



BRICS, BELTS, AND ROADS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A GLOBAL HEGEMON?

*How do BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative
compare in helping China achieve its goals as an
emerging hegemon?*

ABSTRACT

China's rise as a superpower has been debated for years. Now with BRICS and the Belt and Road, China is closer than ever to achieving this goal. But which of these strategies is most effective, and how do they compare? This paper uses structural realism and hegemony theory to answer the question: How do BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative compare in helping China achieve its goals as an emerging hegemon? Keywords: China, BRICS, Belt and Road, hegemony, realism, international development, multipolarity

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Development and International Relations; China and
International Relations

May 15, 2020

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1. Introduction

China has long been seen as a rising superpower, re-emerging into prominence on the global stage. Over the past five decades, China has made staggering progress in the development of its economy, political system, and international influence. Presently there is significant debate about whether China should be considered a developed or developing nation, and if it is nearing its goal of filling the role of global power. China has called for an increased position in the international system for itself and other emerging economies that it feels have not been treated fairly. A big motive for China has been win-win cooperation among emerging economies, and China has kept this idea in mind while forming many of its multinational projects throughout the years. While researching for this paper, I found these desires for more influence very interesting, and decided to work on a thesis dedicated to figuring out China's strategy for hegemonic development.

On the global stage the United States and its Western allies still dominate most international institutions. This has been seen as a problem by emerging economies like China, who feel that they should have more say in these institutions. It is from this sentiment that the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) coalition was formed. These nations are all part of the Group of 20 (G20) that consists of the 20 largest economies in the world. Together they are an economic bloc advocating for more inclusion and diversification of the global economic system. Their efficacy has been called into question by some observers, however the group is committed to their continued work. China is in a unique position as the largest economy and most powerful nation in the BRICS group. Some argue that China does not need BRICS to gain increased influence in the international arena, yet there must be a motivation for China to continue its intense involvement with the group.

The approach of BRICS differs significantly from that of one of China's other major international projects, the Belt and Road Initiative. When the Belt and Road project started in 2013, its goal was to link China to Europe along the pathways of the old Silk Road trade routes by land and by sea. This massive project connects a huge portion of the world's population and economy in the most ambitious infrastructure undertaking in history. If successful, the Belt and Road Initiative could solidify China as a major world hegemon and superpower whose influence will last far into the future.

These two projects have different goals and paths towards achieving them, however at their core both aim to increase China's influence and power in the world. As China continues to grow and develop, its position in the international system will become even more prominent. But which strategy is helping to further China's international ambitions? Only time can tell if China has the ability to become the newest superpower on the world stage, but many analysts are looking at BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative as exciting prospects for China's hegemonic ambitions. Both of these projects have been underway for several years, and their impacts are now able to be studied. This project aims to investigate the question: **How do BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative compare in helping China achieve its goals as an emerging hegemon?** This thesis will seek to answer this question by looking at theories such as structural realism and hegemony theory, and applying them to the cases of the Belt and Road Initiative and the BRICS coalition. These initiatives will be compared for the effectiveness of their strategies at achieving hegemonic goals and make conclusions based off these results.

The following section provides a review of the literature available on the topic and the literature gap that is filled by this research.

2. Literature Review

There is a wide selection of literature available on the topics of BRICS, the Belt and Road, and hegemony. However some sources have been especially crucial to the formation of this thesis. This section explores the sources that were essential to the gathering of data and information in the search for an answer to the research question. Together with a collection of other scholarly sources and news articles, these sources have informed many of the stances and understandings of the concepts expanded on in the following sections of this thesis.

In relation to the Belt and Road Initiative, the book *Mapping China's 'One Belt One Road' Initiative* (2019) edited by Li Xing has been essential to the creation of this paper. Li is a professor from Aalborg University whose work is focused around the topics of globalization, political order, and hegemony. His research has also covered both the Belt and Road Initiative and the BRICS partnership, so his works have a unique relevance to the topic of this thesis. In the book *Mapping China's 'One Belt One Road' Initiative*, Li et al. outline the foundations of the Belt and Road Initiative; its scope, goals, vision, and impact. This information is essential to any discussion of the Belt and Road, as it gives the reader a fuller picture of what is encompassed in this massive project. He also goes into how the Belt and Road Initiative is relevant in terms of structural power, which has informed this report understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative in China's vision of challenging hegemonic structures in the world. The book makes it clear that we live in a world in flux; international relations and political economy are changing. The world of US dominance in international relations is ending, and a transition to a multipolar moment. Additional chapters in the text describe how China's BRI impacts structural power through its connection to Europe, a longtime partner to the US. This book takes into account the importance of the BRI on hegemonic power structures worldwide, and this perspective is echoed in the pages of this thesis.

When analyzing the role of BRICS, Muhammad Adnan's article *BRICS: A Challenge to the US Hegemony* (2014) provides valuable insights into how BRICS fits into the international order. Adnan is a postgraduate research scholar for the National Defense University in Islamabad Pakistan. This text is not focused entirely on China within the group, and instead chooses to look at all of the member states. However, the text does provide key information about how China fits into BRICS and

how China's perspective shapes the group. The text provides balanced criticism of the BRICS group and discusses many of the challenges that the group faces in accomplishing its goals.

Much of the understanding of hegemony that is used in the understanding of BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative comes from the text *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001) by John Mearsheimer. Mearsheimer is a well-respected political scientist who developed the offensive realism theory and has been very active in work around hegemony and the rise of China. He has taught at the University of Chicago since 1982 and is a distinguished professor there. His writings in this book thoroughly explain the relationships between Great Powers and how hegemony works in a realist understanding of international relations. The terms *regional hegemon* and *global hegemon* were defined in this work and have been very constructive in the formation of this thesis. His frameworks outlined in the book provide the necessary information to link theory and practice.

This thesis fits into a larger framework of research on the subject of the rise of China, hegemony, the belt and road, and BRICS. These topics are popular areas of research that have been analyzed in a multitude of ways. This paper fits into a literature gap by comparing the Belt and Road through a Realist viewpoint.

