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# **Narration, Cooperation, and Confrontation**

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A Comparative Study  
of the Belt and Road's (De)Securitization

Inaugural-Dissertation  
zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde  
der  
Philosophischen Fakultät  
der  
Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität  
zu Bonn

# **Narration, Cooperation, and Confrontation**

A Comparative Study of  
the Belt and Road's (De)Securitization

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Bonn 2024

Gedruckt mit der Genehmigung der Philosophischen Fakultät  
der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

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Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 26.08.2024

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the people who guided and supported me throughout my dissertation process. At each stage, I had doubts that the day would ever come to complete this work, but your support allowed me to continue, strive, grow, and push through. First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Xuewu Gu. Without your mentorship, guidance, trust, and patience, this research would not have come to life. Your support enabled me to navigate through the jungle of knowledge and pursue my academic and personal development. I am also incredibly grateful for the thought-provoking discussions and insightful reflections with my second supervisor, Professor Dr. Maximilian Mayer, who has been instrumental in inspiring me to refine my ideas. Special thanks are also due to Professor Dr. Volker Kronenberg and Professor Dr. Wolfram Hinz, who kindly agreed to serve as chairman and fourth member of the board of examiners, respectively.

I would also like to thank my former teachers, especially Hartmut Liebermann, who paved my way into political science. Only as I have grown older have I truly appreciated the indispensable role you played in laying the foundation for my future.

In addition, I want to convey my profound gratitude to all of my colleagues at the University of Bonn, fellow researchers in Germany and abroad, as well as my friends and family for their collaboration and advice. I will refrain from naming you individually since I may inevitably forget someone, but I would like to thank all of you for your unwavering encouragement. No words can adequately express my appreciation to all of you who supported me on this journey, encouraged me to write word after word, rehearsed my presentations, and helped me finalize this project.

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## List of Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BDI	Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V. (Federation of German Industries)
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany)
BRF	Belt and Road Forum
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRITACOM	Belt and Road Initiative Tax Administration Cooperation Mechanism
BUILD Act	Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development Act of 2018
B3W	Build Back Better World
CAI	Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
CBBC	China-Britain Business Council
CDB	China Development Bank
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)
China-CEEC	Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency
CIPS	Cross-Border Interbank Payment System
COPRI	Conflict and Peace Research Institute
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CSR	Congressional Research Service
CS	Copenhagen School
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DBAR	Digital Belt and Road Program
DOD	Department of Defense (U.S.)
DOS	Department of State (U.S.)

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DIT	Department for International Trade (UK)
EFD	UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue
EU	European Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EximBank	Export and Import Bank of China
FAC	House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee
FCO	Foreign & Commonwealth Office
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDI	Global Development Initiative
GTAI	Germany Trade and Invest
GSI	Global Security Initiative
HC	House of Commons
HL	House of Lords
HM	Her / His Majesty
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IR	International Relations (Academic Discipline)
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (Reconstruction Credit Institute)
LIWC	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MSR	21st Century Maritime Silk Road
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P5	The permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RMB	Renminbi
RS	Resolute Support
SFAAT	Security Force Assistance Advisory Team
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SNP	Scottish National Party
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
SRF	Silk Road Fund
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOE	State-owned enterprises
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USA	United States of America

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## 1. Introduction: The Birth of a Security Issue?

*“Quand la Chine s'éveillera... le monde tremblera.” Napoléon Bonaparte*

“When China wakes up... the world will tremble” – this quote attributed to Napoléon Bonaparte in 1816 was made famous by the eponymous book by the French author Alain Peyrefitte in 1973.<sup>1</sup> It is improbable that the French Emperor made that statement, but despite its disputed origin, the quote has made a considerable impact in the literature.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this study, the sentence and its meaning are intriguing as it demonstrates that China has been of global importance, fascination, and seemingly concern for centuries.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it suggests the strong impact that words can have on shaping the world. Such words and attributions convey authority, especially when attributed to a person of power. They create an image in people’s minds of a sleeping giant (which is a common complement in English to the former quote) and dormant hazard, poised to awaken and assert its interests, thus raising questions about international power transitions.<sup>4</sup> Glimpsing into this far-fledged controversy, internationally renowned political scientists and advisors such as Zheng, Nye, and Mearsheimer have frequently discussed China’s rise, albeit from different perspectives. Zheng stated that China requires a peaceful rise, pursuing a cooperative and anti-hegemonic approach toward global politics and the United States of America.<sup>5</sup> Assessing these international power dynamics, Nye repeatedly discussed US relations with China, “whose rise is one of the most important foreign policy challenges of the twenty-first century.”<sup>6</sup> Mearsheimer does not employ such diplomatic language by claiming:

“Can China rise peacefully? My answer is no. If China continues its impressive economic growth over the next few decades, the United States and China are likely to engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war”<sup>7</sup>.

In line with the quote that opens this chapter, these three perspectives share the impression that China’s conduct on the world stage is intrinsically connected to global security, particularly in relation to the United States. While this association may seem

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<sup>1</sup> Peyrefitte 1973: ii-iii.

<sup>2</sup> Stone Fish 2016.

<sup>3</sup> In the context of this study, the term “China” refers to the People’s Republic of China.

<sup>4</sup> Stone Fish 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Zheng 2016: 20-23; republished from 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Nye 2018: 112.

<sup>7</sup> Mearsheimer 2016: 23; republished from 2006.

straightforward, the underlying debate is considerably intricate. China's rise in the 20th and 21st centuries and its implications for the global order are discussed from virtually every economic, societal, political, or International Relations (IR)<sup>8</sup> perspective. These perspectives contribute to the so-called China threat theory, encompassing major security concerns about whether China's increasing economic and military power will lead to more aggressive behavior. In simple terms, the theory suggests that as China becomes stronger, it will expand its territorial claims and challenge the current international order on a global scale, including the United States, due to its authoritarian political system.<sup>9</sup> Oftentimes, however, the theoretical foundations of "security" and which aspects of security are perceived to be threatened are left undefined in the literature and political rhetoric. As a result, the term "security" has become degraded to the point of meaninglessness by being used to mean everything without discerning the appropriate means to manage the security issue. Studying this debate thus necessitates categorizing diffuse security statements into useful observations to differentiate between the ontological and epistemological perspectives and their implications, as the present study aims to achieve. In the words of the opening quote, it is essential to question who perceives that the world trembles and in what way this trembling is perceived to occur.

When surveying the theoretical landscape in the political science discourse regarding whether China's rise will be peaceful, offensive realists, in line with John J. Mearsheimer, anticipate that it will not.<sup>10</sup> Liberals are more optimistic as they see the benefits of China for the current system without rejecting that there are contentious points of order. In a constructivist view, it is possible to peacefully integrate rising China into the global political order through a process of mutual learning among all involved parties regarding their core values, identities, and perceptions.<sup>11</sup> This condensed overview of the debate serves to exemplify the divergent perspectives regarding the ongoing transition of power, the political imperatives involved, and the scientific approaches most relevant to this question. These aspects highlight how scholars perceive the world and the driving factors of power and security that shape their conclusions.

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<sup>8</sup> When used in capital letters, the term refers to the academic field, in lower case to the political practice.

<sup>9</sup> Vuori 2024: 75; Mayer 2018a: 1231.

<sup>10</sup> Mearsheimer 2016: 23.

<sup>11</sup> Feng and He 2018: 168-169.

Such ontological foundations are related to how a dangerous situation is assessed and what kind of behavior or policy is deemed necessary.

A common aphorism suggests that thoughts serve as the genesis of all actions. In political science, this is often associated with the term “perception,” which means “the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted.”<sup>12</sup> Constructivists claim that perceptions are central to their school of thought, while perceptions also play a significant role in certain strands of realism<sup>13</sup> and liberalism<sup>14</sup>. While there are certain similarities that can be observed between these schools of thought, political scientist Alexander Wendt argues that realists and liberalists do not adequately account for “the complex learning involved in redefinitions of identity and interest.”<sup>15</sup> This inadequacy leads to a shallow comprehension of how transformations take place in global politics. A critical distinction between these perspectives is that realists and liberalists consider anarchy and self-help in international relations inherent, while constructivists see them as products of practices.<sup>16</sup> How actors identify with each other shapes the political process, which in turn constitutes the necessity to resort to competitive, individualistic, or cooperative policies to provide for security.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, anarchy can be managed by the way the interaction takes place – or, as Wendt famously put it: “*Anarchy is what states make of it.*”<sup>18</sup> Due to his significant contribution to the development of social constructivism, Wendt’s writings constitute a fundamental theoretical foundation of this study.<sup>19</sup> However, more specific theoretical accounts aim to understand the terminology of security and the evolution of security studies as a specific field of scientific inquiry. A gene-

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<sup>12</sup> Oxford Dictionary 2019.

<sup>13</sup> In his ‘balance of threat’ theory, Stephen M. Walt postulates how states interpret threat factors shaping their behavior. He lists four threat categories: aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions, which ultimately determine international alliance formation (Walt 1985: 43). Similarly, the ‘balance of power’ proposition stresses the importance of power perceptions for state behavior, which might result in a security dilemma. See, e.g., Gu (2018: 103), or Grieco, et al. (2019: 78-86).

<sup>14</sup> The liberalist focus on the formation and importance of interests opens the “black box” of the state and considers domestic political processes. Foreign policy interests and perceptions are in this school of thought oftentimes related to the nature of a state’s political system, see e.g., Morgan (2016: 32). Grieco et al. (2019: 87-88) point out that individual and group thinking shapes politics, which is an important connection to constructivism (see Chapter 2 of this study).

<sup>15</sup> Wendt 1992: 392.

<sup>16</sup> Wendt 1992: 393, 395. A conceptual debate is presented in Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Wendt 1992: 400-401.

<sup>18</sup> Wendt 1992: 395, emphasis in original. More insights into the relation between anarchy and security are given in Chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> Among them, but certainly not limited to in this study, most prominently the article “Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics” (Wendt 1992) and the book “Social Theory of International Politics” (Wendt 1999).



alogy of security terms and studies, provided by Christopher Daase, aids in comprehending the concurrent evolution and increasing expansion of various IR schools of thought and specific security concepts over the past decades.<sup>20</sup> This genealogical inquiry forms the foundation for addressing various security concerns across policy areas and fills the void under the umbrella term of security. Daase's genealogy does not explain how political issues evolve into security issues on the political agenda – in other words, securitization. Especially the Copenhagen School of Securitization Studies, established by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, offers a more targeted theoretical framework for assessing whether political discussions related to various aspects of China's international policies tend toward defensive postures or partnerships.<sup>21</sup>

As a symbol and manifestation of the Chinese power ascent, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) frequently takes center stage in political debates. Since 2013, when Xi Jinping first announced the idea of a "Silk Road Economic Belt," both the initiative and the international discourse surrounding it have gained momentum. Considered as "a sign of China's rise as a global superpower,"<sup>22</sup> the BRI has been examined from various perspectives, including geo-economics<sup>23</sup>, various national and regional viewpoints, and across virtually all policy fields and IR schools of thought.<sup>24</sup> From its inceptions, the BRI has garnered widespread attention and extends beyond the epistemic communities of "China watchers" in academic or policy circles."<sup>25</sup> Xi's Astana speech in September 2013 can thus be viewed as a pivotal moment, signifying a major shift in China's foreign and economic policy. It provided the initial impetus for a new quality of policies and politics across the globe, almost two years before the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China presented a first official document about

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<sup>20</sup> Daase 2010a, 2010b; Schlag et al. 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Buzan's seminal work „People States and Fear" (1983) and Wæver's "Securitization and Desecuritization" (1995) are considered scholarly precursors for the Copenhagen School. The book "Security: A New Framework for Analysis" (Buzan et al. 1998) is widely perceived as the key text for the study of the securitization concept, which is elaborated in Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> Brakman et al. 2019: 7.

<sup>23</sup> See Beeson (2018).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., the compilation edited by Mayer (2018b) encompassing several perspectives, Kühnhardt (2018) for a comment on the European Union's perspective, or Fornes and Mendez (2018) for a detailed analysis of China-Latin-American relations. The upcoming Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the research landscape.

<sup>25</sup> Brakman et al. 2019: 5.

the BRI's measures and targets.<sup>26</sup> The initiative's profound impact is underscored by the fact that even countries not directly involved in the infrastructural corridors in China's neighborhood are engaging in BRI discussions, analyses, and policy considerations.<sup>27</sup> Embedded in political discourses are traces of stakeholder perceptions toward China and security conveyed in speech or writing.<sup>28</sup> As a form of 'social practice,' discourses shape the social world and are reciprocally reshaped by it. Consequently, the discourse on China's BRI is influenced by the temporal and spatial context of the actors, as well as their perceptions, identities, and norms, which may vary accordingly.<sup>29</sup>

If this logic is now applied to the case of a rising China, securitized perceptions of the BRI shape, modify, and limit policy choices, which may be detected by studying the political discourse. This links to a key tenet of constructivist thinking, where perceptions are an essential component of the "social act" in international relations. According to Wendt, the social act can be divided into three interrelated stages: signaling, interpreting, and responding.<sup>30</sup> For example, the BRI can be viewed as a signal transmitted by China, the 'ego' in constructivist terms, by virtue of initiating the program. From a constructivist perspective, the project is not solely a signal of power or economic interests, although they do play a part. It also entails a reservoir of past experiences, cultures, norms, and traditions that evolve over time through interactions. In a strategic communication effort, these elements are composed by the ego to achieve a favorable signaling outcome. Such a strategic effort is also identified by British Sinologist Kerry Brown, stating: "The BRI is an attempt for China to tell its story to the world."<sup>31</sup> These words prompt the question of what story is being presented and which version is being heard. Accordingly, a thorough investigation needs to examine both sides of the coin: China's 'ego' presentation and the signal recipients – the 'alter.' Assessing the construction, re-

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<sup>26</sup> Mayer 2018c: 6; National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China 2015 (hereinafter: NDRC 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Take Canada, for example, a country through which the BRI's corridors do not run. Yet great attention is devoted to the plans as it can be detected, among others, in the "Rethinking Security: China and the Age of Strategic Rivalry" Workshop Report by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (2018). The report dedicates a separate chapter (pp. 53-62) to the initiative in which it is described as an instrument for re-shaping the target region to China's advantage with consequences for Western, hence Canadian, strategic policy planning.

<sup>28</sup> The term 'discourse' is interpreted differently and is operationalized in a great variety of ways. For more details, see Wodak and Meyer (2015: 6).

<sup>29</sup> Wodak and Meyer 2015: 6.

<sup>30</sup> Wendt 1992: 404-405.

<sup>31</sup> Brown 2018: 219.

production, or dismissal of potential threats, the social act heuristic facilitates the analysis of the security implications of the BRI as a manifestation of an awakened China.<sup>32</sup>

This requires a decision choosing whose perspectives will be studied as the recipients of the social act. Due to the extensive global reach of the BRI, all countries' perspectives offer a gateway for analysis. As noted above, the power transition debate, to which the BRI is intrinsically connected, was already found to be linked to the USA and the Western-led liberal international order.<sup>33</sup> Notions of a "Western" or, more specifically, "American Decline" are pervasive in scholarly literature, highlighting the relevance of changing security capacities and perceptions.<sup>34</sup> Still, the United States and other established powers<sup>35</sup>, particularly those from Europe, play a crucial role in global security affairs, as in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).<sup>36</sup> While this might suggest the US is a valuable research subject regarding its perceptions on the BRI's security implications, there is existent literature by Wuthnow, and Shah, respectively, along with Heidbrink and Becker that previously delved into the issue.<sup>37</sup> These studies underscore the US's growing reservations, leading to staunch rejection of participation in the BRI. However, some of its close European security allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) exhibited greater ambiguity, presenting a research puzzle regarding the development of their perceptions. Notably, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great

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<sup>32</sup> Wendt 1992: 405.

<sup>33</sup> It can be argued that the concepts of the political West and the international (liberal) order are controversial. In a historical European context, interpreting Hilz (2017: 24), the term „political West“ refers to the increasing conflict between the Western democracies, led by the USA, and the Soviet-dominated communist bloc. This conflict led to the division of Europe and a significant portion of the world into East and West in the years following World War II. Accordingly, in this study, the political West or Western countries describe countries aligned with the United States, sharing similar political and economic values, such as a democratic political system. These norms are also central to the international liberal order, sparking further controversy. For instance, Albert et al. (2018: 3-4) point out that any thinking of order is normatively loaded and entails diverging interpretations.

<sup>34</sup> Ikenberry 2018: 18-19; Lieber 2012: 88.

<sup>35</sup> China is frequently classified as an "emerging power" or "rising power" due to considerable power gains over the last few decades, as indicated by researchers such as Parlar Dal (2019: 500), Ghimire (2018: 2), or Larson (2018: 251). This contrasts with "established powers" or "traditional powers." For instance, Ghimire (2018: 2) used these terms "to denote great powers who underwrite liberal consensus, viz. the US, the European Union (EU) and influential Western states." The definitions and use of these terms remain vague and controversial.

<sup>36</sup> Next to China and Russia, the United States, France, and Great Britain have a permanent seat in the council, including a powerful veto-right, which is why these members are called the permanent five (P5). Countries such as Germany, Japan, India, and Brazil are calling to reform the UNSC as they see an imbalance in the regional representation. For more information, see Parlar Dal (2019: 500), Ghimire (2018: 8, 10) or Hilz (2017).

<sup>37</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023; Shah 2021; Wuthnow 2018.

Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) have endorsed certain elements of the BRI, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Despite some critical voices from Washington warning that the AIIB is a pretext for China's revisionist capacities and ambitions under President Xi Jinping, both European democracies have become founding members.<sup>38</sup> Both Germany and the UK are linked to China by rail, suggesting that either country marks the western end of the Silk Road project. Both countries have strong economic ties with China and have upgraded their diplomatic relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Nevertheless, neither of them has signed a national-level Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Beijing, which would officially mark their participation in the BRI.<sup>39</sup> How the attitudes of these two European democracies toward the BRI have evolved since its inception seems to present a formidable research puzzle in global international affairs dealing with a rising China. An investigation of German and British perceptions of the BRI addresses the empirical puzzle concerning their views on the central security implications and also contributes to the theoretical advancement in security research, particularly securitization. Articulating this interest into a central research question, the present study explores to what extent the BRI is perceived as a security issue in Germany and the United Kingdom.<sup>40</sup>

Three main contributions of this research project can be summarized as follows: First, the present study undertakes a theoretical revision with regard to existing research concepts in the field of security studies and constructivist securitization studies. The resulting security taxonomy not only guides this work but also provides direction for the future. It acknowledges the diversity of perspectives by critically examining and methodologically updating the so-called securitization spectrum. This methodological innovation is the second main contribution of the work, which represents a synthesis of qualitative content and discourse analysis. This contribution is particularly evident in a novel approach established in this study for assessing levels of securitization in relation to variety across security policy areas and intensity. Third, this study presents the first evaluation of security signals in Chinese strategic BRI communication and a cross-

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<sup>38</sup> Huang 2021: 37; Hilz 2017: 157; Summers 2016: 64, 66.

