to trade agricultural products and participate in political and security affairs. Most governments of Africa see threats on Chinese objectives as an attack on their security at national levels. The recent African-China Action Plan signed by African leaders in 2018, indicates that the Chinese nationals safety and security based on significant domestic economic projects, Chinese crucial projects and companies shall be given priorities in police cooperation, military, and intelligence (Nantulya, 2019).

## 2.2 Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)

SREB traces back to Silk Road in the historical context of Zheng. He had voyages that are composite of folk yarn as well as part of archaeologically dated backward. History shows that his ships, which were as many as 300 fleets sailed by the strength of sailors who were around 28,000. They stooped on the East African coast, including Malindi and Lamu in Kenya, as well as Kismayu and Mogadishu in Somalia by 1418 (Wekesa, 2015).<sup>iv,v</sup>

Xing (2019) stated that the rise of China and its expansions on the Belt and Road Initiative continue to grow as a challenge to the already established structural power and global arrangements of the worldwide order at work. The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) construction was a profitable project for all countries connected to China, including the Horn of Africa. Although the development led to strenuous human activities, increased water crisis, increased utilization of energy, and worsened the vulnerability of the surroundings. However, the Chinese Silk Road Economic Belt was rebuilt and maintained by China to allow for the enhancement of scientific research, the advancement of education, and reinforcement of global conglomeration (Li et al., 2015). According to Jie (2017), in May 2014, Hanban Office of Chinese Language Council International had passed and introduced the "Global Curriculum for the Chinese Language" that entails most of the cultures in China connotations with the reason to establish widespread of their culture internationally.

Zhou (2018) also analyzed the SREB concerning its security and realized that China often has security interests in countries connected to it through the Silk Road Economic Belt initiatives.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>iv</sup> Zheng arrival happened before the arrival of the Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama, in 1498, who passed near the Cape of Good Hope—evidence that puts a competitive historical record between the West and China over their long interaction with Africa.

<sup>v</sup> As stated clearly with equal passion by the Chinese side, there has been evidence showing the pioneering of armada to East Africa who arrived not to colonize or ill-intentionally arm the local societies but to just look for trade routes.

<sup>vi</sup> They offer policy recommendations to what happens to other countries based on security threats. As I aforementioned earlier, the naval bases have been put in places such as Djibouti to ensure there is peace amongst the fighting societies such as South Sudan and Somaliland.

### 3. Geopolitics of OBOR in the Horn of Africa

The argumentative discussions revolving around economic ideologies rarely show correct objective responses as to what exactly is the solution required that may work in practice. Or what exact mixture of macroeconomics advice third world countries should put in practice. What's better still is the framing of the debate that tends to suggest that economies that are networked that focus on their GBM linkages remain more to leveraging resources, sectors, and overlooked players. With this, there is an increase in the likelihood that these critical stakeholders would take advantage of all this for personal gain or accumulation by dispossession. The only obvious point is that all these key stakeholders, including the government, are necessary to make beneficial decisions over policy, resources, and strategic policy.

In its outwards expression, it is essential also to study the Chinese political economy operating through a GBM network (Merwe, 2019). How data channels are mobilized to enable capital accumulation is the essential trait of this system, and to properly understand this, we have to study the Middle East and Africa and if to put it blatantly in regards to Chinese insertion into these spaces. They use the government and corporate channels to cut-and-thrust to ensure accumulation over the area. This is especially true now that the Chinese government views Africa as a Middle east via OBOR, focuses its capital accumulation efforts and over-accumulation efforts within the OBOR .To prove comparisons for these assumptions, the following section describes the desired roles of Africa and the Middle East within OBOR (Mwatela & Changfeng, 2016).<sup>vii</sup>

### 4. Impacts of OBOR in the Horn of Africa

The effects of the countries within the Horn of Africa has been as a result of the One Belt, One Road Initiative. The influence is both on their economy and political system. The OBOR was initially known as Silk Road expanded to form the OBOR initiative. The route first resulted in the trade within countries. The Chinese economy traded silk and tea. Over time, the road and belt initiative has led to more than just a deal. China now uses it to gain political power over developing countries. The agreement has also resulted in the adoption of Chinese cultures such as tea drinking, whereby Chinese export bulky products of their tea to third world countries. The presence of Chinese has also led to the employment of many people in the horn of Africa. As the Chinese construct power plants, enhance technologies and improve infrastructure, professional individuals from the Horn of Africa get employed. However, the most influenced system is the political system in the Horn of Africa. Belt and Road Initiatives have made the governments collaborate towards achieving security and creation of policies that govern Chinese and even the entire nations in the Horn of Africa.

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<sup>vii</sup> As territorial countries converge to form alliances and protect their interests, Africa and the Middle East come up particularly rich sites of analysis.



#### **4.1 Opening trade Network of the Horn of Africa**

Before the era of Silk Road, China was engaged in closed economic system trade where they traded the agricultural products they farmed. The ideology of using Silk Road was to develop an association with other countries and trade both silk and tea as it was at the center of all countries involved in the business. The Silk Road traces back to the Khan Dynasty, where Marco Polo, his uncle and son, had to travel on Silk Road selling jewelry as they went to China. They also traveled to Asia and back home. It opened the routes to trade in European countries in the early days. China saw an opportunity to purchase and be the center of attention if they initiate connectivity to all nations through development of Belt and Road Initiatives. They improved the infrastructure and created a connection to countries that also are under construction. With the opportunities at hand, they were involved in transactional relations with the Horn of Africa, where they invested in belt and roads. They also imported their products to the Horn of Africa and gained profit in oil companies and power plants.