3. Methodology

This thesis aims to answer the research question: **How do BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative compare in helping China achieve its goals as an emerging hegemon?** In order to determine this, this paper must address several methodological considerations. This is a qualitative study following a deductive approach. In order to assess the hypothesis of this paper, data from economic and trade figures from China and the BRICS countries, articles and scholarly journals on the topic are used to inform the analysis. Data for this project comes from academic articles and the structure of the BRICS group, as well as news articles corresponding to major developments in the group's development. Topics of focus include the cooperation of the BRICS group, as well as the combined efforts of China and BRICS towards establishing an alternate to the US led global financial system. This paper also analyzes the Belt and Road Initiative and considers how this project has developed and the advantages and challenges it presents to China as an emerging hegemon. This will be achieved through analyzing the key goals of the Belt and Road. Next, this data will be applied to the theoretical framework of realism, and structural realism in particular. The theory is primarily composed of defensive realism and offensive realism, put forth by Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer respectively. Structural realism looks at the relationship between power maximizing and security maximizing in the international arena. The tenants of this theory will guide the interpretation of this data. This thesis aims to determine how BRICS and the Belt and Road serve China's hegemonic goals. These two development strategies will be compared to see if one path has more potential to achieve these goals. The tentative hypothesis of this thesis is that both BRICS and the Belt and Road serve a purpose in China's global strategy, however the Belt and Road is more successful in a realist approach. The methods of analysis will consist of evaluating the economic data of China and the BRICS countries, as well as the economics of the Belt and Road. The analysis will also focus on the structures China has put in place with each project to see how, or even if, they can serve as an alternative to the current hegemonic order.

This thesis focuses largely on the economic power and capacity of China in its search for hegemony. Hegemony can be seen in some understandings as including military as well as economic strength. China currently has the world's second largest military, but they do not compare to the United States in size or capability. China has also expressed clearly and often that it does not wish to become a conquering force, and will follow a peaceful and cooperate rise to power. In addition,

BRICS and the Belt and Road are not militaristic projects by their very nature, so they would ultimately have little to no effects on China's military capabilities.

This thesis is limited to only information available in English. Additional research in Mandarin, as well as other languages used by BRICS partners and nations along the Belt and Road can add new perspectives to the research, however these topics are widely reported on and analyzed in English, so there is enough data to draw conclusions. The BRICS group uses English as one of its official languages, and many documents about the Belt and Road can be found published in English or through official translations. It is also important to clarify that the author of this thesis comes from a western educational background. In order to avoid any implicit biases due to this, the paper is written in collaboration between Aalborg University and the University of International Relations in Beijing. The thesis also consults sources from a diverse group of researchers in an effort to provide more nuanced perspectives.

Having outlined the methodology of this paper, the following section delves into the theoretical framework and understanding that guides this thesis.

4. Theory

This section will provide an understanding of the key theoretical concepts used in this paper. Constructing the theoretical framework of this paper, concepts discussed in this section are applied throughout the following sections in order to ground the work in theory and explain the findings.

4.1 Realism

Realism is one of the predominant theories of International Relations and has been a primary viewpoint from which to understand the world since the end of World War II. The foundations of Realist thought can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Thucydides who lived from 460-400 BCE (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). His text *History of the Peloponnesian War* describes wars between Athens and Sparta in ways that encompass a Realist perspective and went on to inspire the modern thinkers that developed the theory of Realism that is used in International Relations today.

First and foremost, Realism is a conflict-based paradigm of International Relations. In Realism, the nation state is the primary actor, and its main concern is with issues of security and power (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). This view of the world does not concern itself with the morality of a state's actions, and states seek to maximize their power relative to other states. Realists such as Thomas Hobbes view humans as inherently egoistic and interested in preserving their own interests. In his works, Hobbes describes human beings as extremely individualistic, and work under "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceases only in death" (Hobbes, 1994). This view of human nature contributed to the formation of the Realist school of thought. It is through Hobbes's work that some of the key tenants of Realism have been developed, namely those of egoistic human nature, international anarchy, and the concept of politics as a power struggle that can be studied in a rational and scientific manner (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017).

Realism also focuses on anarchy in international political outcomes, literally the absence of government. The concept of an anarchic system comes from the works of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes postulates that the natural state of the world is one without government where every man is equal to one another. In this world, any individual may use force to gain what they desire, and as a result all

members of the society must be ready to defend against such a use of force (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). With the availability of only scarce resources, competition is high. This creates suspicion of others and makes actors driven by fear. The works of Hobbes are primarily focused on the relationships between individuals and the state; however his writings can be applied to the relationships within the international system as well. In this state-state viewpoint, this means that states need to help themselves and be responsible for their own survival; there is no overarching system that will step in and protect a state's interests on its behalf (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). Because a state must protect its own interests and security, power becomes the defining element of international relations. States with more power will be better able to protect themselves and their interests, and states with less power will be at a disadvantage.

When states try to amass more power in a realist world, they must also engage in power-balancing to deter potential threats. Power balancing is a tactic used by states to minimize the threat posed by a rival and maximize their own gains in a situation. Power balancing can be accomplished with military strength, financial wealth, strategic alliances, and a variety of other methods (Lobell, 2019). Military might and war are often utilized as a deterrent or threat to help a state hold onto its power.

Realism often sees the concept of morality as opposed to the tenants of realist thought. Some realists, such as Machiavelli, state that there is no place for morality in state relations and that states should act in any means necessary to achieve their goals. This viewpoint can be justified by the expression "a state has no higher duty than maintaining itself" (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). Yet others hold that states can choose to act morally when it suits them or create a form of morality that justifies their actions.

The ideas and thinkers described above are major influences on the school of Realism, however it was not until Hans Morgenthau that Realism was developed into a comprehensive theory of International Relations. In his book *Politics among Nations* (1973), Morgenthau codifies six principles of Realism that help to systematically categorize the ideology.

The first principle of Realism is "governed by objective laws that have their roots in unchanging human nature" (Morgenthau, Michelson, and Davis 1973). This is an important

presupposition to outline as this states that Realism is a rational theory concerned with reflecting objective laws and that human nature can be studied to understand International Relations. The second principle is devoted to the idea of national interest defined in terms of power. This means that international politics should be studied with power separate from other spheres such as economics, ethics, and religion (Morgenthau, Michelson, and Davis 1973). This separation allows a distinction to be made between political and non-political issues which allows for a theoretical understanding of politics. The third principle is primarily concerned with interest in political actions. The interests behind political actions are influenced by the time and place in which they occur. The fourth principle acknowledges that political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It also states that universal moral principles cannot be applied to a state's actions without being filtered through the lens of a state's ideology. The fifth principle of Realism says that the theory does not position the moral arguments of a state within the moral laws of the universe, that is to say that the theory does not determine if a state's actions are morally just. As a state seeks to gain power, morality can be difficult to establish. The sixth principle says that the political sphere is autonomous, and that the theory of political realism is concerned with how politics affects the power of a state. Together these principles create the foundation of Realist theory (Morgenthau, Michelson, and Davis 1973).