<sup>39</sup> Ashbee 2024: 6, 14-15; Colley and van Noort 2022: 103-105; Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 374; Huang 2019: 212; Le Corre 2018: 168.

<sup>40</sup> In order to prevent a confirmation bias, it needs to be realized that the answer may also be that the BRI is not perceived as a security issue, which corresponds to a null hypothesis for the study.

country analysis of Germany and the UK regarding their perceptions of the national-level BRI from 2015 to 2020. Ultimately, the study proposes two novel concepts based on these empirical evaluations to further advance securitization studies in the discipline of IR. These proposals include the idea of a political communication tactic coined ‘veiled securitization,’ and ‘hedging securitization’ as a bridge to strategic studies.

To address the research question and deliver the outlined contributions, the study is organized in four stages: The first part is devoted to the key tenets of exploring BRI security perceptions. Chapter 2 entails an exploration of the evolving concept of security, commencing with a critical review, reorganization, and rejuvenation of Daase’s security genealogy. Subsequently, it expounds upon central constructivist security perspectives and, finally, examines the concept of securitization. These theoretical cornerstones guide the empirical investigation by providing the main security categories for the analysis. To derive an overview and access point for the research framework, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the previous academic landscape on the BRI, with the aim of revealing some present knowledge gaps. Additionally, it uncovers three distinct perspectives regarding the BRI’s relation to security. These perspectives conceptualize the BRI as encountering security challenges in its implementation on the ground, potentially contributing to the mitigation of security issues in target countries and acting as a source of insecurities. Chapter 4 then explains and justifies the analytical approach taken to gauge BRI security perceptions voiced in Germany and the UK. It provides a conceptualization of national-level political elite perceptions, primarily based on national parliaments, complemented by certain government publications as central securitization arenas where political stakeholders negotiate issues. The Chapter’s second section discusses the synthesis of discourse and qualitative content analysis for examining BRI statements using the software MAXQDA. At this stage, the main analytical steps are disclosed to determine the securitization degrees in terms of intensity and variety across different policy areas.

Based on these key tenets for exploring BRI security perceptions, the second stage of the study focuses on the Chinese visions and actions related to the initiative as the signaling ‘ego.’ Chapter 5 provides an overview of the project’s historical and organizational benchmarks as well as central political principles and slogans. While the observa-

tions in Chapter 5 are derived from existing academic analyses, particularly those by Chinese scholars, Chapter 6 undertakes an original exploration of Chinese BRI documents obtained from the Belt and Road Portal. Such an endeavor involves firsthand observation of salient security issues outlined in officially approved BRI documents and the current status of Germany and the UK.

The third stage shifts attention to the BRI perceptions of Germany in Chapter 7 and the UK in Chapter 8. These are organized around the development of the discourse over time, which also highlights the evolution of certain discursive security issues and other perception clusters over the whole observation period. The following stages are guided by two comparison levels. Chapter 9 provides a cross-category securitization comparison of BRI perceptions in Germany and the UK, which is designed to juxtapose securitization degrees and the receivers' perceptions in five security areas, which include economic, human, military, ecologic, and cyber security. Chapter 10 further abstracts the comparison across the three BRI security discourse lines derived from the initial literature review. In this chapter, Chinese perspectives are included to provide a comprehensive portrayal and contrast of BRI security perceptions.

The fourth and final stage provides a sophisticated discussion of the main results from a theoretical, methodological, and empirical view in Chapter 11. The chapter concludes by highlighting ongoing trends and diverse research opportunities for future studies beyond the main observation period, emphasizing the ongoing relevance of the BRI. Chapter 12 succinctly encapsulates the primary findings from all research stages, paving the way for forthcoming studies in the field. These findings hold relevance for political decision-makers in search of strategic insights, as well as for business leaders whose companies possess economic interests in the countries under scrutiny. Moreover, they cater to the inquiries of the interested public seeking to grasp the concerns and aspirations presented in relation to China's intercontinental mega-project.

## **Part I: Key Tenets of Exploring BRI Security Perceptions**

Before delving into the research puzzle of BRI security perceptions, it is crucial to outline the fundamental cornerstones of this research in theoretical, methodological, and empirical terms. These cornerstones facilitate exploring BRI perceptions, emphasizing the complexities of the research puzzle, and structuring the analytical framework. Chapter 2 contains the conceptual basics and describes the state of research on security concepts. Drawing on a genealogy of security concepts, we identify corresponding gaps in the literature and deduce theory-guided methodological choices. As many scholars assess China's rise as a challenge for international security, it must first be clarified what the term "security" means and how it relates to state power transitions.

Based on International Relations (IR) theory, the upcoming chapters outline conflicting and converging perspectives on security and carve out key constructivist assumptions. Wendt's central premise that "the relationship between what actors *do* and what they *are*"<sup>41</sup> serves as the analytic pathway of this study, which examines to what extent national-level discourses in Germany and the UK securitize China's Belt and Road Initiative. Based on these theoretical bedrocks, the research landscape of the BRI is outlined in Chapter 3. The literature review aims to delve into the increased scholarly engagement following the introduction of the BRI and seeks to extract key perspectives on the BRI's impact on security. These insights aid in comprehending the results of the qualitative content analysis of national-level BRI documents from China, Germany, and the UK. This methodological approach combining discourse and qualitative content analysis is explained in Chapter 4. In doing so, the research design systematically builds on the current security and BRI research landscape, justifying the approach with the contributions to the identified knowledge gaps.

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<sup>41</sup> Wendt 1992: 424.

## **2. Concepts and Innovations for Researching Security**

As established in the introduction, the debate about China's rise and securitized perceptions of the Belt and Road becomes meaningless without a guiding concept of security. Accordingly, this chapter explores the evolution of security as a concept and constructivist assumptions to key theoretical and empirical frameworks. To avoid conceptual ambiguity, the first section of the chapter describes the ever-evolving concept of security based on a dimensional genealogy. Accordingly, the section identifies various notions of key actors, security areas, and analytical levels in security studies. Particularly, the distinction of security policy domains offers a useful way to categorize political statements and form the basis of the later-developed security coding frame for this study. Contrasting key terms of realist and liberalist thinking about security sharpens this study's constructivist focus. Juxtaposing the IR schools of thought allows for a more in-depth discussion in section 2.2 about the constructivist's impact on security studies, especially regarding the concept of securitization. The section discusses key debates in securitization studies originating from the Copenhagen School. It points out a gap in research regarding the securitization spectrum. Despite its name, the securitization spectrum is often treated as a simplified binary concept of securitized versus non-securitized rather than as a spectrum of varying degrees and intensities of security discourses across different themes. By merging the genealogy of security domains with a novel classification of securitization degrees, this study achieves an original contribution to the scholarly field.

### **2.1. Reviewing and Renovating a Taxonomy of Security**

To start with, there is no universal framework for constructivist security studies, as there is no single or unitary definition of security. In their broadly received textbook, the security studies scholars Paul D. Williams and Matt McDonald stated in reference to the Scottish philosopher W.B. Gallie<sup>42</sup> that security is an “essentially contested concept”<sup>43</sup>. In other words, there is conceptual confusion concerning the meanings attached to the term that varies according to the normative and analytic perspectives. This confusion is

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<sup>42</sup> Gallie himself, however, did not elaborate on the issue. In his 1956 essay “Essentially Contested Concepts”, security is only mentioned in a sub-sentence on page 184 without further explanation.

<sup>43</sup> Williams and McDonald 2018: 1. This assessment seems to be widely shared, as it is also stated by Buzan (1983: 6), Jarvis and Holland (2015: 29) or Schlag et al. (2016: 1). Baldwin (1997: 12) argues that security is a complicated and oftentimes poorly specified concept. While he questions that security qualifies as an “essentially” contested concept, he does not unequivocally reject the thesis.



aggravated when scholars are “inconsistent in their own usage, or [...] simply fail to grasp the definitions employed by other researchers”<sup>44</sup>. To mitigate the risk of conceptual confusion, this chapter discusses the transforming notions of security without neglecting complexity. There seems to be a certain consensus<sup>45</sup> that the term “invokes safety and the absence of threats”<sup>46</sup>. This is related to the Latin origin of the term ‘securus’, which can be translated as ‘freedom from pain’ or ‘freedom from sorrow’.<sup>47</sup> The essence of most definitions can be summed up by saying that security means the absence of harm, both physical and real (in reference to pain) or mental and expected (in reference to sorrow).<sup>48</sup>

This basic security definition hints at the social construction of reality by the meanings people attach to things and terms – the central constructivist paradigm.<sup>49</sup> In the 1980s, the linguistic turn in IR introduced humans as speaking subjects that bring meaning to their interactions.<sup>50</sup> The diverse definitions for the terms ‘security’ and ‘security policy’ result from a wide range of perspectives about what is to be secured (the referent object) and consequent aspects, including means for ensuring security.<sup>51</sup> The following section, therefore, introduces the scope of the concept of security to analyze whether and to what extent discourses about the Belt and Road project contain security concerns.

### **2.1.1. The Referent Object: Whose Security?**

For the sake of promoting access to the complex evolution of security studies, Christopher Daase created the so-called security dimensions. This concept enables the assignment of changing emphases of meaning. These security dimensions can be found in several research papers in security studies, although the literature hardly refers to Daase’s concept by name beyond the German-speaking area.<sup>52</sup> Daase analyzed the

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<sup>44</sup> Collier et al. 2006: 212.

<sup>45</sup> Collins 2019: 1.

<sup>46</sup> Jarvis and Holland 2015: 1.

<sup>47</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 7.

<sup>48</sup> Wæver found that the literature largely treats security as freedom from threat, both objectively and subjectively. He points out that this does not qualify all threats concerns for security policy, for which the state’s sovereignty has to be essentially concerned. See Wæver 1995: 52-53.

<sup>49</sup> See for example Gu (2018: 255) or Engelkamp (2014: 46).

<sup>50</sup> Fierke 2016: 70, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Collins 2019: 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Hirsch Ballin, Dijstelbloem and de Goede (2020: 13-39) use Daase’s concept to illustrate how security conceptions and challenges evolved. Schlag, Junk, and Daase used the concept as an introductory chapter for their 2016 volume “Transformations of security and security studies” (Schlag et al. 2016: 7-12).

broadening notion of security on the grounds of four dimensions: the danger dimension, the spatial dimension, the reference dimension, and the issue dimension.<sup>53</sup> The multidimensional approach is designed to uncover how the security concept is “reflecting changing political, societal and historical circumstances”<sup>54</sup>.

While many authors acknowledge that the concept of security is broadening<sup>55</sup>, they barely compartmentalize this expansion into useful units. For example, Ole Wæver noted the expanding meaning of security in his seminal work on “Securitization and Deseuritization” in 1995.<sup>56</sup> Although he mentions the “[w]idening along the *referent object* axis”<sup>57</sup>, Wæver did not further systematize the dimensions. Moreover, Jarvis and Holland posed the question, “security for whom or for what”<sup>58</sup> in their introductory book for examining the distinctions between the state and people as referents for security. Even though the authors do not cite Daase’s work, their question aligns with Daase’s conception of the reference dimension. Daase traces the historical expansion of the concept of security in science and politics, which has evolved from a narrow focus on state security to encompassing individual security. This expansion implies that an increasing number of aspects of life are being subjected to the security paradigm.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, a closer look at the different reference objects reveals diverging security measures in the hands of relevant stakeholders or even the sheer lack of their discursive exploration.

In a holistic view of documented human history, people have been the major focal point of security. This notion was profoundly narrowed to national security by the long-standing dominance of political realism.<sup>60</sup> Political realism’s dominance after the Second World War thus provides Daase with the historical starting point for observing the sub-

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<sup>53</sup> See e.g., Daase (2010a: 2-4; 2010b: 142-144), Masala and Tsetsos (2013: 4-5), Schlag et al. (2016: 7-12), Schneiker (2017: 9-12), or Frevel (2018: 9-10).

<sup>54</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 6

<sup>55</sup> See e.g., Jarvis and Holland (2015: 30-31) or Collins (2019: 2).

<sup>56</sup> Wæver 1995: 47. Refer to section 2.2 of this study for more information about securitization.

<sup>57</sup> Wæver 1995: 48, emphasis in original.

<sup>58</sup> Jarvis and Holland 2015: Chapter 4.

<sup>59</sup> Daase 2010a: 9.

<sup>60</sup> Jarvis and Holland 2015: 22-23. It should not be forgotten that Thomas Hobbes, one intellectual antecedent of realism, connected the emergence and the survival of the state as one way to avoid a state of nature in which mankind is destined to fight in a war of all against all (“bellum omnium contra omnes”). In this logic, individual security is inextricably linked to state security, but if the state is seen as an independent political actor, a distinct level, its own security interests can no longer be reduced to those of society. The dual meaning of the term re-emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when liberal theorists challenged the dominance of political realism, but it remains a point of contestation and political prioritization until today (Daase 2010a: 9-10).

sequent transformation of security concepts. Given the existential threats of the preceding World War(s) and nuclear destruction, the meaning of security narrowed to the greatest degree possible in the post-war decade between the late 1940s and 1950s. Political debates about security in this era focused on the national survival of states and communities vis-à-vis symmetric military threats posed by other states. Throughout the 20th century, ideas about security gradually shifted from excluding social notions towards what is now referred to as an extended or broad concept of security.<sup>61</sup> This change closely aligns with the emerging schools of thought in IR studies. Until the mid-1970s, Realism, with its centrism on the nation-state, was the dominant approach. This was challenged by liberal theorists in the 1970s by highlighting issues of societal security. After the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the concept of human security gained attention alongside constructivist approaches, emphasizing the protection of individuals and communities.<sup>62</sup>

As Daase uses a historical approach to organize his illustration of the security dimensions, the ‘state’ is put in the heart of the figure of the reference dimension, followed by the categories ‘society’ and ‘individual’ showcasing their later genealogical emergence.<sup>63</sup> Societal security is frequently connected to normative aspects such as patterns of language, culture, values, national identity, or religion.<sup>64</sup> Although societal security as a security term is controversial among traditionalists, it has become a common term in securitization studies. Traditionalists are concerned that the concept is moving away from the state as the core of security policy. In addition, it is criticized that the social component of identity is deemed a distinguishing feature of societal security. As a result, societal security is regularly treated synonymously with identity security.<sup>65</sup> Albeit identity aspects also affect the individual level, these two security categories should not be conflated. In contrast to the individual level, societal security is defined by the identification of a collective – a “we”.<sup>66</sup> Collective concerns or dominant characteristics of a large group, i.e., a society, are left aside from the individual category. At the individual level, human rights and individual experiences of violence are discussed in terms of

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<sup>61</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 7, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Daase 2010a: 9; Schlag et al. 2016: 9.

<sup>63</sup> Daase 2010a: 3.

<sup>64</sup> Williams and McDonald 2018:4.

<sup>65</sup> Collins 2005: 569; Buzan et al. 1998: 119-120.

<sup>66</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 120.

their overall significance. From a policy perspective, the human being is given priority over the protection of state and social collectives.<sup>67</sup> Human security as a concept is yet much broader than the individual security perspectives, which will be discussed in the issue dimension. Furthermore, a distinction between public and private security aspects is often drawn on the basis of referent objects. Nevertheless, a sharp distinction of the underlying meanings associated with the different reference objects is challenging because they are intrinsically interwoven.

When exploring beyond these classifications, it appears that Daase's reference dimension does not account for the possibility of a smaller-scale, group-based security category. In terms of content, group-based security can be assigned to the human security approach. Group-based security acts as a bridge between the individual and society, the next largest entity. For instance, feminist studies focus on the gendered impacts of security. In this critical research paradigm, intersectional clusters of people and various forms of marginalization are considered key areas for research and practical security policies.<sup>68</sup> Security debates may not only revolve around an individual or the society as the referent object but also directly address specific groups, such as women, children, farmers, refugees, and so on that are deemed vulnerable. While group-based security is rarely used as a standalone category in literature, its introduction in an updated genealogy of security concepts shall be promoted in an updated version of security dimensions in this study. Including this category increases the precision of security classifications as well as targeted policy measures in line with critical modern research.

With it comes to modern security research, another important oversight has been identified in this dimension: Public and political attention concerning global security issues has shifted to planet Earth as a referent object. The primary argument for including Earth as a referent object is that by neglecting the ecological premise of "an inhabitable environment, discussions of all other referents are moot"<sup>69</sup>. Consequently, this study advocates for expanding the reference object categories further, while Daase contends that the suggested additions are already integrated into the extended meanings of 'individuals' and 'society'. However, neither the Planet nor specific groups can be outright

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<sup>67</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 9.

<sup>68</sup> Schneiker 2017: 42-45.

<sup>69</sup> Williams and McDonald 2018: 8.

deduced from the category designations. Thus, including the proposed categories helps to avoid conceptual confusion and address omissions in classical security research. By unraveling the extended referent axis, a hierarchy can be established, ranging from the high precision of the individual to the low precision of the planet as a referent object. This approach reverses and updates Daase's triad of state, society, and individual with the proposed categories in a taxonomy of extended security dimensions, as depicted in Figure 1, which serves as the concluding product of this chapter.<sup>70</sup>

The increased number of referent objects is, however, highly contested in the literature about security politics. A pervasive assumption in IR security studies remains that the litmus test for determining a challenge as a security problem is whether it deprives a state of its capacity to govern itself.<sup>71</sup> This state-centrism is also widespread in securitization theory, as detailed in Chapter 2.2. That does not undercut the existence of different referent objects per se, but transfers the management capacity of security to the state. The privilege of the state is explained by its role as the primary governance institution in current world affairs despite the myriad of other but potentially less powerful actors, such as international institutions.<sup>72</sup> By stating that “[t]he concept of security refers to the state”<sup>73</sup>, Wæver sets a clear mark for establishing a framework for distinction. In constructivist literature, even the ontology of the state itself is considered to be constituted by security. In other words, the existence of the state as a corporate agent is based on the continuously mediated and assigned tasks of hazard management.<sup>74</sup> This interpretation corresponds to Wendt's state-centric constructivism, which is strongly objected to by critical scholars.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, criticism is leveled at classical securitization theory precisely because it privileges the state, in line with Wæver's quote.<sup>76</sup> Grauvogel and Diez demonstrate that the presentation of different reference objects in security discourses is causally linked to the policy measures demanded, which is why a broader distinction beyond the state gains not only analytical utility but also policy relevance.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The final figure of security dimensions is presented at the end of 2.1.5.

<sup>71</sup> Wæver 1995: 53.