#### **4.2 Infrastructural Development**

Countries not landlocked like Eritrea focused on internal matters and market, thereby neglecting its coastal developments.<sup>viii</sup> In contrast, their brother country Djibouti grew economic courtesy of embracing the Ethiopians trade together with accepting foreign military bases and investments from overseas. This happened while some shorelines like Somalia's became a famous pirates grounds compelling both western and Asian military just to see vessels pass safely to the Suez Canal. However, there appears to be a promising change as the neglected ports in the respective countries are suddenly in the spotlight (Styan, 2018).

The Prime Minister of Ethiopia has, on several occasions, stressed the ongoing port development in his recent out of the country travels to countries like Somalia, Sudan, and Djibouti. The relative peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia raises a possibility of rehabilitation of ports such as Assab and Massawa., to add on that the war in Yemen has made the said ports a strategic significance as the UAE has been using its military base in Eritrea's port of Assab to launch bombs at Hodeida since which is a crucial port to Yemen. Therefore, China has constructed railways that connect Djibouti with other countries such as Sudan, a pipeline that supplies fuels, maritime-based on Djibouti, which also links to the ports of Eritrea and power plants in countries within the Horn of Africa. They also created a naval base for military purposes and security issues.

#### **4.3 Military Cooperation**

In Djibouti, there is the Chinese People's Liberation Army Naval Base, which is an army base under the responsibility of the Chinese PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy). The naval base initially established as a first oversea military base of the PLAN. It serves as the most significant facility to raise the projection capabilities of China's power in the

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<sup>viii</sup> There has been little, if not static, stagnation of port development and maritime strategies in the Gulf of Aden and the Red sea for a period longer than 25 years.

Indian Ocean and countries within the Horn of Africa. Since 2017, Liang Yang has been the base commander. The military ensures security within the fighting countries such as Somaliland and Southern Sudan. It also cooperates with governments in countries within the Horn of Africa to ensure their infrastructural and technological advances run smoothly. The governments, therefore, consider their work and offers security protection as it passed a rule that provides for Chinese nationals' safety. Any individual who attacks the Chinese is viewed as a threat to national security. As a result, Djibouti already accommodates many foreign security forces that include France, Japan, Britain, and the United States military at Camp Lemonnier. It has also played an essential role in China's One Belt One Road" project, a diverse network of transportation routes that slightly utilizes the initial Silk Road.

#### **4.4 Debt Implication**

The debt association between Countries in the Horn of Africa is mostly related to the establishment of connectivity of railways, pipelines, power plants, and maritime roads. According to Ylönen & Záhorský (2017), the enormous Chinese foreign direct loans in Ethiopia are for agriculture, real estate, energy, technology, and transport. Owing to China's One Belt One Road Initiative, the development of railway roads and maritime in the Horn of Africa led to public debt. Djibouti, in 2017, had the most considerable share that it owed to China. The debt increased from 50% to 85% of GDP.<sup>ix</sup> By 2018, Djibouti owed China around \$1.2 billion, Mwatela & Changfeng (2016) stated that in road and belt initiative in 2016 was worth \$9.8 billion in Djibouti. China has an arising debt relation that burden Ethiopia. Initially, in 2019, analysts approximated that Ethiopia had loaned above \$12.1bn from China used for infrastructural development (Maini & Lingala, 2019). However, there are no bright illustrations of how much debt Eritrea owes China.

#### **5. Conclusions**

The Silk Road, developed for trade between countries, with China being the center of supplies of their agricultural products. China initially trade silk and tea. In span of years, Chinese economy have expanded their interests in various countries within Africa. As the expansion that connects different nations using China's Maritime Silk Road and Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) increased, China gained political and economic power over certain countries. The countries within Horn of Africa are still developing countries which are driven by the need for success both in politics and economical systems. Therefore, they have engaged in different relations with China to fuel their developments. The building of railways, pipelines, power plants, and maritime to form OBOR has impacted the countries in various manners.

Firstly, countries have adopted new infrastructures and technologies. As it is known that China is good with the supply of machines, especially phones, they also

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<sup>ix</sup> China has obtained a chance to a 10-year lease in Djibouti Port for Doraleh Multipurpose at a yearly accommodation fee of \$20 million.

participate in engineering activities to advance transportation in the Horn of Africa. This aspect has made China export both its agricultural and technological products to Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. Secondly, the OBOR Initiative has made China gain political power as they constructed their first naval base in Djibouti that controls countries in the Horn of Africa. This increased the security measures within countries such as Somali and South Sudan who are often at war for boundary reasons. Thirdly, the engagement of the governments within the Horn of Africa and the Chinese government have led to a conglomeration that thrives on ensuring the development of the country has led to countries within the Horn of Africa incurring burdens such as loans obtained from Chinese companies and lenders. Many of the states have a falling economic growth due to these debts, thus leading to quagmires. Lastly, the countries of Horn of Africa have also adopted Chinese cultures such as tea drinking. Some are employed in Chinese places of work, such as railways constructs and related tasks, as well as oil grills did in the Horn of Africa. This has led to an increased standard of living. Therefore, we can conclude that the OBOR was expanded not just for trade but also for other purposes, which impact the countries located at the Horn of Africa both positively and negatively.

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