4.2 Structural Realism

Structural Realism, also known as Neorealism, is a version of Realist thought that states that the most important element in international relations is power. This theory was developed by Kenneth Waltz in the 1979 book *Theory of International Politics* (Lobell, 2010). In structural realism, the international system is ordered by anarchy as in classical realism, but also by the "distribution of capabilities" which can be measured by the number of great powers in the system (Lobell, 2010). This theory's understanding of anarchy is decentralized stating that there is no central authority. There are two schools of structural realists, the offensive and defensive realists, and they disagree over how states seek power in this system.

Offensive Realism was put forth by John Mearsheimer in his book *Great Power Politics* (2001). Offensive realists believe that states seek power through domination and hegemony in an effort to create security. Offensive realists believe that security is rare in the international system, and states must take an offensive approach to secure it. States aim to maximize their power and become

the dominant state in an effort to create security by dominating their rivals (Lobell, 2010). Every great power therefore has the goal of achieving hegemony, as this is the only position where true security can be achieved since weaker states will be less likely to see them as a target. Mearsheimer aptly says, “states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2001). Expansionist and aggressive policies are favored when the cost-benefits are favorable in this view because they address uncertainties about other states intentions. This leads to a worst-case scenario analysis when considering the potential actions of other states, resulting in high levels of competition.

Defensive Realism, on the other hand, believes that it is in a state’s best interest to maintain moderate policies to get security due to the natural order of anarchy. This means that aggressive expansion that is favored by offensive realism does not align with the defensive realist perspective as it is seen as having the potential to upset the balance of power theory and lowers a state’s security, therefore going against the primary mode of operation. The moderate position favored by defensive realists is thought to allow states to avoid security dilemmas by not antagonizing other states with aggressive actions. If offensive realists seek to maximize power, defensive realists seek to maximize security.

Within the theory of Realism, one of the key elements is that of power. Without understanding the concept of power, one cannot understand the motivation of states and how they act. As power is such a broad and important topic, many Realist thinkers have developed their own definitions and understandings of the concept. As there is no monolithic definition of Realism, there is no singular understanding of power that addresses all focuses and concerns. This section will describe some of the prominent understandings of the term that are relevant to this thesis.

Power deeply entwined into the realist theory of international relations that realism is often seen as the study of power. John Mearsheimer has described the Realist school by saying, “calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the world around them” (Mearsheimer, 2001). When looking at power from the understanding of structural realism, international relations can be seen as a continual struggle for power. However structural realists do not believe that this is due to certain qualities of human nature. According to Hobbes, humanity’s desire for power is due to man’s inability to secure the power and means to live well without acquiring

more (Schmidt, 2005). In the perspective of structural realism, the struggle of power is focused around the anarchical international environment and not human nature, as is often the understanding of classical realists. Neorealists such as structural realists often rely on the understanding that power is the amount of capabilities that a state has at its disposal to pursue its interests on the international stage (Pustovitovskij, 2016). Capabilities can be a wide variety of tools or resources, including but not limited to military, economic might, sanctions, investments, trade deals and the like.

4.2 Hegemony Theory

Within the field of International Relations, hegemony refers to “the ability of an actor with overwhelming capability to shape the international system through both coercive and non-coercive means” (Norrlöf, 2015). Typically, this actor is a state, but in some cases “actor” can refer to a bloc such as the European Union where there is a united political community and external decision-making processes. Hegemonic states dominate the international arena by influencing other states, but not through controlling another state or its territory directly. According to Ian Clark (2011) and Howard Lentner (2006), hegemony consists of two primary meanings, that of domination and leadership.

The leading trend in defining hegemony, especially in a realist perspective, is to equate it with material power. However, the concept of power in International Relations theory is also a term that is difficult to pin into a singular and concise definition. Power can be understood as one of the most influential topics in International Relations. Power is the amount of capability a state has at its disposal. When studying hegemony, power is at the heart of how states create and maintain hegemony. Hegemony can be thought of in terms of the dominant group’s ability to persuade others to want the same things as them (Wade, 2002). This is possible by maintaining that all feasible alternatives to the hegemon’s ideals and leadership are worse for the other states below it. This requires a great deal of power and influence in the international system to achieve.

The basis of Hegemony Theory comes from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, in his works collected into *The Prison Notebooks* written between 1929 and 1935. Gramsci was a prominent Marxist in Italy, serving as the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party in 1926. He was arrested and sentenced to twenty years in prison by the fascist government at the time. During his captivity he wrote *The Prison Notebooks* outlining many of his ideas. His works were scrutinized by

the fascist censors, leading to some secrecy and layered meaning in his texts (Bates, 1975). Gramsci's contributions to the theory of hegemony is spread throughout these writings, and many scholars in the decades after his death have tried to combine his writings into a complete theory. Gramsci was unable to form a completed version of hegemony theory before his death in 1937, yet there was a framework of ideas spread throughout his writings. The researchers in the coming years worked tirelessly to compile a theory that was accurate to Gramsci's work. What emerged was one of the most prominent theories in Marxist thought (Bates, 1975).

Gramsci's basic premise of hegemony is that humanity is ruled not only by force, but also by ideas (Bates, 1975). Bates (1975) defines hegemony as "political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class". This definition highlights the ways in which culture plays a significant part in the construction and preservation of hegemony.

In the study of hegemony it is important to understand the ideas of unipolarity and multipolarity. Unipolarity is a rare balancing of the international scale that places one nation with a significantly higher capability and power than other nations in the international system (Ikenberry, Mastanduni, and Wohlforth, 2009). This is a relatively unusual configuration for international power dynamics, as no other nation has the power to create a significant challenge to the unipolar state. This can easily result in the unipolar state achieving hegemony, as it is militarily and economically strong enough to apply its will onto the other states, either through persuasion or threats. A much more common balance of power internationally is multipolarity. Multipolarity is the balancing act of multiple great powers competing for dominance in the international arena. In multipolarity, states are much more controlled actors as they have significant competition and must balance their power acquisition and their security maximization in an effort to gain an advantage (Chan, 2013).

5. Analysis

This section explains the data of the thesis, and put the theories mentioned earlier into practice. This section scrutinizes the cases and their relevance, leading to a comparison of their effectiveness in answering the research question. This section will conclude with the findings of the analysis, as well as reflections on their significance.