<sup>72</sup> This is also argued by Williams (2003: 516) as a key advantage of securitization theory.

<sup>73</sup> Wæver 1995: 49.

<sup>74</sup> Emerson 2019: 526.

<sup>75</sup> Agius 2019: 84-85.

<sup>76</sup> Malik 2015: 82. For more details see Chapter 2.2.

<sup>77</sup> Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 209. Grauvogel and Diez, however, do not systematize reference objects and other security dimensions, resulting in a lack of horizontal and vertical precision in their approach to

Thus, although the expansion of security referents is controversial, broadening the reference axis allows for understanding expressions of whose security is perceived to be affected by the Belt and Road Initiative and how this relates to requested policies.

### **2.1.2. The Spatial Dimension: Security for Which Geographical Area?**

The spatial dimension appears to be closely related to the reference dimension, but it is focused on a geographical area instead of an object.<sup>78</sup> Daase's original dimension contained four categories: national, regional, international, and global.<sup>79</sup> At first glance, the reference unit 'state' and 'national' seem to correspond. Indeed, traditional security policies guided by the realist paradigm primarily focus on the territorial state, as they only consider national security measures viable solutions due to the persistent anarchy in the international system.<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, the operationalization of the spatial dimension is linked to security assumptions revolving around anarchy in IR theory.

The meaning, restrictions, and persistence of anarchy are controversial in the discipline of International Relations. Depending on their interpretation, diverse security policies are considered to be effective. Anarchy is commonly described as a structural feature of the international system. What IR theorists regularly neglect, according to Wendt, is that this feature does not have a single causal 'logic' that inevitably leads to a specific type of behavior.<sup>81</sup> He states that Realism is based on a wrong determinism that there is only one culture of anarchy – that of self-help. In contradiction to this statement, Wendt noted that “[s]tates periodically have made something new out of anarchy”<sup>82</sup>. In his perspective, various cultures of anarchy emerge based on the social structure constituted by shared knowledge.<sup>83</sup>

This leads to the question of whether anarchy and its implications for security can be eliminated as a structural feature. Barry Buzan rejects this idea, stating that “[a]ny concept which rests on the assumption that either [anarchy or the arms race] is removable,

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security discourses. This is due to the fundamentally different study design, which examines causal linkages between reference objects, diagnosed security problems, and policy actions in climate change discourses (Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 208-209, 222).

<sup>78</sup> Daase 2010a: 12.

<sup>79</sup> Daase 2010a: 3.

<sup>80</sup> Daase 2010a: 11.

<sup>81</sup> Wendt 1992: 394-395.

<sup>82</sup> Wendt 1999: 314.

<sup>83</sup> Wendt 1999: 247. See Chapter 2.2.1. of this study for more details.

exposes itself as fundamentally impractical as a basis for policy”<sup>84</sup>. Nonetheless, according to Buzan, this does not mean that these concepts are invariable.<sup>85</sup> Both Wendt and Buzan consider that anarchy might be removed by the establishment of a world government, but they differ concerning its likelihood. Buzan explains that by empirical findings anarchy has proven a durable feature of the international system.<sup>86</sup> Wendt, by contrast, predicts that “a world state is inevitable”<sup>87</sup> and anarchy will be removed. In Wendt’s earlier writings, he did not explore overcoming anarchy but held a similar view as Buzan, arguing that states could manage anarchy in various ways under the absence of a centralized authority on the world stage.<sup>88</sup> For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary to delve deeper into this normatively loaded debate but to start from the premise that world affairs are currently determined by the structure of anarchy.

The discussion of anarchy is, nevertheless, relevant for identifying the political options at hand for states. Suppose one assumes that there is only a *sauve-qui-peut* anarchy, i.e., a self-help environment. In that case, cooperation is hardly possible, and prudent power politics for survival are the indispensable drivers for state security. When applying constructivist thinking, the variation in meaning, specifically the ideas associated with states and anarchy, constitutes interests. As a result, security policies can be not only cooperative in a liberalist sense but also collective. By adopting a one-dimensional view of anarchy, political maneuverability for achieving security in cooperation is drastically decreased.<sup>89</sup>

Having said that, narrowing the spatial dimension to national security policies fails to capture the complexity of political reality. States have demonstrated to form alliances such as NATO on the principle of collective defense. This alliance primarily focuses on regional security of the Euro-Atlantic area – corresponding to the second category on the spatial dimension.<sup>90</sup> States may thus develop common interests and joint policies to provide for regional stability.<sup>91</sup> If states are cooperating beyond the regional level, the

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<sup>84</sup> Buzan 1984: 115.

<sup>85</sup> Buzan 1984: 115.

<sup>86</sup> Buzan 1983: 113-115.

<sup>87</sup> Wendt 2003: 529.

<sup>88</sup> Wendt 1999: 246-247.

<sup>89</sup> Buzan 1983: 116-117.

<sup>90</sup> Daase 2010b: 13.

<sup>91</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 11.

geographic scope is extended to the international level. Liberalists or institutionalists explain enduring security cooperation at regional and international levels as a state's focus on absolute gains, while realist scholars reject this idea in favor of relative gains.<sup>92</sup> Following this security logic of absolute gains, Schlag, Junk, and Daase explain that "[t]he question then is no longer how to maximize national security but how to create international conditions in which all states enjoy a high degree of security."<sup>93</sup> This broader perspective on security not only extends beyond national borders, which would cement security as a characteristic of a territorial state, but also transcends regional boundaries. Therefore, introducing the international arena as a viable and enduring form of cooperation transforms the definition of security: Security is no longer merely a national property but a concept of relations.<sup>94</sup>

Still, the international category primarily concerns state relations, whereas the extension to global security, which was brought into the debate in the 1980s, is intellectually linked to the above-described transformation to a post-Westphalian world society.<sup>95</sup> At this stage, Daase highlights the semantic content of the security concept's development instead of merely providing an empirical hierarchy of spatial security areas. Attention to security problems that span across the world emerged with the terms of common and collective security, leading to global security's inclusion in Daase's genealogy. However, it is imperative to recognize that global security should not be conflated with these concepts, even though they are sometimes used interchangeably. Common security typically centers on securing the well-being and living conditions of human beings, linked to the report of the Palme Commission in 1982, whereas collective security usually concerns inter-state relations. Therefore, the spatial and semantic notions of the global security term need to be discerned. Without conceptual clarity, the spatial category of global security is compounded with different subject categories whose security shall be ensured.<sup>96</sup>

Critically reviewing the proposed geographic security areas, Daase's concept can be enhanced with at least two more spatial levels. First, an observation category below the

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<sup>92</sup> Gu 2018: 48-49.

<sup>93</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 11.

<sup>94</sup> Daase 2010a: 14.

<sup>95</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 12; Daase 2010a: 14-15.

<sup>96</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 12; Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 137.



state level can be added because security considerations might be geographically limited within the state. Empirically reasoned, security challenges stemming from one specific Belt and Road project do not necessarily extend to the national level. The sub-national level might also play an important role in the articulation and organization of security policy. For example, in federally administered states like Germany, the sub-national level fundamentally determines the provision of services and legislative authorities. This is due to shared legislative competences between the national and sub-national administrations.<sup>97</sup> This justification is in line with the study by Jens Lanfer, who also added the sub-national category in his adaption of Daase.<sup>98</sup>

Turning to another innovation for this axis, the extraterrestrial domain has been addressed in security debates since the earliest inventions of space technology.<sup>99</sup> Recognizing this extraplanetary area extends the upper range of the spatial dimension. This can also be empirically justified with regard to the BRI. In BRI frameworks and studies, the category of outer space is discussed as a “new strategic territory”.<sup>100</sup> This aspect is reflected by China’s 2015 military white paper that identifies outer space as a domain of international strategic competition and possible security threats.<sup>101</sup> While the geopolitical competition points to the concept of national security, the institutionalization of space governance at the United Nations (UN) level refers to concepts of collective security. The institutionalization of space governance is also endorsed by countries such as China or Russia, for example, in view of space non-weaponization.<sup>102</sup> Although Daase did not mention outer space in his original framework, this domain can be deemed of vital importance for security governance. Therefore, including the sub-national as well as the extraterrestrial level on the spatial axis of an updated security taxonomy, as illustrat-

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<sup>97</sup> To stay with the example of Germany, law enforcement, thus policing is constitutionally administered by the sub-national states. The division can be illustrated by the distinction between the Federal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt*) and State Criminal Police Offices (*Landeskriminalamt*), of which one headquarter exists in each of the 16 federal states, see Lanfer (2017: 49-50).

<sup>98</sup> Lanfer 2017: 49-52. Frevel (2018: 9) proposed adding a category for the local level regarding internal security. However, this proposal is rejected for the security concept forged in this study as the local is already subsumed in the sub-national category.

<sup>99</sup> In the early 1980s the security implications of outer space gained particular attention when US-President Ronald Reagan presented the Strategic Defense Initiative. The plan to develop a new space defense technology against the Soviet Union was commonly called “Star Wars” and despite its failure still finds consideration in geostrategic analyses of space today, among others, by Doboš (2019: 41).

<sup>100</sup> Rolland 2019b: 2.

<sup>101</sup> Chase 2019: 21.

<sup>102</sup> Drozhashchikh 2018: 182.

ed in Figure 1, creates a more comprehensive order of spatial dimensions from a low to a high range.

### **2.1.3. The Issue Dimension: Which Policy Area Calls for Security?**

Over time, political and scientific debates increased the number of issues under the umbrella of security policy. The traditional focus on military issues has been augmented by security studies that address additional critical concerns essential for the security, survival, and prosperity of diverse referent objects. Accordingly, this section explores the various areas of security policy to develop a useful framework for classifying security issues. Daase's hierarchy in this dimension can be classified into a range between classical and novel, extended subjects. His original issue dimension contained only four categories: military, economic, environmental, and human security.<sup>103</sup> As these four categories are considered incomplete in modern security studies, the chapter argues that cyber security needs to be added to update this dimension. Relevant information regarding China and the BRI enriches this conceptual overview to derive valuable insights for the subsequent analysis of these policy areas.

The traditional focus on military threats after the Second World War was extended to economic threats in the 1970s. The oil crises created an awareness that people's survival and well-being can be impacted by economic factors like supply disruptions. This can jeopardize the political stability of a society and the state. The preservation of economic security can be impeded by a multitude of factors, with environmental influences emerging as a central theme in security discourse during the 1980s.<sup>104</sup> A connection was drawn between the emergence of conflicts and the destruction of human living space due to environmental degradation and climate change.<sup>105</sup> In other words, the environment is identified as a source of military or economic insecurities, although empirical evidence between environmental change and violent conflict remains a point of conten-

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<sup>103</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 10; Daase 2010a: 3.

<sup>104</sup> Barnett and Dabelko (2019: 236-239) note that the origins of environmental security date back to the 1960s and may even be older, considering the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, but they stress that it was not until 1983 that the concept was seriously proposed by Richard Ullman. Ullman's work is also highlighted by Schlag et al. (2016: 10), although the Brundtland Report of 1987 is identified as the point of recognition of this agenda on a global level (also according to Daase 2010a: 7; 2010b: 11).

<sup>105</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 10.

tion.<sup>106</sup> Environmental aspects have also been discussed in the context of the BRI. Lachlan Carey and Sarah Ladislaw from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) warned of highly problematic climate change implications due to the BRI, although China presented plans to “green” the BRI.<sup>107</sup> President Xi Jinping himself pushed in his keynote address of the Belt and Road Forum in 2017 for a new vision of green development that will realize the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>108</sup>

After the controversial introduction of environmental security, the development of human security in the 1990s further broadened conceptual debates, as mentioned in the section on the reference dimension. As a policy area, this category is concerned with security hazards for all kinds of human rights, including the individual’s freedom and dignity through crimes, social deprivation, gendered violence, health issues, migration, and many more.<sup>109</sup> Since its first systematic articulation by the United Nations Human Development Report in 1994, the concept remains highly contested. Its problematic nature can be illustrated by two main criticisms leveled at human security: First, the concept is criticized for being too broad to be of analytic or practical use. Second, neo-colonial practices are seen as being carried out under the guise of human security. This is related to legal objections that humanitarian interventions violate the principle of state sovereignty.<sup>110</sup> The debate about the existence, interpretation, and conclusiveness of a “responsibility to protect” exemplifies the connection and contention between the violations of human rights and military interventions.<sup>111</sup> In this context, China is described as pursuing a strategy of selective pragmatism: On the one hand, Beijing advocates the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and remains very sensitive to physical or political interventions. It places interventions under general suspicion of promoting Western geo-strategic motives and norms. On the other hand, China itself is one of the top providers of UN peacekeeping forces and thus actively participates in international interventions abroad.<sup>112</sup> Particularly China’s position or influence

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<sup>106</sup> Barnett and Dabelko 2019: 238, 241-243; Daase 2010b: 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 1.

<sup>108</sup> Xi 2017.

<sup>109</sup> Daase 2010b: 10.

<sup>110</sup> Persaud 2022: 145, 153-156.

<sup>111</sup> Daase 2010a: 8; 2010b: 10.

<sup>112</sup> Huotari, et al., 2017: 28 (Box 2.3, authored by Dirk Schmidt).

on Western norms is critically evaluated in the US.<sup>113</sup> Some studies characterize Europeans equally concerned that China, with its BRI, challenges international development norms that are inextricably linked to human rights.<sup>114</sup> These concerns are based on diverging interpretations of core human rights in China compared to the so-called ‘Western’ or ‘liberal’ understanding. According to Mitter, China does not subscribe to the human rights concept of individual civil and political rights, which have universal validity, but of national responsibility for economic growth.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Malin Oud describes in the *Decoding China Dictionary* a state-centric interpretation of human rights, which are understood as the right to subsistence and development. She characterizes China’s view of human rights as internal affairs that are not subject to the international community. Beijing is more proactive in bringing this interpretation to the United Nations and its Security Council, thus increasing China’s role as a norm entrepreneur.<sup>116</sup> Overall, fundamental discrepancies in interpretation can be noted within the category of human security of the issue dimension, which requires thorough observation in national and international policy debates.

At this point, some readers might note a striking similarity between Daase’s issue dimension and the five security sectors presented by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde – the Copenhagen School of Securitization pioneers. They aim at a sectoral analytical approach, corresponding to categories of Daase’s historical genealogy of security, and discuss five security sectors<sup>117</sup>: military, environmental, societal, political, and economic security.<sup>118</sup> The three sectors with the same name (military, environmental, and economic security) present the same content as Daase’s issues. Political and societal security have a different focus than the issue dimension. Both categories correspond, by and large, to categories of the spatial and reference dimension. Political security is mainly discussed around the stability of states, government systems, and legitimacy.<sup>119</sup> Political security, thus, largely coincides with the state of Daase’s reference dimension. Depend-

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<sup>113</sup> See e.g., Reinke de Buitrago (2016: 167).

<sup>114</sup> Brown 2018: 218-219; Zhao 2016: 115. See Chapter 3 for a more nuanced literature review of BRI perceptions.

<sup>115</sup> Mitter 2022: 15.

<sup>116</sup> Bandurski et al. 2021: 34-36.

<sup>117</sup> The sectors originate from Buzan’s seminal book „People States and Fear“ (Buzan 1983: e.g. 11, 83). In their seminal book “Security – A New Framework”, the scholars extensively study these five security sectors (Buzan et al. 1998: 49-162).

<sup>118</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 22-23.

<sup>119</sup> Williams and McDonald 2018: 4.

ing on the definition of a government system, political security encompasses several categories of the spatial dimension. This complexity constitutes a major hurdle in operationalization and is a crucial reason for its exclusion from this study.

Societal security is practically identical to Daase's reference category of society. Buzan et al. portray the societal sector as being primarily concerned with relations of collective national identity and the political sector as primarily about the government's relationships of authority and ideologies to grant legitimacy.<sup>120</sup> Although this rough definition obscures the intricacies of the sector studied by Buzan et al., it accentuates a certain degree of overlap between the political and societal sectors. The political sector recruits from society and derives its legitimacy to varying degrees from citizens, and, in turn, is shaped by the very relationships of collective identity.

Although Kilroy's study proves that these five sectors might be operationalized, Daase's genealogy avoids this overlap between the political and societal by designating security issues according to policy areas.<sup>121</sup> While Schlag et al. also observe some conceptual links along Daase's issue dimension, the concept still fares better in capturing the distinct features of the security issue categories in line with the evolution and extension of security policy areas.<sup>122</sup> As both concepts of security categories are largely congruent, they share some advantages and fallacies. Both concepts suffer from the fact that some security items affect more than one political area or security sector as they ultimately "remain inseparable parts of complex wholes."<sup>123</sup> A virtue can be made of this necessity by observing how the same security item activates or neglects different sectoral consequences by shaping security policies and related debates. Buzan et al. point out that analysis may well start by disaggregating the securitization by sector but needs to be reassembled at the end to understand how the different parts relate to each other.<sup>124</sup> Although Daase's concept shares the problem of sectoral interrelatedness, it captures more precisely in which policy areas an issue raises security concerns. Therefore, Daase's approach allows the operationalization of security policy areas and their reas-

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<sup>120</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 7-8.

<sup>121</sup> Kilroy 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 11.

<sup>123</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 8.

<sup>124</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 8, 17.

sembling under an extended security concept that mirrors the theoretical development of security studies.

However, neither Daase's issue dimension nor the five security sectors by the Copenhagen School scholars include cyberspace as a security area, while Hansen and Nissenbaum argue that cyber security is a security sector of its own.<sup>125</sup> Cyber security expert Myriam Dunn Cavelty characterizes the double role of cyberspace<sup>126</sup> in security policy. It encompasses both a value that can be threatened (i.e., cyber security as security of cyberspace) and a sphere that can be instrumentalized against security threats (cyber security as security achieved through cyberspace).<sup>127</sup> Although the issue of cyber security dates back to the very origins of modern communication technology, "cyber security" is a relatively new term, coming into existence only around the year 2000<sup>128</sup>. According to Jan van den Berg, the International Organization for Standardization defines cybersecurity as "the preservation of confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information in cyberspace."<sup>129</sup> This definition reverts to the traditional paradigm of critical information security, emphasizing its technical orientation and the centrality of information, although digitalization and technological innovation have expanded the scope of the cyber domain.<sup>130</sup> Cyber security has become increasingly diverse and diffuse as technological dependencies now pervade everyday life, yet without losing its importance for critical infrastructures and information security.<sup>131</sup> Hard cyber infrastructures such as cables, computers, and transmission towers, while locally limited, connect to a global virtual space, which in turn is hardly spatially confined. Through this, cyber security involves potential issues around the physical layer as well as the virtual layer. The first touches on security topics, for example, around the protection of the infrastructure against fire, water, dust, corrosion, and physical access or the impact of the construction in a certain environment. The virtual layer includes external access to information as well as standards, legal acts, management, and governance procedures. The boundaries between architecture, management, and governance are fluid between the

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<sup>125</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum 2009: 1156-1157.