5.1 The status of American Hegemony and the Rise of China

In order to understand the premise for this thesis, one must be familiar with the concept of American hegemony and how China aims to counter this notion as the dynamic of the world shifts from unipolar to multipolar. The United States has been the sole hegemon since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Chan, 2013). Since then, scholars have referred to the world order as unipolar, meaning that there is only one leading force or “pole” in the international landscape. But even before the official beginning of the unipolar moment commonly understood as lasting from 1991 to the present, the United States was amassing power and allies in the international sphere since the end of the Second World War. In order to be a hegemonic power, a state must have amassed enough power to deter attacks or competition for dominance from other powers. In traditional definitions, this refers primarily to wealth and military strength that are needed to fend off conventional attacks, but more modern understandings also include dominance through culture and other means.

The United States has used several key tools to create and maintain its hegemonic status, namely its military and financial powers. The nation has used its military power to enforce an anticommunist and pro liberal democracy agenda abroad through the use of wars, coups, and weapons sales to entities that align with its own value system. While the US is still the largest military nation by a significant margin, outspending its closest competitor China by USD\$300 billion (Floyd, 2020). However after the forever wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, domestic American sentiment has turned sharply away from interventionist policies, leading to President Trump’s isolationist ideals of “America First”. In his text *The Rise of Multipolarity, the Reshaping of Order: China in a Brave New World?*, Gerald Chan from the University of Auckland writes that these wars mark a point where the US military overreached its capacity to engage in overseas military conflicts, and can be seen as the

start of the end of the era of unipolarity (Chan, 2013). Chan also highlights that this decline is gradual, and that we will not see an over-night shift to full multipolarity. The other great powers of the world, Russia, the EU, China, and Japan are poised to gain from the collapse of the unipolar moment. Yet China's rapid rise and clear vision present a favorable position to gain significant power in this new multipolarity, potentially even taking on the position of hegemon itself.

After looking at the militaristic angle of American hegemony, one must consider the financial tools that solidify this position, such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the pervasiveness of the US dollar in global economy. The United States created the institutions known as the Bretton Woods Institutions in the aftermath of World War II (Bretton Woods Project, 2019). These institutions created the financial system that would help the world recover from the devastation of war, and have become the most important financial institutions in the world today.

With the end of the unipolar moment and the rise of multipolarity, China is on the cusp of assuming a position of great power and possibly even hegemony (Chan, 2013). In a multipolar world, multiple nations or entities are vying for the hegemonic position, fundamentally changing the way that states interact with one another. Kenneth Waltz, the father of neorealist thought, postulated that unipolarity is the "least durable of international configurations" (Waltz, 2000). Waltz goes on to say that in unipolarity, states trend towards overextension and in multipolarity the trap they can fall into is inattention. As the number of powers in a multipolar configuration grow, it is easier to overlook when one is positioning itself to rise above the pack.

China's return to prominence in the globalized world has had a significant impact on the way the west perceives the nation. China began to rise economically in 1978 during the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. This time saw China bring 850 million people out of poverty and create a standard of living that continues to rise to this day (The World Bank Group, 2020). Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has embarked on a number of reforms and initiatives that aim to increase the standing of the country in the eyes of the world, and to provide its citizens with continued prosperity. China's continued prosperity has given it a position amongst the most powerful nations in the world. China has stated that its rise will be peaceful, and that it will not seek to dominate other nations as it grows in strength. This is in line with the fact that for much of China's long history, it has been a peaceful nation seeking to avoid large conflicts with other sovereign states. In a speech, President Xi

Jinping said "We Chinese love peace. No matter how much stronger it may become, China will never inquire expansion or hegemony." (Napang, Nurhasanah, and Rohman, 2019). It is very important to distinguish the definition of hegemony used in this thesis differs from the perspective of this quote. In the definition used by this paper, there is no inherent expansion or explicit control by the hegemon over other nations. This paper takes the perspective that a hegemon is the dominant power in a region and does not have to rule by force. Gramsci's writings on hegemony state that a hegemon can influence other states with its ideas and values. In this understanding of the term, one can see that China does possess hegemonic goals, and that this does not conflict with the peaceful rise of China.

One can see a shift the perspective that China is taking towards its global strategy in recent decades. China's previous strategy of "keeping a low profile" has been left behind and the nation is now following a new direction of "striving for achievement" (Li, 2016). This strategy allows China to excel in its new hegemonic goals of becoming an economic powerhouse that can shape the face of the global economic system. Indeed China is already the largest economic power in Asia, and the largest contributor to world economic growth (Li, 2016). This has given China a place as one of the Great Powers in today's international system, and has made room for China to bring its ideas to the world and potentially assume a hegemonic role within the new multipolar world.

5.2 What is BRICS?

In 2009, the first summit of the BRICS (then only BRIC) countries was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia (BBC, Nations eye stable reserve system, 2009). This group consisted of four emerging world economies: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. In 2010 the final member South Africa was included by invitation of China (Reuters, China invites South Africa to join BRIC, 2010). The term BRIC was coined by the chairman of Goldman Sachs, Jim O'Neil in 2001 upon noticing the growth potential of these nations (O'Neil, 2001). These countries saw an advantage to forming this union, namely that they are all major powers in their respective regions and members of the G20. Despite their influence and growth potential, they saw an opportunity to unite forces to help them advance economically in a world controlled by the Global North. Their mission, as stated at the 2009 Yekaterinburg summit, is to diversify the international monetary system and bring greater representation to major international financial systems, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (BBC, Nations eye stable reserve system, 2009). Together the BRICS nations represent approximately 41% of the global

population including over 3.1 billion people (Pletcher, 2019). They have a combined GDP of \$18.6 trillion USD, coming to 23.2% of the world's total economic production (Pletcher, 2019).

The BRICS coalition has received criticism targeted on the distances between member states. The distance is great; geographically, historically, culturally, socially, politically, and economically (Beeson and Zheng, 2018). Many in the West question if BRICS can overcome these obstacles in its path to diversifying the financial landscape of the world. Despite the formation of BRICS as a trade bloc, they are united by some shared values that help strengthen the bonds between them. These values include a shared view on global development and ideas of reforming the global governance system (Lukin and Fan, 2019).

At the 2019 G20 meeting in Osaka, Japan, China's President Xi Jinping addressed BRICS members saying that the nations need to strengthen their strategic partnerships and promote the improvement of global governance (Lukin & Fan, 2019). Xi also advised that BRICS base its interactions off of mutual respect, fairness, justice, win-win cooperation, and fostering a sound international environment (Lukin & Fan, 2019).

5.2.1 Does BRICS Challenge American Hegemony?

The BRICS coalition aims at challenging the financial systems created by the Bretton Woods convention and by extension the notion of American hegemony. But is this truly possible? Many scholars have stated that BRICS is failing to challenge these systems. The primary concerns are that BRICS is too diverse in geography, political system, and faces internal challenges that limit its ability to accomplish its goals (Beeson and Zheng, 2018). But are these challenges impeding the progress of BRICS, and how does the success or failure of BRICS influence China's rising superpower goals?