<sup>126</sup> According to Dunn Cavelty (2019: 411), cyberspace includes more than just the Internet, it can be understood as a network ecosystem of virtual (e.g., databases) and physical properties (e.g. computers).

<sup>127</sup> Dunn Cavelty 2019: 411.

<sup>128</sup> Dunn Cavelty and Egloff 2019: 40.

<sup>129</sup> Van den Berg 2018: 574.

<sup>130</sup> Van den Berg 2018: 571, 573-574.

<sup>131</sup> Dunn Cavelty and Egloff 2019: 37-38.

virtual and physical layers. Consequently, they transcend any national and societal boundaries. The complexity and transcendence of cyber security complicate any definition of this domain and security policy management.<sup>132</sup>

As a broad-based infrastructure project, the BRI does not only build ports and roads but also digital infrastructure through investments in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and smart cities. Digital infrastructure is already targeted in early mainstay documents, as well as a distinct dimension of connection in the CCP's 14th Five-Year plan.<sup>133</sup> To the benefit of the internal validity of the security concept for testing the securitization of the BRI, this justifies the consideration of cyber as a category at the content level. Evidently, digital BRI aims often collide with the situation on the ground. Many countries involved in the initiative currently have neither sophisticated digital expertise nor advanced digital infrastructure nor the necessary funding for all of this. Therefore, in 2016, the Digital Belt and Road Program (DBAR) was initiated to foster the digital development of Belt and Road countries, which includes, among others, environmental monitoring and data sharing.<sup>134</sup> The upcoming digital networking of BRI societies involves a deluge of security concerns that need to address several challenges: The physical security of the infrastructure to be built, the virtual security of the infrastructure<sup>135</sup>, and the management of information to be shared through cyberspace. The latter involves a practical and normative dimension in relation to information and operational security. While information security refers to protecting the integrity and privacy of data in storage and transmission, operational security focuses on procedural aspects such as user permissions when entering a network or data storage and sharing decisions. Both cyber security areas encompass state regulations on standards for user behavior, and data storage and access for political, commercial, and other reasons.<sup>136</sup> The role, actions, and norms of state and non-state actors in cyber security are potential points of friction in national and international security debates. In the most extreme form, cyber-

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<sup>132</sup> Cederberg 2018: 87-88; Minth 2018: 481-482.

<sup>133</sup> Translation of the 14th Five Year Plan provided by Ben Murphy from CSET Translation Lead based on the Xinhua News Agency's version of March 12, 2021. Murphy 2021: 101, Article XLI, Section 2; NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>134</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2022: 3; Guo 2018: 25-26.

<sup>135</sup> The virtual and physical components are oftentimes heavily intertwined as visible in damage of the Stuxnet worm in 2010 on the Iranian nuclear program (Dunn Caveltly 2019: 418-420).

<sup>136</sup> Van den Berg 2018: 573-575; Betz and Stevens 2011: 47-48.

attacks attributed to foreign countries are alleged to constitute a “nation-state threat.”<sup>137</sup> In a world increasingly connected through and dependent on the digital domain in societal, political, and economic issues, cyberspace can even be regarded as a novel conjunction affecting all areas in the issue dimension.<sup>138</sup>

Overall, the extended issue dimension provides fertile ground for categorizing security research by subject, which is particularly relevant for operationalizing this study’s mixed-methods approach, which leverages qualitative content and discourse analysis, as presented in Chapter 4. Compared to other security dimensions, the security policy areas of the issue dimension are characterized by comparatively sharper boundaries according to their historical origin and catalog of measures, although they also involve some overlapping aspects as described above. This becomes especially apparent in the next section, as the definition of hazards reveals grave inconsistencies in the empirical and theoretical use of categories.

#### **2.1.4. The Danger Dimension: Security From What?**

The fourth dimension of security described by Daase is the danger dimension. Schlag, Junk, and Daase consider it the “arguably most important dimension”<sup>139</sup> due to the fundamental shift from a reactionary towards a precautionary understanding of what security is to be achieved.<sup>140</sup> This category is the most difficult to describe because – depending on the applied definition – Daase’s historical concept differs from a hierarchical categorization of dangers on a spectrum from specific to diffuse. A danger is all the more specific, the more clearly a threatening actor, its intention, and means can be designated.<sup>141</sup> The quality of uncertainties, in other words, the problem intensity, changes accordingly. The problem intensity results from the damage’s probability, frequency, and expected severity.<sup>142</sup> In his original genealogy, Daase classifies the danger dimension from the category threat to vulnerability to risk. He refers to the three aspects of actors, means, and intentions<sup>143</sup>, albeit not thoroughly stringent, without noting the expected damage. These aspects are of utmost importance for adequate security policy

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<sup>137</sup> Betz and Stevens 2011: 28.

<sup>138</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum 2009: 1157.

<sup>139</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 12.

<sup>140</sup> Daase 2010b: 14.

<sup>141</sup> Enskat et al. 2014: 11.

<sup>142</sup> Lanfer 2017: 51.

<sup>143</sup> Daase 2010b: 14.



planning. In the following, the hierarchical classification is presented, combined and contrasted with Daase's ordering to form an innovative and concise taxonomy of danger categories presented in a table at the end of this section (Table 1).

The most challenging part of consolidating the danger dimension is that different classifications and interpretations of danger terminology can be found in the literature. The plethora of terms further contributes to this problem. Therefore, the following list presents a non-exhaustive but delineated and expedient selection of classes of danger.<sup>144</sup> Most authors do not even try to define categories of danger or even basic terms such as 'threat.'<sup>145</sup> This shortcoming renders many texts imprecise and contributes to conceptual confusion. To illustrate, Lanfer's hierarchy corresponds to the categorization established here,<sup>146</sup> but his study also lacks a profound definition of danger terminology.

The most specific term of danger to be described is hierarchically concordant with Daase's historical classification. The term 'threat' is used to describe a situation in which it is comparatively well-defined who the threatening actor is, what his<sup>147</sup> intentions are, and what means he has at his disposal.<sup>148</sup> Daase, as well as Enskat, Masala, and Sauer, highlight the Cold War period as a paradigm example for the threat category. The Soviet Union was described among NATO states as the main threatening actor whose intention was to impose its ideology. To achieve this goal, the Soviet Union used military capacities and propaganda. In short, security policy until around the 1960s was mainly focused on defusing military threats.<sup>149</sup> Given the research case of this study, it is of interest to whether the countries to be analyzed frame China due to the Belt and Road Initiative as such a specific threat. This conundrum was also detected by former NATO deputy secretary-general and American ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the

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<sup>144</sup> This classification is simplified due to heuristic considerations. It does not aim to achieve a consensus about the use of terms that does not exist. For instance, the comparative glossary by Thywissen (2006) lists more than 30 definitions for vulnerability, 12 for hazard, and more than 20 for risk.

<sup>145</sup> Albrecht (2010), for example, describes the changing nature of 'threats' without defining the term itself. Collins (2019) defines the concept and the change of security (studies) but neglects differences in the designation of dangers. Contrary to this, Enskat et al. (2014: 11-12) or Von Bredow (2015: 129) highlight the different meanings of threat (*Bedrohung*), risk (*Risiko*) and danger (*Gefahr*). Von Bredow, however, does not directly refer to the triad of actor, intention, and means.

<sup>146</sup> As the figure shows in Lanfer 2017: 63.

<sup>147</sup> Insofar as the masculine form is used in study, it is assumed that this refers to all genders on equal terms.

<sup>148</sup> Enskat et al. 2014: 11.

<sup>149</sup> Enskat, Masala and Sauer 2014: 11, Daase 2010a: 15; 2010b: 14.

NATO summit in December 2019: “Some allies don’t want to see NATO go global, and don’t accept that China is a direct military threat to NATO.”<sup>150</sup>

Potential damage to the well-being of states and societies does not necessarily presuppose hostile actors. This was recognized due to the historical shift in the subject dimension from a narrowly defined military perspective to the acknowledgment of economic, ecological, and other problems to the well-being of societies and states. Therefore, Daase introduces “vulnerabilities” as the next step of the danger dimension. The category primarily informs domestic means to reduce an actor’s weaknesses against potential externalities.<sup>151</sup> It is neither possible nor necessary to define an antagonizing actor. Hence, neither intentions nor means play a role. The danger category of vulnerabilities is, therefore, the most diffuse. That does not mean that a vulnerability cannot be exploited or even intentionally created by hostile actors. The essence of this category is that potential damage can occur even without the presence of an enemy due to one’s own vulnerabilities, such as economic dependencies.<sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, the term is not as simple as Daase defines it. First, related literature defines vulnerability in the context of environmental changes and disasters that may have human or natural origins.<sup>153</sup> This definition does not contradict Daase but exceeds his narrow description of economic interdependence.<sup>154</sup> A similar issue arises from Daase’s assertion that risks pertain to social functional relationships, while vulnerabilities concern collective goods.<sup>155</sup> He does not elaborate on this differentiation, which leads to definitional confusion. Establishing such a distinction might be misleading due to the interdependent functional relationships between societies, systems, and organizations, and their reliance on collective goods.<sup>156</sup> Vulnerability is thus defined as “a function of the sensitivity or susceptibility of a system (community, household, building, infrastructure, nation etc.).”<sup>157</sup> Searching for other more consensual characteristics of the term ‘vulnerability’, it is frequently used in the context of major emergency planning in cases

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<sup>150</sup> Vershbow as cited in Mehta 2019.

<sup>151</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 12; Daase 2010b: 14.

<sup>152</sup> Daase 2010a:16; 2010b: 14.

<sup>153</sup> Thywissen 2006: 36-37.

<sup>154</sup> Daase 2010a: 16.

<sup>155</sup> Daase 2010a: 17.

<sup>156</sup> Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz (BABS) and Ernst Basler + Partner AG (EBP) 2013: 60.

<sup>157</sup> Thywissen 2006: 37.

of catastrophes or not yet committed belligerent acts of unspecified origins. Such events potentially inflict total systemic disruptions of critical infrastructure<sup>158</sup> in relation to cascade and avalanche effects.<sup>159</sup> To render vulnerability more tangible, analysis and policy planning is frequently based on a limited scenario. Due to this, the multidimensional aspects (physical, social, economic, environmental, institutional, and human) of prevention, reaction and aftercare are revealed, though “many of them are not easily quantifiable.”<sup>160</sup> Consequently, the probability, frequency, and severity of harm depend on the vulnerable subjects’ intrinsic features, but remain hardly predictable.<sup>161</sup>

In this context, another loophole in Daase’s definition of risk and vulnerability can be detected. He stated that risks have to be proactively addressed in contrast to threats that are countered by reactive security policies.<sup>162</sup> Daase underscored the broad and challenging nature of risks, whereas other security definitions state that vulnerability, too, “indicates a damage potential and is a forward-looking variable”<sup>163</sup>. The literature yet reveals a striking difference between the predictive quality of risk and vulnerability. Due to the latency and multiple possible, though unknown triggers of damage of vulnerability, it “can often only be measured indirectly and retrospectively”<sup>164</sup>. Concepts of risks are used to calculate the probability of damage occurring. The term ‘risk’ is thus used to determine in advance the likelihood of and extent of losses.<sup>165</sup> Because they imply a probability of occurrence, security measures addressing risks are preventive.<sup>166</sup> Consequently, security measures directed at risks are usually more specific than those trying to hedge the imponderables of vulnerability.

For Daase, the political shift towards risks is the third and latest historical extension in the danger dimension. This implies a shift from clear and present towards unclear and future issues that may eventually cause harm.<sup>167</sup> The shift leads to the dissolution of the national boundaries of security policy and also to the need to act proactively or preven-

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<sup>158</sup> According McCreight (2019: 2) critical infrastructure refers to the basic supply of food, water and energy.

<sup>159</sup> Lanfer 2017: 52-53.

<sup>160</sup> Thywissen 2006: 37.

<sup>161</sup> Thywissen 2006: 36.

<sup>162</sup> Daase 2010a: 17.

<sup>163</sup> Thywissen 2006: 36.

<sup>164</sup> Thywissen 2006: 36.

<sup>165</sup> Enskat et al. 2014: 12.

<sup>166</sup> Daase 2010a: 17; Thywissen 2006: 38.

<sup>167</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 12.

tively instead of merely reactively. In this logic, the perceived causes of damage should be addressed before they can arise.<sup>168</sup> In this context, Daase warns that this shift abandons the traditional normative basis of security policies. It reinterprets the fundamental freedoms and defensive rights vis-à-vis the state into authorizations to intervene, as in the case of the ‘responsibility to protect’ debate.<sup>169</sup> In contrast to threats, risks do not refer to a territorially limited space.<sup>170</sup> This feature of Daase’s risk definition is scarcely found in the literature and omits transnational spillover effects of vulnerabilities in the era of globalization. For instance, Freudenberg pointed out that significant vulnerability in overseas and transcontinental production facilities, trade centers, and tourist destinations blurs a strict distinction between external and internal security.<sup>171</sup> Certain aspects of Daase’s critique regarding the political transition towards risk prevention are applicable to vulnerability management, whereas his risk definition appears to be incomplete.

A brief risk definition is given by Enskat, Masala, and Sauer: In contrast to threats, the adversary, his means and intention are hardly recognizable in a risk situation. Although risks have a higher degree of uncertainty than threats, they are manageable with statistical means such as probabilities of occurrence, as mentioned before. The insurance industry is a real-life example of this risk concept based on the calculation of the amount and probability of loss.<sup>172</sup> As Thywissen outlines, “risk also provides information on how often or with what probability those scenarios have to be expected”<sup>173</sup>. From this, it can be inferred that although harmful means consist of tangible triggers and capacities, they are still accompanied by some degree of uncertainty.

Moreover, Von Bredow introduces another relevant attribute, defining risks as unintended consequences of an actor’s actions. Even if an actor does not have harmful intentions, they may accept potential damage as a consequence of their actions. Von Bredow illustrates this with the operation of a nuclear power plant that in cases like Fukuyama or Chernobyl caused unintended damage.<sup>174</sup> This definition aligns with Daase’s frame-

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<sup>168</sup> Daase 2010a: 17.

<sup>169</sup> Daase 2010b: 15.

<sup>170</sup> Daase 2010a: 17.

<sup>171</sup> Freudenberg 2008: 78.

<sup>172</sup> Enskat et al. 2014: 12. It needs to be noted that there is also a fierce debate in regards to the measurability of risks and the semantics of the term as described Merkelsen (2011).

<sup>173</sup> Thywissen 2006: 38.

<sup>174</sup> Von Bredow 2015: 129.

work, as the latter implicitly assumes the absence of an antagonist at present. Accordingly, risk-focused security policy focuses on potential actors before they can unfold their damage potential.<sup>175</sup> To summarize these features for the risk category, security policy directed against risks is shaped by prevention and feasible reaction plans to future opponents.

Similar to the previously reviewed dimensions of Daase's genealogy, another category is deemed essential to modernize and complement this dimension's empirical hierarchy, which is the term 'danger' itself.<sup>176</sup> To start with, the differentiation between the terms 'risk' and 'danger' is problematic because they are often synonymously used.<sup>177</sup> Several authors use the writings of German sociologist Niklas Luhmann to distinguish danger from risk.<sup>178</sup> According to Luhmann, the term risk is inextricably linked to "a decision without which the loss could not have occurred"<sup>179</sup>. In contrast to the agency involved in risk<sup>180</sup>, damage as a result of danger is "caused externally, that is to say, it is attributed to the environment"<sup>181</sup>. Therefore, the triad of antagonizing actor, intention and means does not apply to dangers, which renders dangers more diffuse than risks.<sup>182</sup> In contrast to the concept of vulnerability, however, the sources of damage or triggers are usually described as known, e.g., a storm. In contrast to that of a risk, the damage of a danger such as a storm is not related to a decision; its source is beyond control.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, there is neither a clearly determinable group of people nor a precisely predictable space of impact.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Daase 2010b: 14-15.

<sup>176</sup> It may be objected that the term "hazard" could also be used. Merkelsen (2011: 887) points out that hazard describes the risk source, the threat from a given object (e.g., chemicals), whereas danger is applicable for both a situation and an object. Boholm (2012: 281, note 1) states that English written literature referring to Luhmann (considering his own choice of word) usually refers to the term "danger". Therefore, there are both semantic as well as practical reasons to apply the term "danger" in this study.

<sup>177</sup> Merkelsen 2011: 883; also Luhmann (1993: 22).

<sup>178</sup> See e.g. Boholm (2012) or Merkelsen (2011).

<sup>179</sup> Luhmann 1993: 16.

<sup>180</sup> Merkelsen 2011: 885.

<sup>181</sup> Luhmann 1993: 22.

<sup>182</sup> Enskat et al. 2014: 12.

<sup>183</sup> Merkelsen 2011: 885.

<sup>184</sup> Kaschner 2008: 25.

Still, danger is seen as an anthropologic phenomenon. If only referring to Luhmann's distinction mark of an externally orchestrated challenge, a danger potentially constitutes an attack by an enemy.<sup>185</sup> The separation by self-responsibility provides yet an insufficient distinction line between the categories of danger. An attack by an enemy can be classified as a threat if the harmful actor, his means, and intentions can be identified. If the latter is unclear or the actor appears not yet as harmful, one might calculate the risk potential. If the identification of an adversary is not possible, the potential of an attack might fall under the category of danger. This implies that the trigger of damage (the attack) can be identified, but the timing, direction, and extent of damage are unknown and therefore incalculable. Frevel notes four different types of dangers that may cause harm: natural dangers (such as storms), technical dangers (arising from accidents such as those at nuclear power plants), biological dangers (like a pandemic), and terrorist dangers.<sup>186</sup> Particularly on terrorism, it needs to be differentiated to what extent the actors can be identified or if one assumes only a faceless group. As a result, forming a security policy based on dangers implies prevention, reaction, and aftercare directed at the identified triggers or sources of harm.

The following table summarizes the categories of danger to highlight the differences in the terminology (Table 1). The definitions presented herein are not exhaustive and vigorously contested. Overall, the dimension of danger in Daase's genealogy is characterized by the most contentious definitions. The theoretical literature reviewed in constructing the following table exhibits grave disparities in its definitional aspects, thus posing a challenge for its empirical application within the context of this study.

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<sup>185</sup> Kaschner 2008: 25-26.

<sup>186</sup> Frevel 2018: 141.

<b>Categories of Danger</b>				
<b>Category</b>	<b>Threat</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Danger</b>	<b>Vulnerability</b>
<b>Brief Concept</b>	Specific and intended damage by an opponent	Likelihood of a harmful actor to appear	No opponent yet, but harmful event named	Sensitivity to systemic disruption by an unknown event
<b>Antagonist</b>	Identified adversary	No adversary so far or hardly identifiable	No specific adversary, natural or human sources	No specific adversary, natural or human sources
<b>Intention</b>	Hostile, harmful, deliberate	Usually not harmful, but possible damage accepted	Not applicable	Not applicable
<b>Means</b>	Tangible, usually military capacities	Tangible, but uncertain triggers and capacities	Intangible or known to a very limited extent	Unknown until harm occurs
<b>Damage</b>	Intended, quantifiable	Not intended, extent and probability calculable	Trigger known, but time of occurrence and extent of damage unknown	Trigger unknown or diffuse, systemic cascade effects or avalanche effects on critical infrastructure
<b>Security Policy</b>	Reacting to the opponent	Prevention plus reaction plans to future opponents	Prevention, reaction and aftercare of triggers	Extensive major emergency planning including prevention, reaction and aftercare

*Table 1: Categories of Danger. Source: Own Table.*

### 2.1.5. Overview of the Extended Security Dimensions

The previous analysis demonstrated that the concept of security has profoundly broadened over the years. Due to this shift, an increased number of issues, areas, and referent objects are discussed under the label of security.<sup>187</sup> The observed extension has been criticized by some security scholars for misconceiving the root causes of conflict, for example, in cases of a changing environment. Others claim that the broadening dilutes the classic clout of security policy to such an extent that it can hardly be implemented institutionally or operationally. Against this, Daase observes that there is no general militarization of foreign policy.<sup>188</sup> It has become apparent that meanings of security exhibit significant variation and can be conceptualized in diverse manners. Already, the mere definition of security-related terms, particularly categories of dangers, poses a

<sup>187</sup> Abrahamsen 2005: 57.

<sup>188</sup> Daase 2010a: 10-12.

challenge as Schlag, Junk, and Daase note that it is “a contested semantic field”<sup>189</sup>. This corroborates the notion that security is linked to the meaning an actor attaches to it, as stated at the beginning of this chapter. This establishes a connection to the constructivist framework by Alexander Wendt, who indicates that security is based on an identification process, i.e. a social relationship, by at least two actors.<sup>190</sup> In that sense, security can be understood as lived human experience, which is produced and reproduced in language and practices in a specific context.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, Huysmans argues that insecurity should not be understood as a fact but as something that emerges from a process of dominant framing through speaking or writing.<sup>192</sup> This process and its dependence on perceptions, which can be expressed and influenced by speech acts, is examined in more detail in the following chapter.

In order to be able to assess perceptions of China’s Belt and Road Initiative with regard to security, Daase’s historical approach provides a starting point for classifying discourses of security. Figure 1, which is presented below, summarizes the extended specifications of security dimensions. The original but also the augmented concept is not exhaustive and may be subject to future changes and additions. Nevertheless, Daase’s concept offers a useful classification of security discourses that are inherently found in related literature. The concept enables us to expose its flaws regarding the use of terms, such as the discussed rampant indistinctiveness due to previously neglected definitions. Our extended taxonomy based on Daase’s genealogy provides a systematic tool to determine the quality of a security discourse regarding different emphases on which policy area is affected (issue dimension), whose security is concerned (reference dimension), what type of danger is perceived (danger dimension), and for which geographical area security shall be provided (spatial dimension). In particular, the issue dimension provides a useful category system for classifying the policy area and comparing discursive shifts over time. While all four dimensions have the potential to be integrated into a coding system for qualitative content analysis, a systematic coding of a large-scale document corpus would exceed the scope of this work. For the sake of providing a feasible and parsimonious coding system for elevating the comparative study, the coding system

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<sup>189</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 7.

<sup>190</sup> Wendt 1992: 399.

<sup>191</sup> Fierke 2016: 78.

<sup>192</sup> Huysmans 2006: 5.



of this study operationalizes the five issue areas: military, economic, ecologic, and cyber security. By focusing on these policy areas, we can effectively trace and compare whether and how the BRI is perceived as a security issue. In fact, the approach systematically reveals the variety of securitized perceptions across policy areas and the frequency of voiced security concerns. Consequently, this study allows us to test the hypothesis that there are observable varieties in the quality, i.e., the emphasis of security discourses regarding the Belt and Road Initiative between the states under review applying the extended security dimensions.

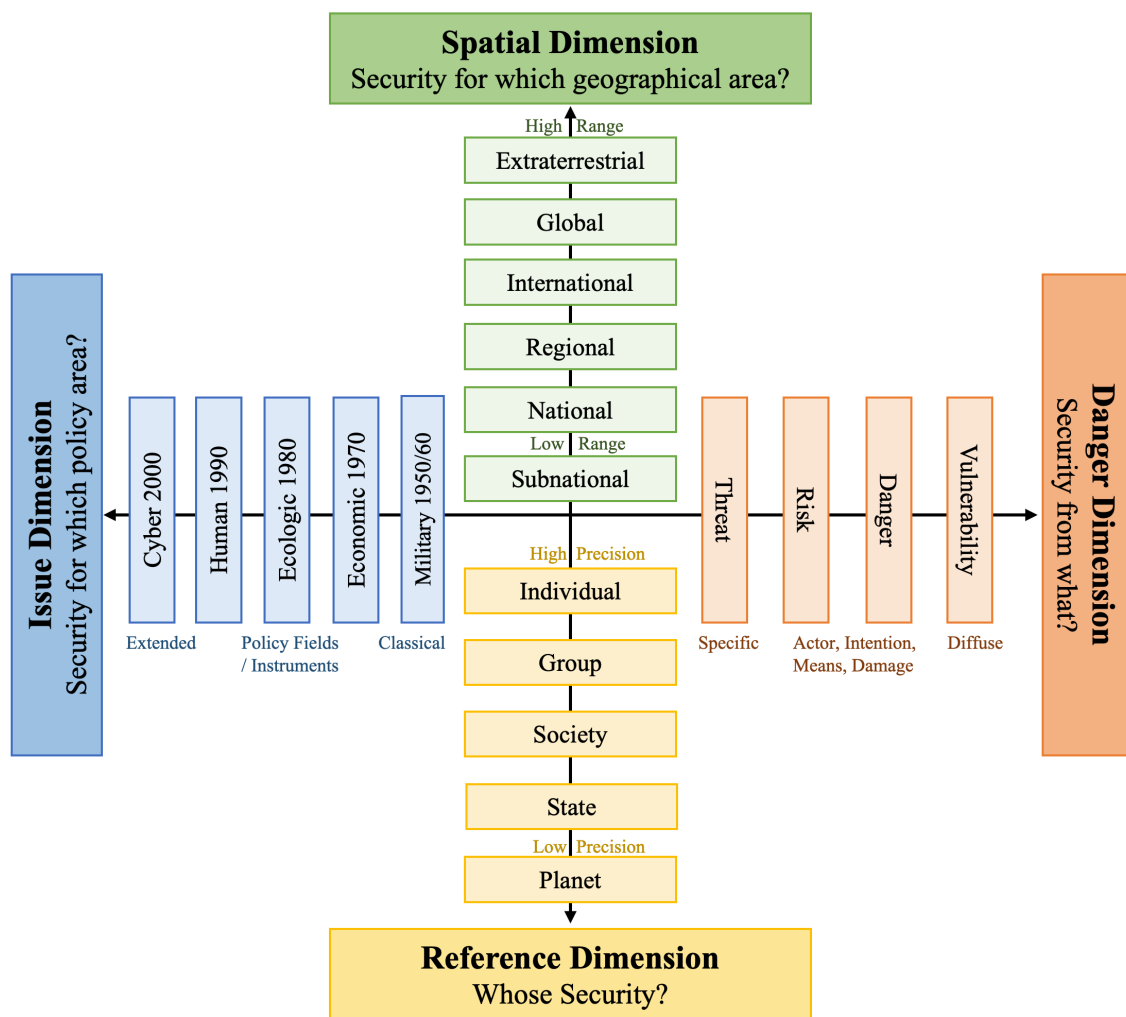


Figure 1: Four-Dimensional Taxonomy of Security. Source: Own adaption of Daase (2010a: 3; 2010b: 143), Lanfer (2017: 53), and Schlag et al. (2016: 8).

An essential tenet needs to be pointed out already at this stage, which is an essential part of the later methodological approach. With regards to the importance attached to the danger dimension, as Daase and related writers point out<sup>193</sup>, a statement can only be ascribed to the concept of security if it contains the notion of harm – regardless of being real or expected.<sup>194</sup> Consequently, if a danger is not assumed in any way by highlighting a detrimental effect, a statement cannot be called a security-related perception. Even without coding along the danger category, this assumption can be applied as a key guideline for categorizing perceptions. It highlights that a mere coding of negative, securitized perceptions does not sufficiently trace the spectrum of BRI perceptions. Positive statements not only avoid talking about harm but may even claim that an issue can promote security and reduce the probability or severity of danger. In addition, balanced or neutral statements may weigh up an issue’s harmful or beneficial effects or say nothing at all about the assumed effects. Accordingly, before classifying a security issue according to the policy area, the sentiment has to be assessed. That allows the capture of non-security-related references and thus mitigates the risk of a pejorative bias in the analysis. This needs further clarification in the methods section as these primary considerations on the concept of security structure are used to analyze BRI discourses. They also present some guiding premises about constructivist security studies and the securitization of discourses, which are further elaborated in the following.

## **2.2. The Conundrum of Constructivism and Securitization**

After having discussed the extended construction of security as a concept, the following chapter presents the main features of constructivist security research to locate this study in the broader IR theory. In doing so, the study’s critical ontological and epistemological axes are outlined. Based on this overview, the second part of the chapter presents the securitization theory and the different currents and associated difficulties. The third section deepens the theoretical insight regarding the securitization spectrum. In this way, the significance of perceptions expressed in (security) discourses and knowledge gaps in previous research will be examined, which this study contributes to closing

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<sup>193</sup> See 2.1.4.

<sup>194</sup> This is also connected to the basic security definition provided at this chapter’s beginning.

### 2.2.1. Constructivist Contributions to Security Studies

Compared to other schools of thought in International Relations, constructivism can still be regarded as a young discipline. It evolved from a few critical essays in the 1980s to one of today's theoretical mainstream IR perspectives by adding a reflexive meta-theoretical approach to the intellectual portfolio of political science.<sup>195</sup> Critical constructivism, focusing on the power of discourse and the social constructions of threats and enmity, evolved around the mid- to late-1990s.<sup>196</sup> Despite its breakthrough as a school of thought, constructivism has not yet offset the realist predominance in security studies. Particularly in North American security studies, realism is the dominant approach.<sup>197</sup> To this day, realism "still occupies the core of security studies,"<sup>198</sup> so this study's constructivist approach contributes to redressing this imbalance.<sup>199</sup>

Despite the existing research disparity, substantial contributions from a constructivist perspective are evident in security studies. Furthermore, the substantial common ground between realism and constructivism is particularly noteworthy given the inherent link of our research question to a perceived global power shift. In the literature, constructivism is sometimes accused of ignoring questions of power<sup>200</sup> - a critique that can easily be refuted, as this chapter demonstrates. The critique points to fundamental differences in the conceptualizations of power in the field of IR. A crucial difference is that constructivism refers to both aspects, the relation between material and discursive power. Neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism only regard the former as the single most important source of influence in world affairs. Against the claim that constructivism is "unRealistic"<sup>201</sup> for believing in the power of language and knowledge, it could be argued that this kind of power does not exist without the material world. Quite the contrary, it even invites a debate about reality in social science as it claims that multiple interpretations of reality are possible and calls for empirical research.<sup>202</sup> Precursors of the claim that

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<sup>195</sup> Engelkamp 2014: 45.

<sup>196</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 18.

<sup>197</sup> Farrell 2002: 50.

<sup>198</sup> Fierke 2016: 70.

<sup>199</sup> Constructivism is no uniform approach but is internally diverse and fragmented as other IR schools of thought, which makes generalizations about it difficult (Agius 2019: 84; Kessler 2016: 44; Peou 2002: 210). Keeping this in mind, the statements presented in this chapter are based on common reflections in the discipline.

<sup>200</sup> Engelkamp 2014: 55.

<sup>201</sup> Hopf 1998: 177.

<sup>202</sup> Engelkamp 2014: 48.

ideas are a form of power can be found in Foucault's nexus between power and knowledge, Gramsci's statements about ideological hegemony or Max Weber's discrimination of coercion and authority, and his understanding of humans as cultural beings with the ability to lend meaning to the world.<sup>203</sup>

The differences between a materialist and a constructivist understanding of power are apparent in the diverse research programs in IR and security studies that give direction to studying Belt and Road perceptions. Neorealist scholars such as Kenneth Waltz underline the centrality of the distribution of power capabilities as a central part of the international political structure.<sup>204</sup> This is related to the previously outlined debate in chapter 2.1.2. Waltz defines anarchy and self-help as a natural condition of the international system.<sup>205</sup> Wendt rejects this premise of an exogenously given, thus constitutive, structural element.<sup>206</sup> He contends that Waltz's triad of the international political structure, encompassing ordering principles, principles of differentiation, and the distribution of capabilities, needs to be complemented with intersubjectively constituted identities and interests.<sup>207</sup> In this constructivist thinking, not the distribution of power shapes international politics and security, but the meaning states attach to these terms and to one another. This interpretation is reflected by the title of Nicholas Onuf's ground-breaking book "World of Our Making"<sup>208</sup>. This book is said to have coined the term social constructivism and to have informed much of Wendt's writings.<sup>209</sup>

These variations in the meaning of each other, anarchy, power and ultimately security depend on a process that Wendt calls the social act. A social act consists of three stages: signaling, interpreting, and responding.<sup>210</sup> These stages do not happen in a vacuum just for themselves but exist in a loop of constant feedback, whereby the self and social relationships are permanently constructed and reconstructed. The process is embedded in the knowledge one possesses about the world. This knowledge creates expectations

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<sup>203</sup> Agius 2019: 76 [Key Ideas 6.1]; Hopf 1998: 177.

<sup>204</sup> See particularly Waltz 1979: chapter 6 (102-128).

<sup>205</sup> Waltz 1979: 104.

<sup>206</sup> Wendt 1992: 403.

<sup>207</sup> Wendt 1992: 396, 401.

<sup>208</sup> Onuf 2012; republished from 1989.

<sup>209</sup> Agius 2019: 74.

<sup>210</sup> Wendt 1992: 404-405. In his later book, Wendt (1999: 330) treats the act in four scenes, the fourth of which is ultimately the new beginning of the act based on the added information gained through the previous stages.

about the behavior of all involved parties, which is constantly added and altered by each other's gestures.<sup>211</sup> Consequently, according to constructivists, the current state of world affairs has evolved from a history of interaction between states that signaled and responded to competitive behavior, the meanings and requirements of self-help and survival.<sup>212</sup> The insecurity embedded in such an anarchic system forged competitive or egoistic identities that are mirrored by actors according to the 'looking-glass self'-principle of identity formation.<sup>213</sup> The actors themselves constitute and reconstitute the dynamics of the international system and, thence, the rules of security. In other words, these rules are endogenously developed and thus malleable.<sup>214</sup> This is a foundational idea of a constructivist social ontology, in which structures and agents are co-determined.<sup>215</sup> Such a notion of agency contradicts a widespread understanding among poststructuralists that assigns only a weak actor capacity to speakers in political arenas. According to this, political speakers are less consciously and autonomously acting individuals. They are considered as discursively shaped, even passive, role-bearers who are ultimately subject to the limits of discourse. The constructivist co-constitutive understanding similarly acknowledges limits to the speakers, but it valorizes them in the discourse around strategic agency and creates space for the exploration of those very actors within the social act.<sup>216</sup>

The social act does not neglect the distribution of capabilities but includes the physical qualities of 'ego' and 'alter' in the process of interpretation.<sup>217</sup> Again, this is related to the notion that human perceptions and the material structure mutually constitute each other – material structures are certainly not dismissed in constructivism.<sup>218</sup> Taking a closer look at the implications of this two-way relationship for state behavior, there appears to be some degree of congruity to the neorealist 'balance of threat' approach

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<sup>211</sup> Wendt 1992: 407.

<sup>212</sup> Wendt 1992: 402-403.

<sup>213</sup> Wendt 1992: 404, 406.

<sup>214</sup> Engelkamp 2014: 51.

<sup>215</sup> Engelkamp 2014: 51; Wendt 1999: 194.

<sup>216</sup> Heindl 2015a: 262; Stritzel 2012: 551. Stritzel (2012: 551; 564, fn. 3) highlights that this notion of weak agency is particularly prominent among scholars locating themselves in the tradition of Michel Foucault, which, however, does not correspond to Foucault's perspective of complex reality.

<sup>217</sup> Wendt 1992: 405.

<sup>218</sup> Malik 2015: 78.

coined by Stephen Walt.<sup>219</sup> In his article “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power” published in 1985, Walt argues:

“Although power is an important factor in their calculations, it is not the only one. Rather than allying in response to power alone, it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most *threatening* power.”<sup>220</sup>

According to Walt, threats derive not only from aggregate capabilities or the geographic component, which are traditional (neo)realist features but also from offensive intentions.<sup>221</sup> Farrell and Hopf underline that the element of intent has the potential to build a bridge to constructivism, which offers a theory of threat perception missing in mainstream realism.<sup>222</sup>

This can be further corroborated by the emergence of security dilemmas. In IR, the concept of security dilemmas plays a central role in (defensive) realism. The concept was developed by John Herz and further refined by Kenneth Waltz, among others. According to them, actions to strengthen one’s security, e.g., by increasing military capabilities, reduce other state’s security if these are interpreted as potential attack capacities. This interpretation depends on the uncertainty about the other’s intentions which particularly derive from the perceived anarchic and competitive structure of global politics.<sup>223</sup> This constitutes a dilemma since the vicious circle of an arms race, for instance, is an unintended consequence; measures to increase one’s own security ultimately lead to more insecurity. Even before the formal establishment of constructivism, in 1976, Robert Jervis published the book “Perception and Misperception in International Politics”, in which he described the relationship between skewed perceptions about each other’s intentions and security dilemmas.<sup>224</sup> This is also a key concept for the study of Belt and Road security discourses. For instance, Wuthnow expands on the ideas of Jervis, describing a multifaceted Sino-US security dilemma in which “a fundamental problem is that both sides doubt the motives of the other.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Farrell 2002: 65; Hopf 1998: 188.

<sup>220</sup> Walt 1985: 8-9, emphasis in original.

<sup>221</sup> Walt 1985: 9.

<sup>222</sup> Farrell 2002: 65; Hopf 1998: 186-187.

<sup>223</sup> Glaser 2019: 21.

<sup>224</sup> Jervis 2017: 70.