BRICS aims to challenge American hegemony by promoting non-Western countries' influence in financial and global governance institutions. Fareed Zakria argues that as a nation's economic power rises, so does its influence (Adnan, 2014). And indeed BRICS has grown economically; data for the last decade shows that the combined growth of the BRICS nations sits at 179%, and that from 2008- 2017 the global average growth rate was about 1%, yet BRICS saw an annual growth rate of 8% (Harper, 2019). BRICS as a whole have seen very impressive growth rates,

but these pale in comparison to the meteoric rise of China. China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world in 2010, and in 2018 had a GDP of \$13.6 billion. China is by far the largest economy in BRICS, dwarfing the combined GDP of the other member nations (Plecher, 2019). This, in theory, should result in a significant challenge to the hegemonic status of the United States, however this is not supported by the data. US GDP figures in 2018 showed the country at \$20.5 billion, significantly higher than China and the combined BRICS nations (Plecher, 2019). While the BRICS countries present an interesting case and an alternate approach to international finance and global governance, they do not currently threaten the United States' position at the top of the heap. BRICS has amassed a significant amount of financial resources that realism dictates should give them a share of power in the international system, but they do not approach the level required to surpass the current hegemon.

The global institutions that BRICS seeks to challenge; namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, were established as part of the Bretton Woods conference of 1944. The World Trade Organization (WTO) was added to the group in the 1990s. These institutions form a pillar of the American claim to hegemonic status, and currently dominate the world's financial systems. In the post war environment the founders of the Bretton Woods Institutions believed that it was crucial to create "a multilateral framework was needed to overcome the destabilizing effects of the previous global economic depression and trade battles." (Bretton Woods Project, 2019). Supporters of these institutions argue that they serve to create a dynamic global community that allows nations to meet their potentials in a peaceful manner as well as provide financial support to countries in need (Bretton Woods Project, 2019). Critics feel that this is not the whole story, and that rather than help all nations equally, the IMF, WTO, and World Bank impose neo-liberal policies that are to the benefit of the US and its allies rather than small countries that are not in a strong position to challenge them (Mazumdar, 2019).

In response to the criticism of the Bretton Woods Institutions, BRICS established the New Development Bank (formerly the BRICS Development Bank) in 2014. The New Development Bank was formed with the goal of being by and for the developing world. According to the BRICS Policy Center, the bank focuses on "mobilizing resources to infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS countries and other developing countries, in addition to existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions to the global growth and development" (BRICS Policy

Center, 2018). Transparency and sustainability are key focus areas, and the New Development Bank claims to work towards innovative projects that would help balance the financial order of the world. In establishing the New Development Bank, BRICS made a clear statement that they criticize the IMF for failing to implement reforms that would give more decision-making powers to developing economies (Andreoni, 2017). However, this goal never truly materialized. In 2020, the only members of the Bank are its founding BRICS countries (New Development Bank, 2020), and its selection criteria appear opaque and far from sustainable (Andreoni, 2017). The New Development Bank began with such promise, yet never truly took off, and has yet to live up to the goal it set for itself.

Despite its shortcomings, the New Development Bank is not without significance. It provides loans to many countries that could not receive funds from more traditional banks due to a lack of credit and has innovated in the area of lending in local currencies to protect developing nations from unfavorable exchange rates to the dollar (Andreoni, 2017). This bank does present some alternative to the US hegemonic financial system for developing nations, however it is far from strong enough to be seen as a serious threat to the Bretton Woods institutions and the order they represent.

It is interesting to note that while the BRICS led New Development Bank is widely seen as unable to challenge the World Bank and IMF, China has created its own development banks outside the BRICS framework that are in some ways competing with the New Development Bank. For example, with the combined financial power of the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank, China issues as much financial aid to the developing world as the World Bank (Gallagher, 2018). This figure only takes into account the national development finds of China, showing the strength of China on its own at promoting its goal of increasing the share of power it and other emerging economies can have in the global financial system. In addition to the New Development bank with BRICS, China is a leader in several other multilateral and bilateral development arrangements such as the China-Africa Development Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, both of which provide billions of dollars of financing each year. In the 15-year period between 2000 and 2014 China spent USD\$354.6 billion on foreign development. This number is only slightly smaller than the USD\$394.6 billion spent by the United States in the same period (Dreher, Fuchs, Parks, Strange, and Tierney, 2017). With the US as the longtime leader in global aid and financing, this is close enough to see that China is fast approaching equaling the US in terms of foreign development (Murphy, 2017). These banks serve as an important element of creating power in

structural realism. The use of financial resources to assert power in the international system is one way that states can vie for hegemonic status.

The use of the United States Dollar as a global reserve currency has been a pillar of American hegemony. The world trades primarily in US Dollars because this is seen as the safest currency for international trade, but in recent years a movement to step away from the dollar as the main currency of the international financial system has begun. Of the BRICS countries, China and Russia are highly vocal about their desires to shift away from dollar-based economics. Yet others like Brazil and South Africa have heavily dollarized economies and are less vocal about dismantling the dollar system (Chossudovsky, 2018). With internal disagreement about the extent and speed of de-dollarization policies, BRICS must come to an agreement before any serious challenge to the dollar, one of the most crucial elements of American hegemony, can be successful.

BRICS has begun development of a system called “BRICS Pay” that aims to operate similar to major online wallets such as Apple Pay or Google Pay. BRICS Pay is set to connect the credit and debit cards of citizens of BRICS nations in order to enable “payments for purchases in any of the five BRICS countries, regardless of which currency the payment and the money in the account of the buyer are denominated in” (Silk Road Briefing, 2019). This would be a big step forward for the BRICS nations, creating a stronger connection between them and eliminating the dollar as an intermediary for these types of transactions. BRICS Pay transactions will be able to be carried out on a smartphone, increasing the integration of digital systems. BRICS has even spoken about the possibility of developing a cryptocurrency for the group. These ideas represent a big step away from the dollar in theory, however they have yet to be tested, and this will not be enough to detangle the five nations from the hold of the dollar.

China and Russia have been the most vocal of the BRICS countries about their desire to leave the dollar behind. They claim that the dollar hegemony is used to bend states to the will of Washington. They say that a global system run using the dollar forces states to comply with American ideals or face financial punishment in the form of sanctions or withheld loans (Silk Road Briefing, 2019).