<sup>225</sup> Wuthnow 2019: 100.

Even though Jervis broadly elaborated on the aspect of misperceptions, he revealed himself as being more a realist or liberalist than a constructivist by writing:

“But the heart of the security dilemma argument is that an increase in one state’s security can make others less secure not because of misperception or imagined hostility, but because of the anarchic context of international relations.”<sup>226</sup>

In contrast to neorealism, Jervis opens the ‘black box’ of the state by operationalizing the domestic level as a source of perceptions and beliefs that matter on the international level.<sup>227</sup> As indicated by the quote, Jervis’ study is subject to the limited framework of classical schools of thought by placing more emphasis on the anarchic context than on perceptions. Jervis can even be interpreted to have paved the way for constructive studies by criticizing that “most international relations (IR) scholars had ignored the general question of how states perceived each other”<sup>228</sup>. Despite the positivist logic of realism and liberalism, there are several writings to be found that raise questions about observing the unobservable, such as beliefs that constructivism puts at its heart.<sup>229</sup> These similarities have later been reaffirmed by one of the key figures in securitization studies, Thierry Balzacq, who argues that Jervis’ conceptions on images and perception are in accord with key assumptions of constructivism.<sup>230</sup>

While Jervis investigated the influence of perceptions under the constraint of anarchy, constructivism is more radical as it has denaturalized the concept of anarchy as a matter of fact and stresses that it is essentially meaningless without its intersubjective recognition by social actors.<sup>231</sup> In a constructivist logic, studies about security dilemmas remain incomplete without the notion of a socially constructed and, thus, possible continuum of anarchies.<sup>232</sup> This thought is based on Wendt’s observation that it makes a difference for policymakers in the United States, whether Great Britain or North Korea possessed nuclear capabilities.<sup>233</sup> In the former case, nuclear armament was interpreted as a threat to national security, hence something to balance against in a realist reading, whether the

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<sup>226</sup> Jervis 2017: 76.

<sup>227</sup> Jervis 2017: xx.

<sup>228</sup> Jervis 2017: xv.

<sup>229</sup> Farrell 2002: 60.

<sup>230</sup> Balzacq 2010: 57.

<sup>231</sup> Hopf 1998: 173; 182.

<sup>232</sup> Wendt 1999: 307; Hopf 1998: 174.

<sup>233</sup> Wendt 1995: 73.

latter being less of a threat than a strengthening of its own defense.<sup>234</sup> Hopf comments on this: „States understand different states differently.“<sup>235</sup> While this may sound like a truism, it is a crucial remark for Wendt’s social theory of international politics and his approach towards anarchy:

“States act differently toward enemies than they do toward friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not. Anarchy and the distribution of power are insufficient to tell us which is which.”<sup>236</sup>

While realism understands states as like units that are particularly constrained in their cooperation for security and ultimately subject to self-help for security, Wendt and other constructivist stress the possibility of friendship – an idea strongly opposed by neorealists<sup>237</sup> – among states that may moderate or even overcome anarchy in certain aspects. This way of thinking allows not only limited cooperation, but even systems of collective security dependent on the state’s identifications with one another.<sup>238</sup> Wendt proposes three ideal types of cultures of anarchies, which arise from these different intersubjective social structures and are intrinsically related to different systems of security. He calls these the Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian cultures of anarchy and limits his analysis of these three without claiming their exhaustiveness. These three cultures differ in terms of the orientation of the self towards the other which are inherently connected to the before described social act. The position the self attributes to the other is in the Hobbesian culture that of ‘enemy’, in the Lockean ‘rival’, and in the Kantian ‘friend’.<sup>239</sup> Based configurations of subject positions, states are able to define the roles of power and interest, which inform their security policy.<sup>240</sup>

In the Hobbesian culture, states have to fear unlimited violence by the other as a threatening adversary, who is attributed an intent on destroying or enslaving the self. As a consequence, states are forced to mirror that behavior, as their calculations are based on

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<sup>234</sup> Gu 2018: 259.

<sup>235</sup> Hopf 1998: 188.

<sup>236</sup> Wendt 1992: 397.

<sup>237</sup> Interestingly, Wendt (1999: 258) states in classical realism it was Carl Schmitt who claimed that friend-enemy distinction was fundamental, but it was rejected by the reductionist IR-conceptualization of neorealism. This demonstrates once again that some considerable links between the different schools of thought in IR can be established.

<sup>238</sup> Wendt 1992: 400-401.

<sup>239</sup> Wendt 1999: 257-258.

<sup>240</sup> Wendt 1999: 310.



the worst-case scenario of “kill or be killed.”<sup>241</sup> This is a pure self-help system in which state survival depends solely on relative military power. Principles like absolute sovereignty, stability, and control are thus central organizing principles for international affairs.<sup>242</sup> This way, security becomes a deeply competitive, zero-sum game in which risk aversion almost entirely obstructs cooperation due to the malicious intentions attributed to the other.<sup>243</sup> In his earlier article, Wendt designates this as a competitive security system, in which states identify negatively with each other’s security, whereas the next higher stage of an individualistic security system may be assigned to the Lockean culture of anarchy.<sup>244</sup> Although Wendt argues that the Hobbesian culture and realism are not necessarily connected, there are implicit links to the notions of power and survival commonly labeled as realist behavior.<sup>245</sup>

Linked to this perspective, there is a pessimistic view in IR studies about power transitions such as China’s rise. The corresponding expectation is that China behaves as a revisionist power<sup>246</sup> and challenges US-political hegemony, which might ultimately lead to a military conflict.<sup>247</sup> Thus, if China is perceived primarily as an enemy, the foreign policy strategy at hand would feature strong elements of a containment strategy, according to Wojczewski.<sup>248</sup> Concerns about Chinese revisionism have already found their way into the US political sphere, which might constitute warning signs of the political discourse leaning towards a Hobbesian culture of anarchy: In 2017, the White House officially termed China and Russia revisionist powers in their National Security Strategy (NSS).<sup>249</sup> In the following year, the 2018 US National Defence Strategy warned that China is acting like a revisionist power “undermining the international order from with-

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<sup>241</sup> Wendt 1999: 258; 260-262.

<sup>242</sup> Yu 2018: 232.

<sup>243</sup> Wendt 1999: 265; 282.

<sup>244</sup> Wendt 1992: 400.

<sup>245</sup> Wendt 1999: 259, 262.

<sup>246</sup> The difference between status quo and revisionist powers has sparked considerable academic controversy. In the broadest sense, revisionist powers are states that seek to change established norms, rules, and other elements of the international code of conduct, as defined by Mead (2014: 74). China and Russia are frequently the subjects of related papers, as seen, for example, in the works of Mead (2014) or Lind (2017). This classification is yet highly contentious. Kastner and Saunders (2012: 175) concluded that China acts as a status quo power according to their conception. Similarly, Ikenberry (2014: 89) contends that “China and Russia are acting more like established great powers than revisionist ones”.

<sup>247</sup> Feng and He 2018: 167-168.

<sup>248</sup> Wojczewski 2016: 26.

<sup>249</sup> X. Yang 2020: 425; The White House 2017: 25.

in the system”<sup>250</sup>. With predatory practices in the military and economic realm, China is perceived to displace the US’ global preeminence rendering it a strategic competitor.<sup>251</sup> These documents evince that threat perceptions manifested in the Trump administration around US-China great power rivalry and perceived malign revisionist practices.<sup>252</sup> As presented in the introduction, this corresponds to the offensive realist prediction of Mearsheimer that China will not rise peacefully.<sup>253</sup>

The Lockean anarchy is characterized by the feature of self-restraint concerning the expected level of violence. This is based on the idea that rivals do recognize each other’s right to life and let live, safeguarded on the state level in international relations by the institution of sovereignty. Violence and war are still accepted as legitimate means to advance interests and settle disputes, yet they typically do not escalate to the point of killing of each other.<sup>254</sup> Thus, rudimentary opportunities for security cooperation or so-called other-help are possible, yet under the continuation of self-help as the dominant but restricted principle. International relations are no longer a ‘*sauve qui peut*’ environment as in the Hobbesian culture because there is now a commonly acknowledged right to exist. States may, therefore, coordinate their actions on mutually beneficial outcomes, while deception cannot be ruled out. As threats by their rivals are no longer existential, windows for cooperation are created.<sup>255</sup> Collective actions are possible, for example, if group interests, such as the norm of sovereignty, seem to be threatened by outsiders (e.g., entities that are not recognized as states) or designated rogue states.<sup>256</sup> The individualistic security system related to this culture of anarchy is thus based on generally indifferent identifications with one another. Consequently, prospects of absolute gains can guide the decisions of the still self-interested states.<sup>257</sup> Wendt stresses that it is this kind of culture of anarchy that has dominated international affairs since the establishment of the Westphalian state system.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) 2018: 2.

<sup>251</sup> DOD 2018: 2.

<sup>252</sup> X. Yang 2020: 425; Wu 2020: 61.

<sup>253</sup> Mearsheimer 2016: 23.

<sup>254</sup> Wendt 1999: 258.

<sup>255</sup> Wendt 1999: 282, 287-288.

<sup>256</sup> Wendt 1999: 293- 294.

<sup>257</sup> Wendt 1992: 400.

<sup>258</sup> Wendt 1999: 285.

A corresponding security perspective to power transitions in this culture of anarchy is more ambiguous. Due to the competitive logic of the Lockean culture, there is both room for pessimistic and optimistic interpretations of rising powers. On the one hand, studies emphasize that a rising power such as China has fundamentally profited from the existing order, whereas it may still be interested in a sort of ‘soft’ or ‘shallow’ revisionism to adapt the international system to its needs.<sup>259</sup> This might also probe military conflict, though interdependencies make it a very costly endeavor and thus constrain it.<sup>260</sup> Therefore, whereas power transitions in the Hobbesian culture of anarchy pose considerable challenges, the Lockean culture of anarchy is able to draw a differentiated picture.

In contrast to the restricted form of other-help in the Lockean culture of Anarchy, the Kantian culture, in which amity is the dominant configuration of relationships, allows for cooperation even if there is no direct return.<sup>261</sup> This is connected by name to the cooperative security system, in which states identify positively with each other’s security. They are thus engaged in community gains based on collective interests instead of self-help.<sup>262</sup> This should not be conflated with a thoughtless termination of egoism; the underlying logic here is that the welfare of the self includes the other, which does not mean nursing the other to the exclusion of the self.<sup>263</sup> Due to this posture, the main rules of action are non-violence and mutual aid, which both must be adhered to at the same time to speak of ‘friendship’. That means that violence is no longer perceived as a legitimate means to advance interests, and conflicts are handled by negotiation, arbitration, or courts. This reduces the relevance of military capabilities for advancing interests in a Kantian anarchy. Alternative forms of power, such as discursive, institutional, or economic power, gain importance. In this form of anarchy, states reciprocally attribute each other peaceful intentions.<sup>264</sup> Thus, the Kantian culture of anarchy offers the most optimistic perspective concerning the interpretation of power transitions. As the states view each other as friends, changing distributions of power are less important than community gains. Based on this, security communities (to settle conflicts within the group) or

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<sup>259</sup> Buzan 2010: 5, 18; Wendt 1999: 261.

<sup>260</sup> Feng and He 2018: 168.

<sup>261</sup> Wendt 1999: 300.

<sup>262</sup> Wendt 1992: 400.

<sup>263</sup> Wendt 1999: 305-306.

<sup>264</sup> Wendt 1999: 298-300.

collective security systems (to settle conflicts between a group and outsiders) may be formed and tend to go together. These multilateral institutions may be founded on the basis of an alliance, but there is a decisive difference between them. Alliances are temporary arrangements possible under the primacy of self-help in which each actor feels individually threatened. Based on the configuration of friendship, alliances can become relatively permanent structures over time, even without a specified threat.<sup>265</sup> As stated before, realist thinkers widely dismiss the notion of friendship between states as utopian or fatal, whereas Wendt sees evidence for this conceptualization in the often-recalled special relationship between the United States of America and Great Britain<sup>266</sup>, as well as the continuation of the NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>267</sup>.

It can be deduced from the above that state perceptions about each other indeed matter and ultimately have the power to produce, reproduce, and alter the dynamics of global politics. Empirical evidence for this theoretical claim is provided, for instance, by a series of experiments conducted by Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero. They found an increased chance of support for inter-state cooperation if there was a sense of shared identity, which also decreased threat perceptions. Their experiments corroborated the constructivist assumptions that in a Hobbesian world, cooperation is more difficult.<sup>268</sup>

Apart from that, collective representations cannot be reduced to single actors' perceptions, according to Wendt. As they are frequency-dependent, the number of expressed perceptions may reach a tipping point of constituting or altering such a structure of collective beliefs.<sup>269</sup> Consequently, although these collective structures cannot be reduced to the individual by name, inferences about the structure can be derived from the actor's perceptions, which, in their sum, represent a structure. It is thus this distribution of ideas about one another that ultimately constitutes the social structure of security.<sup>270</sup> Coupled with that, states do not necessarily regard each other as like units as suggested by neorealism, but "instead as an ally, friend, co-guarantor, threat, a democracy, and so on"<sup>271</sup>.

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<sup>265</sup> Wendt 1999: 300-302.

<sup>266</sup> Wendt 1999: 298.

<sup>267</sup> Wendt 1999: 301-302.

<sup>268</sup> Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero 2007: 766.

<sup>269</sup> Wendt 1999: 264.

<sup>270</sup> Wendt 1999: 309.

<sup>271</sup> Hopf 1998: 194.

In constructivism, states gain more agency. This perspective enables a broader range of behavior and choices and an understanding of opportunities for cooperation, threats, and security dilemmas.<sup>272</sup> This does not imply that collective action problems are automatically resolved, nor does it mean that similarity or positive identifications result in cooperation. It is impossible to make such a priori claims. Nevertheless, windows of opportunity are created, and the likelihood of cooperation is higher in situations where communities of identity exist.<sup>273</sup> In the words of Ted Hopf: “Sitting down to negotiate a trade agreement among friends (as opposed to adversaries or unknowns) affects a state's willingness to lead with a cooperative move.”<sup>274</sup>

Studying expressed perceptions enables thus to draw deductions about the social configurations between the states in interests and gather information about cooperation opportunities. This, in turn, has the potential to understand the social construction of threats, and the dynamics of security dilemmas. These insights do not necessarily break the vicious cycle of aggressive behavior, as it might only replace the uncertainty of each other's intentions with certain insecurity by enabling a state to recognize its enemy. The important constructivist implication for security studies is, however, that it treats uncertainty as a variable for research, not a fixed assumption as in realism.<sup>275</sup> Despite all the differences between realism, liberalism and constructivism, “beliefs are doing much of the explanatory work”<sup>276</sup> in several approaches in both schools of thought and are also to be found for example in the concept of preferences of liberalism. On these grounds, this study places perceptions at the center of the investigation, whereby, despite the constructivist basic perspective, further studies from other schools of thought are enabled, building on these commonalities.

From the explanations about constructivist contributions to security studies, important implications can be drawn to the research object and design of this study. At the center of attention, the study focuses on the Belt and Road Project as a signal sent by China. China's perception of the BRI serves as a pivotal element of the social act. Examining China's perspective corresponds to the constructivist emphasis of the ‘ego’ view con-

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<sup>272</sup> Hopf 1998: 177.

<sup>273</sup> Hopf 1998: 189-190, 193.

<sup>274</sup> Hopf 1998: 189.

<sup>275</sup> Farrell 2002: 65; Hopf 1998:188.

<sup>276</sup> Farrell 2002: 70.

cerning the mirroring of practices. How this signal will be interpreted under the pretext of security depends on the social configurations of the states vis-à-vis one another, which are reflections of self and other representations. The ‘ego’ view of the BRI serves as a bridge to analyze the perceptions of the other, thus Germany and Great Britain, which is the main analytical endeavor according to our research question. Therefore, greater attention is dedicated to the receiver side. According to Yu, the international success of the BRI relies on how others interpret the Chinese goals, what conclusions they draw from them, and how these are translated into action.<sup>277</sup>

The study has the potential to identify prevalent perceptions of the BRI interpreted as an expression of China’s rise. Particularly, discourses connected to narrations of friend, rival or enemy help to assess what kind of culture of anarchy is perceived as dominant. This is of essential importance as it shapes state behavior according to the rules of security that are considered to be in effect. The results may offer insights into the degree of shared or diverging conceptions of China’s umbrella project, the conflict potential ascribed to it, and the likelihood of cooperation opportunities. This goal requires more specific insight into how initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative evolve into security issues, which leads us to the next section on the process of securitization.

### **2.2.2. Securitization: Let’s Talk About Security**

Security is what states make of it. Rephrasing Wendt’s famous quote “*Anarchy is what states make of it*”<sup>278</sup> in this manner, succinctly summarizes securitization theory. The theory was fundamentally developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde at the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI) of Copenhagen, explaining why their concept of securitization is also known as the Copenhagen School (CS). The altered Wendtian dictum implies that the CS regards security as a socially constituted concept. Since its formal establishment in the 1990s, securitization theory has become an increasingly influential approach in security studies.<sup>279</sup> Due to its conceptual flexibility<sup>280</sup>, a myriad of research objects can be examined under the header of securitiza-

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<sup>277</sup> Yu 2018: 234.

<sup>278</sup> Wendt 1992: 395, emphasis in original.

<sup>279</sup> Emmers 2019: 174; Nyman 2018: 106.

<sup>280</sup> Nyman 2018: 106.

tion.<sup>281</sup> Notwithstanding, the approach allows a “systematic, comparative, and coherent analysis of security.”<sup>282</sup> Regarding constructivist contributions to security studies, Thierry Balzacq asserts that securitization theory is “perhaps its strongest offshoot”<sup>283</sup>.

The extension of securitization studies has been accompanied by the emergence of distinct strands of thought. Their differences are explained in this chapter to illustrate the approach used. The common denominator of all securitization branches is that they are located in the constitutive-theoretical realm, in which security issues are created politically, socially, and culturally by actors, discourse, and practices.<sup>284</sup> This relates securitization studies to constructivism<sup>285</sup> and the extended notion of security beyond but including the traditional military focus. Briefly speaking, securitization studies aim to understand security in terms of who securitizes what issues for whom, why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions.<sup>286</sup> This approach matches Daase’s multi-dimensional framework, whereas Daase presents more sophisticated categories as discussed in chapter 2.1.<sup>287</sup> Based on these commonalities, securitization theory is considered “a relatively well-defined, mid-level theory”<sup>288</sup>. This quote should not obscure the complexity of securitization as a heterogeneous and multidimensional process engaging manifold contexts and actors that constitute a security issue as such.<sup>289</sup>

So, how does an issue become a matter of security? The modified Wendtian saying suggests that identifying, articulating, and accepting a security issue is based on a social act.<sup>290</sup> This is essentially the process of securitization how Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde elaborated the concept in their seminal book “Security: A New

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<sup>281</sup> The securitization compendium by Kreide and Langenohl (2019) illustrates the diversity of research directions including, among others, terrorism, migration, social conflict, international law, colonialization and decolonialization, and drug politics.

<sup>282</sup> Emmers 2019: 174.

<sup>283</sup> Balzacq 2010: 56.

<sup>284</sup> Langenohl 2019: 27.

<sup>285</sup> Buzan and Wæver even claimed that securitization theory is “constructivist all the way down” (1997: 245). This extensive claim is, for instance, challenged by Adler (2005).

<sup>286</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 32.

<sup>287</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 22-23.

<sup>288</sup> Watson 2012: 282.

<sup>289</sup> Emerson 2019: 524.

<sup>290</sup> Emmers 2019: 174, 177.

Framework for Analysis” in 1998.<sup>291</sup> The name of the concept and its key assumptions are based on Wæver’s famous 1995 article “Securitization and Desecuritization”. Wæver explicated that an issue becomes a security problem if it is labeled as such by elites.<sup>292</sup> This approach, nevertheless, risks overstretching the limits of security policy by making it all-inclusive and thus emptied of content.<sup>293</sup> In order to maintain its conceptual specificity, securitization theory combines constructivist and classical realist tenets.<sup>294</sup> Wæver ties the conceptual limits to a narrow meaning of security, which is related to state survival. By defining the issue as an existential threat, called a securitizing move, the securitizing actor claims a special right for extraordinary measures to address the issue.<sup>295</sup>

“A successful securitization thus has three components (or steps); existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules. The distinguishing feature of securitization is a specific rhetorical structure (survival, priority of action ‘because if the problem is not handled now it will be too late, and we will not exist to remedy our failure’). (...) That quality is the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics. In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus, by labeling it as security, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means.”<sup>296</sup>

This authoritative definition by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde demonstrates that the Copenhagen version of securitization theory and constructivism share a focus on the use of language. Language is also of fundamental importance for Alexander Wendt, who stated that “the structure of shared beliefs is ultimately a linguistic phenomenon, this means that language does not merely mediate thinking, it makes thinking possible.”<sup>297</sup> For this passage Wendt refers to a central author for critical security studies: Nicholas Onuf. Much of the constructivist understanding of language as a constitutive element of international relations can be traced to Onuf’s writings. Onuf stated that words do not only represent the world (or politics vis-à-vis the Belt and Road as in this study), as assumed by positivists. Language produces and reproduces them.<sup>298</sup> Thus, it can be inferred that

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<sup>291</sup> Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde refer to Wendt only one time in the main body of their seminal book (1998: 144). While they support a constructivist understanding of security (Buzan et al. 1998: 190-191), they do not elaborate on certain concepts such as the social act.

<sup>292</sup> Wæver 1995: 54. Elites as securitizing actors are defined and discussed in Section 4.1.

<sup>293</sup> Wæver 1995: 48.

<sup>294</sup> Emmers 2019: 177; Williams 2003: 516, 528.

<sup>295</sup> Emerson 2019: 519; Nyman 2018: 102.

<sup>296</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 26.

<sup>297</sup> Wendt 1999: 175.

<sup>298</sup> Onuf 2013: 28-29.



Wendt and Onuf share the view that “By speaking, we make the world what it is.”<sup>299</sup> This interpretation is corroborated by Malik, who pointed out that the mutual constitution of structure and agency in Wendt’s three cultures of anarchy depends on the cultural and linguistic practices.<sup>300</sup>

Despite the role Wendt assigns to the issue, he does neither elaborate on the importance of language, nor does he offer empirical evidence in further studies. As a consequence, Wendt is criticized for his ‘speechlessness’ because he basically does not address the constitutive role of language.<sup>301</sup> Guzzini and Leander even wrote of a Janus-faced role of language in Wendt’s constructivism which “is very much out of the picture, despite his repeated reference to its centrality”<sup>302</sup>. They yet agree to the general compatibility of Wendtian constructivism and Onuf’s language-based approach.<sup>303</sup> Concerning our research question, it can be reasoned that it is both possible and necessary to fill the lacuna of Wendt’s ‘speechlessness’ by more critical forms of constructivism and securitization theory. In so doing, the linguistic practices of securitization, precisely the speech act in securitization theory, gains special attention.

#### **2.2.2.1. The Bridges and Fences of Securitization**

Securitization is commonly viewed as a bridge between traditional and critical security studies.<sup>304</sup> Depending on the author, securitization analysis tends in one direction or the other. The approach of this study is too conventional to be fully attributed to critical constructivism but also too critical to be fully assigned to conventional constructivism. This does not imply that it is destined for arbitrariness. The approach corresponds to certain common features of critical (security) studies, which is commonly used by scholars analyzing discourses<sup>305</sup>: A key tenet is that principal actors like states and their policies are social constructs. They are constituted by political and social practices that attributes meaning, hence power, to them. Consequently, these structures are endogenously malleable. In order to gain insights about these structures, interpretative methods

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<sup>299</sup> Onuf 2013: 29. Onuf (2013: 31), however, writes that Wendt’s contribution is a mixed blessing. He indirectly relates to Wendt that language receded into a sidekick of constructivist research.

<sup>300</sup> Malik 2015: 77.

<sup>301</sup> Engelkamp 2014: 56.

<sup>302</sup> Guzzini and Leander 2006: 86.

<sup>303</sup> Guzzini and Leander 2006: 86.

<sup>304</sup> Nyman 2018: 101.

<sup>305</sup> See e.g., Agius (2019), Fierke (2016) for the assumptions of language-based approaches. Mutimer (2019) provides guidance in critical security studies as a distinct approach.

are necessary.<sup>306</sup> This corresponds to Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, who admit to be informed by the poststructuralist notion that security is a socially constituted concept.<sup>307</sup>

While these insights accord with the critical approach, the comparison of Belt and Road perceptions is strongly generalized to the state level, particularly for the sake of fostering a cross-country comparison.<sup>308</sup> Critical theorists commonly dismiss state-centric approaches, as advocated by the CS, as not critical enough.<sup>309</sup> Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde distanced their approach from the critical faction by stressing that their methodological collectivism contradicts the emancipatory individualism of critical theories.<sup>310</sup> While the CS could be seen as an opportunity to bridge the gap between traditional and critical factions, it also sparked ongoing academic debates.<sup>311</sup> Critical scholars, who challenge and explore the state's claim to the security prerogative, have constituted a distinct school within security studies known as the Welsh or Aberystwyth School of Critical Securitization Theory.<sup>312</sup>

The Welsh School critically informs about how discourses present and create patterns of political power. However, their emancipatory agenda is not fruitful for a research question like ours that targets the configurations of inter-state relations. This reading is, in turn, consistent with the CS that is committed to methodological objectivism.<sup>313</sup> The CS is not primarily interested in dismantling the power patterns in existing security concepts like critical theorists are. It aims to understand how the dynamics of naming a security threat elevate an issue into a security domain beyond normal politics.<sup>314</sup> Consequently, this study uses a framework for analysis that builds upon the CS's preference for the *via media* or middle ground established by Wendt, who underlines the importance of collective institutions, such as the state and its representatives. While the

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<sup>306</sup> Mutimer 2019: 101.

<sup>307</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 34-35.

<sup>308</sup> At this juncture, it must be acknowledged that using country names such as China, Germany, and the UK as generalizations should be cautiously approached. These generalizations do not accurately represent the full complexity and diversity of the cultures, societies, and individuals within those countries but are used in this study to highlight heuristic similarities and differences.

<sup>309</sup> Agius 2019: 85; Malik 2015: 82.

<sup>310</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 34-35.

<sup>311</sup> For example, critical scholar David Mutimer (2019: 97) criticized that the sectoral analysis of security does not cohere with the largely objectivist epistemology of methodological collectivism.<sup>311</sup>

<sup>312</sup> Langenohl 2019: 28.

<sup>313</sup> Williams 2003: 521.

<sup>314</sup> Fierke 2016: 73.

state-centrism of IR research remains contested, states are still the primary actors in global security institutions such as the UNSC. States are thus the privileged ordering units in global security politics.<sup>315</sup> Due to their authoritative rights, states and their representatives are productions as well as producers of social structures and may legally institutionalize the meanings and procedures of security. Hence, state organizations have the power to produce knowledge. This echoes Foucault's assertions and underscores the potential for reconciling critical and conventional approaches. An epistemological deadlock is thereby avoided without slipping into arbitrariness. Building such a bridge on the principle of eclectic pragmatism while being aware of its boundaries has a prominent advocate in Nicolas Onuf, who wrote that a "constructivist is a *bricoleur* – one who makes what is needed out of available materials."<sup>316</sup>

#### **2.2.2.2. The Debates about Speaking and Listening**

In addition to the critical-conventional dispute, the sub-schools of securitization differ concerning the role of language and audience. This can best be illustrated by the divisions between the Copenhagen School and the Paris School. Nevertheless, these scholarly factions are more representative of an ideal conceptualization than a rigid classification, as, in reality, researchers flexibly integrate insights from both.<sup>317</sup>

As the state is not directly observable in contrast to power holders within a state, the CS requires an agent to make the securitizing move through a speech act by which an issue is defined as a threat.<sup>318</sup> The linguistic-pragmatic theory of the CS borrowed its speech-act model from John L. Austin.<sup>319</sup> Wæver, Buzan, and de Wilde argued for analyzing securitization as an illocutionary act: "By saying the words, something is done."<sup>320</sup> Although Wæver, Buzan, and de Wilde do not quote Onuf, their statement reads surprisingly familiar to his words: "By speaking, we make the world what it is."<sup>321</sup> That indicates an inherent link between these strands of literature concerning their illocutionary logic. The centrality of illocutionary acts renders security a self-referential practice. An issue becomes a security question by labeling or explicitly framing it as such. The exist-

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<sup>315</sup> Wæver 1995: 49.

<sup>316</sup> Onuf 2013: 29, emphasis in original.

<sup>317</sup> Balzacq et al. 2016: 498.

<sup>318</sup> Malik 2015: 84.

<sup>319</sup> Austin 1975; republished from 1955.

<sup>320</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 26.

<sup>321</sup> Onuf 2013: 29.

ence of an objective or real threat is not a prerequisite for securitization.<sup>322</sup> Therefore, the CS focuses its concept of securitization on the securitizing move being semantically constituted by speech acts.<sup>323</sup> Accordingly, discourse analysis is deemed the “obvious method”<sup>324</sup> of the Copenhagen School and has become the most common method used by CS scholars.<sup>325</sup>

As one of the prime figures of the Paris School, Thierry Balzacq advocated viewing securitization as a perlocutionary act. Perlocutionary acts concentrate on the responses from a relevant audience, i.e., the effects of speaking, including the reactions of the listeners. According to Balzacq, there is no securitization without reaction.<sup>326</sup> He deems the focus on illocutionary acts the primary error of CS, as it neglects the power of context for discourse analysis.<sup>327</sup> This demonstrates that the Paris School rejects Copenhagen’s premise, according to which securitization itself is a speech act.<sup>328</sup> Opposed to this, CS scholars argue that the power of context is not disregarded but found in the specific place of an utterance.<sup>329</sup> Although Balzacq did not fully abandon security discourses of security, he recast their meaning to strategic actions for a political purpose. This shifts attention to the audience’s persuasion of measures that must be aligned with the external context.<sup>330</sup> Based on this, securitization in the sense of the Paris School is shaped by everyday practices rather than by language.<sup>331</sup> Accordingly, the importance of language comprising some kind of “social magic”<sup>332</sup> should not be overestimated, as stated by Balzacq. In a paper that can be seen as a response to the Paris’ headwind, Ole Wæver is adamant about the CS conception of illocutionary acts:

“I have insisted on analyzing securitization as an illocutionary and not a perlocutionary act in order to organize the theory around the constitutive, transformative event of actors reconfiguring the relationship of rights and duties rather than seeing an external cause-effect relationship between speech and effects.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 24.

<sup>323</sup> Langenohl 2019: 41, 47.

<sup>324</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 45.

<sup>325</sup> Watson 2012: 282; Balzacq 2011a: 31.

<sup>326</sup> Balzacq 2010: 61.

<sup>327</sup> Senn 2017: 608; Balzacq 2010: 62; Balzacq 2005: 176.

<sup>328</sup> Balzacq 2005: 176.

<sup>329</sup> Wæver 1995: 57.

<sup>330</sup> Balzacq 2005: 172-173.

<sup>331</sup> Langenohl 2019: 45; Nyman 2018: 107.

<sup>332</sup> Balzacq 2011b: 1.

<sup>333</sup> Wæver 2015: 122-123.

This quote clarifies Wæver’s perspective on language as a constitutive element in securitization. It does not fully resolve its inherent conflicts because external cause-effect relationships between speech and effects are included in the original framework of the CS. This is best illustrated by two elements: the role of the audience and facilitating conditions. Already in their key founding book, Buzan et al. noted that “the issue is securitized only if the audience accepts it as such.”<sup>334</sup> Whether the audience accepts securitization is, in turn, dependent on facilitating conditions. These are linguistic-grammatical and external, contextual and social. The former asks whether or not convincing and appealing security language is used: the so-called “grammar of security”. The latter examines whether the position of the securitizer has sufficient authority. In addition, the nature of the issue to be securitized allows it to be persuasively linked to features that are commonly seen as threatening in the socio-cultural context of the audience.<sup>335</sup> Despite the linguistic focus on the rhetorical structure, speech acts ought to be socio-politically contextualized as proposed in the original framework by the CS, resulting in significant overlap with the Paris School. Due to these overlaps, Baele and Sterck argue that this is an artificial separation. In their view, the conflict could be resolved by the fact that the use of language as such can be understood as practice.<sup>336</sup> In this respect, the use of language – and thus securitization – is viewed as an intentional, strategic act of the rhetor, which is suited to appeal to the audience in a certain context.<sup>337</sup> For authors advocating a more sociological view, according to the Paris School, this solution remains insufficient to capture the performative effects of securitization.<sup>338</sup> Therefore, the following sections take a more nuanced look at the debates in securitization studies to justify the approach taken in this study.

Starting with the audience, there are some open questions: Who is the audience? What does the audience’s acceptance of securitization mean? Concerning the first question, newer accounts of securitization refrain from a monolithic, singular notion of audience and recognize the existence of a range of multiple audiences.<sup>339</sup> Particularly in the field of international relations, in which our research question is situated, there are various

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<sup>334</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 25.

<sup>335</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 32-33.

<sup>336</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1125.

<sup>337</sup> Emerson 2019: 519; Heindl 2015a: 263; McDonald 2008: 569.

<sup>338</sup> Stritzel 2012: 554-555.

<sup>339</sup> Emerson 2019: 524; Salter 2008: 322, 325-326.

domestic and foreign audiences. These can, in turn, be subdivided into social groups such as governments, political departments, economic interest groups, scientific circles, and the general public.<sup>340</sup> If China is understood as the originator of the BRI and corresponding rhetoric, its own population and political elites constitute domestic audiences, and foreign countries like Germany and the UK constitute foreign audiences. By inquiring into foreign perceptions of the BRI as a security issue, the debates in these countries reflect whether or not the (de)securitized vision of the BRI conveyed by official Chinese rhetoric is accepted. Still, foreign actors who might operate as securitizing actors bring in their own understanding of the BRI and shape (de)securitized BRI policies in these countries. Thinking one step further, Chinese BRI decision-makers constitute then an audience for these foreign securitizing moves, which corresponds again to Wendt's social act model. This brief digression indicates that audiences are conceived as active stakeholders in the creation of meaning with regard to securitization.<sup>341</sup>

Instead of a fixed model in which a unitary state actor is driving securitization, a more process-oriented view is proposed for the present study to elaborate on the iterable structures in which securitization and the actors involved are contextualized.<sup>342</sup> Parliaments can be used to illustrate this procedural understanding and the difficulty of dual roles as audience and actor. These institutions contain an important audience for the government to gain public support for foreign policy, but parliamentary actors also review policies or present and discuss alternatives.<sup>343</sup> Parliamentary discourse comprises various national-level political elites, including elected party members, government representatives, and scientific and civil society experts, as will be explained in more detail later. Rychnovská even refers to parliaments as a key arena of securitization, bringing together speaking and listening actors in a formally institutionalized setting. Within these major political forums, the actors involved signal their interpretation of threats, build coalitions for or against extraordinary means, and significantly steer national discourses on security.<sup>344</sup> Accordingly, the parliamentary arena hosts both securitizing actors and audiences, which can themselves become securitizing actors once the right to

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<sup>340</sup> Salter 2008: 322. Mark Salter (2008: 322) defines four types of audiences: the popular, the elite, the technocratic, and the scientific.

<sup>341</sup> Watson 2012: 284.

<sup>342</sup> Emerson 2019: 516.

<sup>343</sup> Ihalainen and Matikainen 2016: 2-3.

<sup>344</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 12-13.

speak is granted to the stakeholders involved.<sup>345</sup> Since national-level rhetors and audiences could be divided into smaller and smaller units, it is necessary to embark on a pragmatic analytical path as described in the methods chapter of this paper.

While CS centers its analytical energy on the securitizing move and intersubjectivity, little attention is given to perceptions as precursors of utterances within securitization studies.<sup>346</sup> Threat perceptions are even excluded from the analysis of securitization.<sup>347</sup> Vuori, for instance, proposed their exclusion to avoid conflation about the sincerity of threat perceptions and individualization instead of intersubjectivity.<sup>348</sup> Vuori's arguments yet miss the connection between perceptions and utterances, which ultimately produce intersubjective structures. Threat perceptions are indeed not directly observable, which was discussed in Section 2.2.1. However, they leave physical residues, for instance, in utterances, policy papers, or plenary protocols, which are observable.<sup>349</sup> In the securitization process, threat perceptions may be tracked by their discursive representations.<sup>350</sup> This corresponds to the basic logic of discourse and especially content analysis. Accordingly, threat perceptions, values, and norms are accessible to empirical analysis as social constructs. Observable features in the data material, such as the use of certain words or specific communicative motives, assist in gauging the perceptions of interest.<sup>351</sup> This places the securitization move, the uttering of a threat, in the analytical center.<sup>352</sup> Securitization moves are thus considered central units of analysis and starting points for the present study of securitization.<sup>353</sup> By examining the securitizing speech acts, valuable insights into the discursive developments are obtained by which threats become represented, recognized, or dismissed.<sup>354</sup> The approach is not designed to eval-

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<sup>345</sup> One could also argue that the formal support of the general public needs to be achieved. In most state models political elites, particularly in the parliament and other institutional bodies, are the primary audiences that need to be persuaded of a policy in order to adopt political measures (Roe 2008: 615, 620; Balzacq 2005: 185).