In 2016, China’s Renminbi (also called the Yuan) was listed by the International Monetary Fund as a Special Drawing Right (SDR) currency (Gleason, 2016). This is a designation for the IMF’s

top-tier currencies, sharing this status with the US Dollar, Euro, British Pound, and Japanese (IMF News, 2016). One of the key components of this SDR status is that a currency must be freely usable, which the IMF defines as “widely used to make payments for international transactions and widely traded in the principal exchange markets” (IMF News, 2019). This is an important designation and puts the Renminbi in an elite category of currencies that have a legitimate potential to rival the US Dollar as a currency for large scale international trade. The IMF also states that this classification explicitly increases the attractiveness of the Yuan as a reserve currency and can help to diversify the global financial landscape (IMF News, 2019).

While the dollar is still the leading reserve currency around the world, many believe that its time in the spotlight is waning. This same trend occurred when the Dollar took the lead position from the Pound Sterling. Many economies around the world were anchored to the Pound as a form of stability and security. In Asia, Hong-Kong, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Singapore shifted from a Pound anchored currency to a dollar anchor. Many of them had strong colonial connections to the UK and held onto the Pound even as the UK was losing global prominence to the US (Gourinchas, 2019).

However Gourinchas argues that this link to the Pound was largely illusory as the Pound was anchored to the Dollar. This would mean that there was a rough equivalency between linking to the Dollar or the Pound (Gourinchas, 2019). This phenomenon is known as shadow anchoring and could very well be underway again today in Asia. China’s Renminbi has been anchored to the Dollar since 1994. Gourinchas argues that the same could be underway with a shadow anchor between the US dollar and the Chinese Renminbi, meaning that many states today are poised to peg their currencies to the Yuan if a favorable situation occurs. He states that “As long as the dollar- yuan exchange rate remains stable, a similar form of shadow renminbi anchoring may be at work, masquerading as a dollar anchoring. If, and when, the global economy is ready for a competing renminbi standard, the latter may unveil itself suddenly and precisely at a time of monetary instability between the U.S. and China” (Gourinchas, 2019). With the US China trade war unfolding and showing few signs of abating, this moment of instability between these great nations may come sooner rather than later.

In conclusion, BRICS cannot serve as a threat to the hegemonic order established by the US. The group has significant internal differences that weaken its initiatives, such as the border disputes between China and India, and the complicates positions of the member states within the international political arena. China is significantly stronger than its fellow BRICS counterparts. BRICS continues to serve the interests of China, however more as an ancillary tool to provide an alternative to American led initiatives. In the arena of foreign development, an express goal of BRICS, China has been far more successful at challenging the World Bank and the IMF on its own than with BRICS. While the contributions of BRICS are in line with the stated goals of China, it is not the most effective path forward to challenge the institutional hegemony created by the United States. The BRICS group represents a position in line with the theory of Defensive Realism. BRICS is an effort in gaining security through moderate policy. The many voices of BRICS countries soften the objectives of nations like China that have strong positions and visions for their position in the future international system. The BRICS group is choosing to take a moderate approach in an effort to create small changes and reforms to the financial system rather than create a new hegemonic order.

5.3 The Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative or BRI (called Yi Dai Yi Lu Chang Yi in Mandarin) is a highly ambitious infrastructure project launched by China in 2013 by President Xi Jinping. It has previously been called the One Belt One Road project; however this name has largely been replaced by the Belt and Road Initiative. The vision for the Belt and Road is based off of the ancient Silk Road of 2,000 years ago that connected Han Dynasty China to the Middle East, Europe, and the Mediterranean (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2019). The modern Belt and Road consists of two parts: the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. Together these trade routes will link China with approximately 138 countries that together comprise 65% of the global population and one-third of the Global Gross Domestic Product (China Power Team, 2017). The land-based portion of the BRI follows the path of the ancient Silk Road, passing from China through Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The maritime belt follows a similar path to the sea routes of 15th century China and the famous explorer Zheng He to connect China and the world at large, passing through the east coast of Africa to the Suez canal and the Mediterranean sea (Li,

Mapping China's One Belt One Road initiative, 2019). The cost of the project has been estimated at very different figures ranging from US\$1 trillion (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2019) to as high as US\$26 trillion (China Power Team, 2017). With such a diverse range of cost estimates it has created some concerns in the viability of the project, however China is committed to completing the project by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (OBOReurope, 2019). This is a very symbolic date to have the completion of the Belt and Road Initiative, as it will show the future of the Chinese nation to the world on a highly significant and special anniversary. The Belt and Road Initiative is aimed at promoting “peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit” (Li, 2019, Mapping China's ‘One Belt One Road Initiative’).

As this project is so ambitious and touches so much of the world with its effects, there is a high level of attention being placed on the Belt and Road Initiative both within China and abroad. If China is successful in creating this massive trade network, China will secure itself as one of the dominant hegemons and world powers of the coming age.

5.3.1 China's Belt and Road Goals and Challenges

The Belt and Road project is a highly ambitious project that if successful could shape the direction of China's continued rise for decades to come. The project was born out of a speech by President Xi Jinping titled “Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future” given in Kazakhstan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2013). The Belt and Road is seen as a pathway towards achieving significant economic gain and prosperity for the Chinese nation and its partners. By securing the means of export and the supply chain that supports it gives China a secure and profitable pathway to promote their industries and continued economic rise. This project could also create border security and increased peace and security for China. But perhaps the most significant goal of the BRI is to restructure the international political economy in a direction that places China in the forefront. The Belt and Road project spans several types of infrastructure projects. Major roads, bridges, railways, and ports are scheduled to be completed as part of the BRI, but other projects such as telecommunications networks and energy pipelines are also used to expand and support Chinese trade interests (Li, Mapping China's ‘One Belt One Road Initiative’, 2019).

Within China there is widespread support for the Belt and Road, with papers such as China Daily saying that the “Belt and Road Initiative gives globalization fresh impetus for globalization” (于小明, 2017). President Xi has stated that the Belt and Road will bring about a “new Golden-Age for globalization” (Phillips, 2017). These are strong words, and only time will tell if this ambitious project will lead to the golden vision of the Chinese Dream.

Despite the Belt and Road Initiative launching amongst great expectations from China and the world, there have been potential problems developing that could pose major challenges to China’s global trade and hegemonic goals. For example, nations like Pakistan, Malaysia, and Myanmar have backed away from Belt and Road projects in their nations that had previously been agreed upon (Chandran, 2019). The primary reasoning given for the change of heart is that they wish to avoid the looming threat of debt that has forced other countries to forfeit national resources to China as payment, such as what happened in Sri Lanka in 2017 when they leased the Hambantota port to China for 99 years (BBC, 2017). Incidents such as this have brought fears of “debt-trap diplomacy” to many Belt and Road projects and could have serious impacts on the success of China’s trillion-dollar infrastructure mega project.

Another challenge that is currently unfolding is the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Belt and Road projects around the globe. At the time of this writing, signs of economic recovery in China are emerging, however there have been serious disruptions in supply chains and manufacturing that will have lasting ripples in BRI projects for the foreseeable future. With projects cut off from workers, supplies, and resources; financial losses and projects running over schedule will put stress on the Belt and Road in ways that could leave lasting scars China will need to work hard to heal. In the case of the Indonesian Jakarta-Bandung highspeed railway project, work is continuing however it is significantly slowed as many Chinese workers are banned from returning due to measures meant to prevent the spread of the virus. This is causing massive delays and losses that could pose a risk to the completion of the project (Pearl, 2020). With the global situation around Covid- 19 being so turbulent and unpredictable, this is a problem that is very hard to plan for and could cause significant problems to the Belt and Road Initiative.

5.3.2 Is the Belt and Road contributing to China's hegemonic goals?

With so much international and domestic attention focused on this ambitious project, there has been much pressure for success. The Belt and Road project is still many years from its scheduled completion date of 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (Chatzky, McBride, 2020). Although the project is not finished yet, some conclusions can be made towards its efficacy of meeting China's hegemonic goals.

The Belt and Road Initiative was born out of the same ideas that formed the "Chinese Dream"; creating a prosperous China for generations to come. The Belt and Road set out to accomplish three major goals: creating new economic corridors thorough the concept of win-win cooperation between nations, strengthening China's position in regional integration, and to improve global governance.

The BRI has opened up many new channels for economic development. The Belt and Road has strengthened development and Chinese partnership in six economic corridors: the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the China-Central and Western Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC) (Toppa, 2018). These pathways are creating opportunities for China and the regions they pass through, bringing infrastructure development and trade that is reshaping local economies. China has pledged USD\$60 billion towards the completion of the CPEC. With the example of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the region is expected to see up to 800,000 new jobs in relation to the project (Toppa, 2018). These jobs are primarily in the engineering, infrastructure, and energy sectors. This gives a large boost of opportunities to both China and Pakistan for growth. The partnership between these nations has been described as a friendship that is "higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the ocean, and sweeter than honey" (Toppa, 2018). Pakistan is in need of a strong partner as it has had a challenging time with its economy. Unemployment of young people in the nation is up to a staggering 40%, and the nation has been seeking a bailout from the IMF to alleviate its debt. China has been able to help Pakistan economically through the CPEC, and China is gaining influence in the region by demonstrating its ability to help other nations. This is in line with the ideas of hegemony theory, where a potential hegemon can emerge through promoting its ideals in a win-win format for all involved. A 2014 study showed that Pakistan had the highest favorability

rating of China in the world, with 80% of respondents viewing China positively. This is a sign that China's hegemonic goals are being met by the Belt and Road in the area of creating win-win partnerships based on economic prosperity (Toppa, 2018).

China's creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank also represents China's focus on regional integration and improved global governance. China created a number of funds and banks that play a role in financing the Belt and Road, such as the Silk Road Fund and the China Development Bank. The AIIB was proposed in 2013, and by 2014 a memorandum of understanding was signed by 22 of the 57 founding members (Cai, 2018). China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in large part to finance the Belt and Road project, with a goal of promoting regional integration. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with 100 members (AIIB, 2020). The bank was launched with a starting capital of USD\$100 billion, of which 31% came from China (Cai, 2018). China is the bank's largest shareholder with 26.6% of the voting shares (Cai, 2018). This development bank is a push from China to provide an alternative to the US dominated institutions of the World Bank and the IMF, as well as the Asian Development Bank.

Together the BRI and AIIB are designed to help China to promote continued economic growth by stimulating the economy and expanding the markets for Chinese goods (Cai, 2018). In its first two years of operation, the AIIB had approved 35 projects in 12 countries, and spent USD\$4.43 billion (Cai, 2018). The bank is fully operational and is continuing to expand. The AIIB has notably gone into many of these investment projects in collaboration with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank as a risk reduction strategy (Cai, 2018). The AIIB is still a new bank, so it is expanding its lending portfolio each year, and is expecting to be lending up to USD\$15 billion in the next five years (Cai, 2018). The AIIB in collaboration with the BRI has been seen by the international community as a source of great potential in promoting China's hegemonic goals of becoming more involved in global governance and integrating the Asian region.

The Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are crucial to the goal of reforming the global economic system and giving China, as well as other emerging economies, a seat at the table. With the US led institutions being resistant to changes as strong as those desired by China, the Chinese government has sought out alternate plans to create such reforms. By building

their own investment banks and projects, China can implement its own rules and regulations. With the AIIB and BRI, China is putting pressure on these dominant institutions in such a way that they implement reforms that give China a greater influence. This is in line with China's stated goal of improving global governance in such a way that the international system is not controlled by a select few at the top, but rather is for everyone (Cai, 2018).

5.4 How do BRICS and the Belt and Road Compare?

China is a powerhouse nation whose development occurred at speeds that continually surprised the rest of the world. As the United States loses the position of a unipolar hegemon and we enter into a world with a multipolar moment, China has leapt to the top of the pack of the great powers. For China to assume the position of a superpower and regional hegemon, it must accomplish several goals, namely creating strong links between itself and other nations, increasing its role in global governance, and promoting integration of the Asian region with China at the helm. To accomplish these goals, China has implemented a host of reforms, policies, and projects that contribute to its position around the world. Two of the projects that presented a case for China to demonstrate its ability to lead in the new multipolar world were the BRICS coalition of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and the Belt and Road Initiative. In the prior section of the analysis, the merits of each of these projects towards China's goals were analyzed. In this section the two projects are compared to see which is the most effective and how they relate to one another.

Firstly, it is important to note that the BRICS coalition is an economic partnership of equal nations aiming to transform the financial system and improve the position of emerging economies in global governance. That means that these five nations must all have a strong say in the direction that the group's policy is directed. While this can be a good thing for the other members of BRICS, China is more powerful than the other members. While BRICS has similar goals to China, it is not a successful way for China to become a regional hegemon. BRICS has made progress and created some alternatives to the US led financial system; however these are ultimately not enough to create a new hegemon. BRICS works at its best when it applies pressure to the current financial system and allows for more involvement by emerging economies through reforms. These observations fit into the framework of defensive realism. China is using BRICS as a forum for creating moderate change in the financial systems of the world. It is not creating a hegemonic order on its own, but is rather

maximizing security for China through developing these multilateral cooperation amongst the world's most influential emerging economies.

When looking at the way the Belt and Road Initiative achieves China's goals, one can look at offensive realism to explain many of the nation's actions. China is power maximizing through this project by creating strong economic partnerships with nations along the path of this project. China is creating a strong and diverse net of infrastructure projects that will secure trade routes for Chinese goods, ensuring that China always has access to world markets. These projects also provide alternative development options and revenue streams for partner nations, allowing them to come into the influence area of China rather than the United States. China is using its financial and trade prowess to create a network of projects that will allow it to become a financial powerhouse and regional hegemon. China has designed the Belt and Road Initiative to stretch as to central Asia, the middle east, east Africa, and the Mediterranean coast of Europe. This diverse group of regions and nations encompassed in the project allow for the potential that China can surpass the position of regional hegemon and gain significant influence around these hubs. This is a positive strategy to promote Chinese values and business around the world, shaping international trade around China and its goods. This gives China a significant increase in power and, if successful, could give China a strategic advantage over other great powers competing for dominance in the international multipolar system.

Secondly one can compare the New Development Bank of BRICS with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank that is heavily intertwined with the Belt and Road. Both banks are multilateral cooperative investments, with many nations holding a stake in the projects they take on. However, in the New Development Bank, only the BRICS nations have become members in the six years since it launched. This is in sharp contrast to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which has one hundred members in its five years of operations. The banks also differ significantly in the amount of loans they are able to issue. The New Development Bank issued USD\$4.6 billion in loans during the 2018 fiscal year (New Development Bank, 2019), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was able to issue USD\$7.5 in the same year (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 2019). The number and variety of projects undertaken by the AIIB dwarf those of the New Development Bank.

6. Conclusion

The world we are living in is undergoing a period of change. As the American unipolar moment that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union comes to an end, an era of multipolarity is starting. Some of the great powers in this multipolar moment are familiar faces, such as the United States, Russia, the European Union, and Japan. But one nation is gaining increased attention as its share of global power and influence grows: China. Once the strongest country in the world, China had a period of time where its global influence was diminished. However within recent decades, the People's Republic of China has revolutionized their economy and brought the country to new heights. As the nation's standing and power grows, it is turning its vision outwards to the rest of the world. China is investing heavily in development, aid, and infrastructure for other emerging economies, and this strategy could tip the balance of power during the multipolar moment in their favor. But is China able to become a hegemon? And is its strategy working? As there are still many years and possibly even decades before the current projects are completed it is impossible to predict what will come in the future, however one can analyze the data available at the present to arrive at some interesting conclusions. This section will restate the findings of this thesis and give the answer to the research question: **How do BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative compare in helping China achieve its goals as an emerging hegemon?**

With BRICS, China entered a very promising economic alliance with some of the strongest emerging economies in the world. The group created a lot of buzz around its formation, with claims that it might represent a new power bloc that could challenge the hegemonic financial order of the United States and the Bretton Woods Institutions. However, this has not proven to be the successful power bloc that was speculated. The BRICS differ on nearly as many levels as they have commonalities. They are spread around the globe on various continents, they all speak different languages, have different political systems, and have different degrees of entanglement with the financial systems that currently dominate the world. They share a goal of empowering the global south and emerging economies, but this is easier said than done. Internal struggles divide the group. India and China are suspicious of each other due to long standing border disputes. China and Russia agree that moving away from a dollar reserve currency is an imperative, but Brazil and South Africa have significant investment in the current system and desire more moderate reforms. These differences have proved hard to balance, creating plans that are weekend and cannot present a strong

and unified challenge to the United States and its hegemonic systems. This is clearly exemplified with the BRICS New Development Bank, where the group started with bold promises, but in reality the ideological challenges have prevented the bank from taking off. In relation to China's specific goals for increased global influence and hegemony, BRICS is not a highly effective path on its own. The strength of BRICS for China is that it provides a path towards moderate reform by working with other major emerging economies in the world. By continuing to be a member of BRICS, China is following a defensive realist approach by taking moderate policies aimed more at reform of the system than overturning it in favor of creating its own hegemonic order. BRICS is not successful for China in creating a hegemonic financial system, but it does serve as an important multinational cooperation forum for China to give its ideas to the world.

When China announced the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, this caused significant chatter in international media. Will China pave the way to a brighter future? Is this project going to pay off? Does this trap developing nations in debt? Narratives from all sides swirled around the newspapers and journals. But seven years after the announcement, projects are underway and the Belt and Road is proving to be more than just a dream. A significant advantage that China has had in terms of creating hegemony through the Belt and Road as opposed to BRICS is that this is a series of interconnected bilateral projects. China can enter negotiations on Belt and Road issues without the restraints of consensus among a host of different state actors. This makes it easier for China to arrive at win-win deals with the nations that these projects aim to help. China has faced criticism on some Belt and Road projects, but most have resulted in improved relationships, both economically and politically, with the partner countries. This is essential to, but does not guarantee, the creation of hegemony. It is impossible to see the future, but the Belt and Road at present is meeting more of the necessary requirements for China to improve its standing as a hegemon regionally and across the globe.

The development banks for both projects, the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank have also had different results. The New Development Bank of the BRICS group has largely not lived up to its potential, similarly to the BRICS group itself. Within the AIIB, China controls the largest share of the power, and has been able to implement many projects to aid in the completion of the BRI. The AIIB is more successful in fulfilling China's goals because it is largely under China's control.

Neither the Belt and Road Initiative nor the BRICS coalition are militaristic in nature, so they do not contribute to this angle of hegemonic power. However, China does possess a strong military that has the resources and power to deter threats, as well as maintaining the ability to protect its territory, thus serving the defensive realist belief of security maximization. As military is a widely discussed topic in the study of hegemony, a future study could evaluate the capacity of China's military and how this factors in to China's power balancing strategy.

This project has compared these two development strategies that have hegemonic potential for China, however both are very focused on trade and economic outcomes. Future research on the topic of China's hegemonic potential could focus on the effects of soft power initiatives, such as teaching Chinese abroad through the Confucius Institutes or how China works to develop its image abroad. This thesis also follows the understandings of Realism theory, and future studies using other theories such as liberalism could produce different results of interest. Due to time constraints, this paper was limited to collecting data from other sources, but future studies could include interviews and other tools to gain more first-hand knowledge about the topics discussed.

China has worked hard to create the staggering growth numbers and quality of life increase that its citizens enjoy. As the superpower status of the United States has declined, many have questioned if China could become the next superpower. With a changing structure to our international political order, anything is possible, and the strategies China is using in the Belt and Road could prove to help it achieve the goal of creating hegemony.

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