<sup>346</sup> Chand and Garcia 2017: 311; Vuori 2011: 9-10.

<sup>347</sup> Gauffman even recommended "to not conceptualize the threat as a unit of analysis" (2017: 18).

<sup>348</sup> Vuori 2011: 137.

<sup>349</sup> Farrell 2002: 60.

<sup>350</sup> Emmers 2019: 176.

<sup>351</sup> Heindl 2015b: 303.

<sup>352</sup> Langenohl 2019: 41, 53.

<sup>353</sup> Stritzel 2012: 554-555.

<sup>354</sup> Williams 2003: 513.

uate the outcome<sup>355</sup> or political validity<sup>356</sup> of securitization. Instead, it captures the quality of securitized discourses, i.e., the articulation of threat perceptions and their scope.

As noted earlier, Ted Hopf found that a constructivist account of identity offers a theory of threat perception<sup>357</sup>. Despite its long-standing recognition in the literature, this aspect appears to be under-theorized in many discussions of securitization theory up to today.<sup>358</sup> The missing link between threat perception research and securitization is at odds with the strategic importance of the issue for security politics. Two years after Robert Jervis' seminal book about perceptions in international politics, Raymond Cohen published an article in 1978 specifically about the importance of threat perception in international crises.<sup>359</sup> His very first words stress:

“Threat perception is the decisive intervening variable between action and reaction in international crisis. When threat is not perceived, even in the face of objective evidence, there can be no mobilization of defensive resources.”<sup>360</sup>

There are some implicit links in Cohen's operationalization of threat perceptions to Wendt's model of the social act and Copenhagen School's model of securitization, although the authors themselves do not refer to Cohen. A connection to Wendt can be made in Cohen's reference to predispositions, such as personal experiences or anxieties, influencing an actor's threat perceptions.<sup>361</sup> Wendt described that prior meetings between 'ego' and 'alter' influence their gestures, hence the whole act of signaling, inter-

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<sup>355</sup> The indeterminate status of emergency measures as an outcome of securitization justifies this approach. According to Nyman (2018: 103-104) emergency measures need to be possible to talk about successful securitization, they do not have to be taken. This refers to a cognitive bias known as outcome bias, the risk of which our research approach aims to prevent. The outcome bias notes that people tend to judge a decision by its consequences or results rather than by the quality of process (Baron and Hershey 1988). Researchers should be aware of the outcome bias because securitization is described as a process whose quality can thus be examined, e.g., by Emmers (2019: 176) or Buzan et al. (1998: 17). This corresponds to Wæver's (2015: 122-123) statement about the appraisal of securitization apart from external cause-effect relations. To the best of our knowledge, there is no profound research about the outcome bias in securitization studies so far. Therefore, this topic presents a potential research gap to be filled in future studies, but at this point it goes beyond the scope of the paper.

<sup>356</sup> Watson 2012: 295.

<sup>357</sup> Hopf 1998: 187.

<sup>358</sup> This might also be related to the expansion of securitization theory beyond its original constructivist framework. The approach has been used and modified by realists and liberalists (Nyman 2018: 106).

<sup>359</sup> The findings about danger and threat perception in Cohen's article (1978) are also cited in relation to the danger dimension by Schlag et al. (2016: 12) and Daase (2010c: 147, fn. 27). This corroborates the pioneering role of Cohen's article for the security dimensions in this study.

<sup>360</sup> Cohen 1978: 93.

<sup>361</sup> Cohen 1978: 96.



preting and responding of the social act.<sup>362</sup> Consequently, the historical relations between the selected countries and China are expected to have an effect on their reception of the BRI, which needs to be kept in mind in Part III. Secondly, Cohen's emphasizes the reactions of decision-makers, particularly their articulations, for indicating threat perceptions.<sup>363</sup> This corresponds to the CS's securitization approach, who emphasize that "the way to study securitization is to study discourse and political constellations"<sup>364</sup>. In addition, Baele and Sterck conclude that even after the sociological turn prominently represented by Thierry Balzacq, securitization theory continues to place primordial importance on security language and framing.<sup>365</sup> This further justifies the methodological choices of our study, as explained in Chapter 4.

### **2.2.2.3. Consequences of Securitized Discourses**

So far, the chapter has only touched upon the consequences of securitization. Securitized discourses have dramatic political implications that are revealed by scientific inquiries. Securitization is a useful tool to attract attention to a certain topic and to elevate it on the political agenda.<sup>366</sup> The communicative actions of stakeholders have a potential transformative capacity. On the positive account, securitization can be employed as a "political strategy to unify public and party support behind the government".<sup>367</sup> According to empirical findings by Vultee, securitized language in news articles generates higher levels of trust in the government.<sup>368</sup> By securitizing an issue, power holders gain control over it and legitimize a special right for action.<sup>369</sup> They can affect security perceptions and, thus, the general political reality within and between states.<sup>370</sup>

Against this backdrop, already in their early writings on securitization theory, the CS stresses that securitization is not desirable.<sup>371</sup> The securitization of issues often leads to state-centered solutions that are excluded from the normal political sphere of open bar-

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<sup>362</sup> Wendt 1992:404-405.

<sup>363</sup> Cohen 1978: 95.

<sup>364</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 25.

<sup>365</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1125.

<sup>366</sup> Abrahamsen 2005: 74; Williams 2003: 523.

<sup>367</sup> Abrahamsen 2005: 69.

<sup>368</sup> Vultee 2011: 88. Although Vultee found an overall significant effect on higher levels of trust for securitized articles, the effect was higher for government supporters and marginal for non-supporters. The composition of the audience is thus relevant for the effect of securitization, which is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>369</sup> Wæver 1995: 54-55.

<sup>370</sup> Williams 2003: 522-523.

<sup>371</sup> Nyman 2018: 104; Abrahamsen 2005: 58.

gaining.<sup>372</sup> Public debates might be closed because the topic is moved outside the normal sphere of politics.<sup>373</sup> The securitized topic is transferred to the sphere of “national security”, which operates largely within the realm of secrecy.<sup>374</sup> In this realm, policies and countermeasures can be taken without public scrutiny, draining democratic oversight.<sup>375</sup> The emergency mode activated by securitization intensifies executive powers and justifies the use of force, among other extreme measures.<sup>376</sup> Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde observed both domestic and international consequences in cases of excessive securitization, as in the erstwhile Soviet Union or North Korea:

“Such wide-ranging securitization stifles civil society, creates an intrusive and coercive state, cripples (eventually) the economy, and maximizes the intensity of the security dilemma with neighbors that do not share the ideological project.”<sup>377</sup>

Securitization may undermine personal freedoms for the sake of security as well as hamper international cooperation. The war logic inherent in securitization leaves little maneuvering space for the actors. Cooperation is degraded to compliance because of zero-sum thinking that any gain of the identified adversary poses a personal loss.<sup>378</sup> Securitization can not only intensify security dilemmas but even trigger them in the first place.<sup>379</sup> Mutual distrust is a consequence that ultimately produces international paranoia, a climate of hostility, insecurity, and fear.<sup>380</sup> Using the specific example of China threat discourses, Rogelja and Tsimonis demonstrate that dominating threat frames undermine analytical depth and factual assessments of actual chances and challenges. Concomitantly, they lead to an exclusive attribution of political intentions for any interaction with China. This eventually culminates in the sweeping securitization of everything and everyone that endorses Chinese projects such as the BRI.<sup>381</sup> This climate of suspicion provides the ideal breeding ground for hostile behavior along the lines of militarized and illiberal policies and makes them easier to justify.<sup>382</sup> Shah likewise cautions that US opposition to the BRI is part of a broad and older “China threat” habitus that

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<sup>372</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 4; Wæver 1995: 65.

<sup>373</sup> Langenohl 2019: 524; Nyman 2018: 104; Buzan et al. 1998: 24.

<sup>374</sup> Williams 2003: 524.

<sup>375</sup> Collins 2005: 571.

<sup>376</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 208.

<sup>377</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 208.

<sup>378</sup> Langenohl 2019: 61.

<sup>379</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 40.

<sup>380</sup> Bosco and Hartmann-Mahmud 2011: 534; Buzan et al. 1998: 208.

<sup>381</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 105.

<sup>382</sup> Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 205; Abrahamsen 2005: 68, 71.

culminates in an undifferentiated perception of danger<sup>383</sup>: “All this characterisation securitising BRI climaxes in one key assertion: On the whole, China is a threat to the US and the world.”<sup>384</sup>

Already at an early stage of the securitization process, threat-narrating discourses reveal warning signs of attempted securitization and claimed emergency measures. While such discourses may not result in domestic securitization, they alter the legitimate modes of engagement with a specific problem or actor.<sup>385</sup> Viewed from the outside, these threat utterances might alter foreign political relations. External governments and the public are not negligible audiences.<sup>386</sup> It is possible to draw a connection to Section 2.2.1. noting that securitized discourses present signals in an international social act. Such signals can provoke unintended precautionary measures by the so-called opponents – merely by portraying them as such. Concentrating on the securitizing move by studying discourses offers insights into the nature of threat perceptions and how these are narrated.

Portraying an opponent creates a significant distinction between the ‘self’ or ‘ego’ to be protected, a ‘we’ or ‘us’ in stark contrast to a threatening ‘alter’, the ‘other’ or ‘them.’ Securitization seems thus closely connected to the Wendtian friend-rival-enemy system, even if the middle category is rarely applied. Consequently, friend-enemy distinctions are made by uttering security, with the potential to create an enemy in the first place.<sup>387</sup> This also explains why several securitization studies are linked to Othering.<sup>388</sup> Othering describes the process of defining the self in contrast to the characteristics of the ‘alter’. The process is closely related to identity formation. In social sciences, Othering is often used in a pejorative sense, cautioning against extreme cases in which in-groups (‘ego’) are granted positive attributes and rights while out-groups (‘alter’) are denied them. In the context of securitization, discourses of an “us-versus-them” weld communities together by emphasizing the differences between the members of the community and the supposed non-members. The construction of the Other and mobilization of security re-

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<sup>383</sup> Shah 2021: 10-11.

<sup>384</sup> Shah 2021: 10. The spelling of British English quotes maintains the original’s authenticity.

<sup>385</sup> Abrahamsen 2005: 68.

<sup>386</sup> Lene Hansen (2011) traced reactions to a series of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. One more example of international securitization spillover is the protests in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere triggered by the burning of a Quran by the US Reverend Terry Jones in 2011 (see e.g., Bosco and Hartmann-Mahmud 2011: 534).

<sup>387</sup> Collins 2005: 571.

<sup>388</sup> Gaufmann 2017: 18.

sources is inextricably linked to how the self is conceived.<sup>389</sup> The positive effect of building elements of unification within a society is yet accompanied by enmification, growing antagonism, and even radicalization.<sup>390</sup> The process of inclusion and exclusion as fostered by securitization may lead to stigmatization, xenophobia, and ultimately, rejection of human rights for the perceived other.<sup>391</sup>

The consequences underline why securitization is perceived as a failure to deal with issues as normal politics.<sup>392</sup> Securitization itself exerts power over actions and actors. It is used to legitimize extraordinary actions but also limits opportunities for cooperation.<sup>393</sup> A warning is issued by Bosco and Hartmann-Mahmud: “The language of security is very powerful; once employed, it has the ability to crowd out the language of toleration, sensitivity, and civility.”<sup>394</sup> Securitization tends to exacerbate conflicts, while the avoidance of securitization promotes cooperation – even with adversaries.<sup>395</sup> Bonacker and Bernhardt stated that peace can be deemed as the ultimate consequence of the absence of securitization.<sup>396</sup> Empirical studies about the reverse process of desecuritization have also revealed severe limitations to these statements.

This shifts the focus to acts of desecuritization. Speech acts cannot only aim at narrating a threat, which is securitization, but also at assuring the audience that there is no danger. In cases of desecuritization, actors aim to remove issues from the security agenda. When issues are moved out of the security sphere, they can be managed within the standard political system.<sup>397</sup> The issue is thus politicized; it is still considered a matter for state action in public debates.<sup>398</sup> Through the process of desecuritization, the issues shifted back to a terrain where mutual political coordination between opposing camps becomes possible by revising the friend-enemy distinction inherent in securitization.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 44.

<sup>390</sup> Gaufmann 2017: 5, 18.

<sup>391</sup> Buonfino 2004: 24.

<sup>392</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 29, 208.

<sup>393</sup> Langenohl 2019: 49.

<sup>394</sup> Bosco and Hartmann-Mahmud 2011: 534.

<sup>395</sup> Langenohl 2019: 45.

<sup>396</sup> Bonacker and Bernhardt 2014: 246.

<sup>397</sup> Emmers 2019: 175; Nyman 2018: 103.

<sup>398</sup> Emmers 2019: 175.

<sup>399</sup> Langenohl 2019: 49; Hansen 2012: 533.

The confrontation of securitization and desecuritization illustrates four aspects: Firstly, securitization is described as a failure of ‘normal politics’, therefore, the classical CS involves a pessimistic notion of security. In this conception, security is linked with extraordinary, often militarized, and state-centered politics.<sup>400</sup> Such a conception deviates from a normative understanding of security, according to which security is a human need and a desirable value<sup>401</sup>. Buzan and his co-authors, too, caution against unthinkingly regarding security as a desirable good. Instead, they recommend aiming for desecuritization to allow for a normal bargaining process.<sup>402</sup> Desecuritization is described as the “optimal long-range option”<sup>403</sup>. Their recommendation gives rise to further controversy between securitization and desecuritization, which leads us to the second aspect.

Secondly, one should be equally careful to subscribe to the vision that aiming for desecuritization is always desirable. By applying such an understanding, security issues are ruled out “as a site of contestation and therefore for (even emancipatory) change.”<sup>404</sup> As a result, alternative understandings of security, along with current security discussions, are assimilated as “undesirable” and hence obscured.<sup>405</sup> Security concerns might also be obscured by practices of desecuritization. Generally speaking, desecuritization happens when an issue is not narrated in terms of security, either by applying a different form of language or by an issue not being voiced at all. Both aspects imply that issues may not be framed in security terms because actors do not want issues to be perceived as security threats or potentially insecure subjects are marginalized in the political arena. Consequently, desecuritization can be normatively and politically problematic, although it is regularly portrayed as desirable in securitization theory.<sup>406</sup> Both securitization and desecuritization are consequently linked to diverse political interests and thus involve nor-

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<sup>400</sup> Nyman 2018: 111.

<sup>401</sup> Kaufmann (1973) devoted a profound historical-sociological examination to normative character of security. Kaufmann (1973: 28-29) warned that attention should be paid to the use of language, as this conveys the normative understanding of the term “security” and also gives rise to misunderstandings. This corroborates the focus of our study on how BRI is narrated, although Kaufmann’s seminal study was published long before the establishment of securitization studies.

<sup>402</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 4.

<sup>403</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 29.

<sup>404</sup> McDonald 2008: 580.

<sup>405</sup> McDonald 2008: 580.

<sup>406</sup> Hansen 2012: 544.

mative motives. Analytical value can only be achieved by considering the political status of both.<sup>407</sup>

Thirdly, one may deduce from the delineation of securitized and desecuritized issues conflict dynamics and cooperation opportunities. Securitized perceptions of BRI may limit consultations with China, which is construed as a threat to security. As described, such threat frames reduce the “political space for negotiation and compromise.”<sup>408</sup> The power of securitization creates path dependencies that allow inferences not only about security concerns but also about capabilities to cooperate.<sup>409</sup> Nevertheless, there is a risk that worries will not be raised for fear of retaliation from the originator who caused the security concerns.<sup>410</sup> This might build an invisible wall against cooperation, although security concerns are not overtly voiced.

Therefore, securitization and desecuritization should not be regarded as two sides of the same coin. Both processes may be related to insecurity. While securitized language voices insecurity and elevates an issue on the political agenda, desecuritized language can soothe but also disguise insecurity. There is, however, no such thing as a ‘desecuritized’ speech act, although desecuritization results from speech acts. At first glance, this suggests the theoretical inferiority of desecuritization. Hansen emphasized that securitization is dependent on the existence of its supplement, desecuritization.<sup>411</sup> Her classification of four desecuritization types theorizes different modes and consequences. These types are change through stabilization, replacement, rearticulation, and silencing. Only one type of desecuritization involves removing issues from the security sphere: Rearticulation refers to the idea that the original security threats have been addressed or resolved. In all other forms, desecuritization does not involve the elimination of insecurity. In these other cases, the political elite no longer treats the unresolved conflict under the headline of security (change through stabilization), prioritizes another threat (replacement), or marginalizes security concerns (silencing).<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Hansen 2012: 531.

<sup>408</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 132.

<sup>409</sup> Langenohl 2019: 61.

<sup>410</sup> Hansen 2000: 287.

<sup>411</sup> Hansen 2012: 530-531.

<sup>412</sup> Hansen 2012: 529.

Two implications can be drawn from this: First, desecuritization may happen unintentionally in contrast to securitization. An issue may vanish from security talks because another displaces it.<sup>413</sup> Secondly, desecuritization cannot automatically be equated with more cooperation possibilities by the resolution of security concerns. Although desecuritization is widely perceived to promote transitions from conflict to cooperation in inter-state relations<sup>414</sup>, one should refrain from hailing it as a panacea for insecurity.

The securitization of inter-state relations is thus predominantly described as facilitating threat perceptions, hence divisions between actors. There is, however, the case of “responsible securitization”<sup>415</sup> in Europe, in which the securitization of the self’s past functions as the other. A pertinent example of this is Germany’s national socialist past. The securitization of its own conflictual past creates an incentive for this and other European states to block violent conflicts, which prevents inter-state relations from being (re)securitized.<sup>416</sup> In other words, the internal securitization of the self may foster external desecuritization.

Fourthly and in consideration of the first two aspects, a closer look at the securitization spectrum is needed as it seems questionable to specify the thresholds between issues that are non-politicized, politicized, and securitized.<sup>417</sup> It leads to a key research gap in securitization literature, which this study aims to fill. Therefore, the next section takes a closer look at what is known and unknown about the securitization spectrum in the literature landscape. This offers further insights into the reception of issues and dynamics of (de)securitization. At this stage, it has already been shown that the securitization process depicts a multifaceted reality that complicates its tracing and assessment.<sup>418</sup> Nevertheless, the complexity needs to be considered more comprehensively to operationalize the concept and address its shortcomings.

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<sup>413</sup> During the Corona pandemic in 2020, security experts warned that other security issues lost public and political attention. That might also apply to BRI discourses, which will be discovered more into depths later on.

<sup>414</sup> Emmers 2019: 178.

<sup>415</sup> Wæver 2000: 285.

<sup>416</sup> Hansen 2012: 541.

<sup>417</sup> Emmers 2019: 175.

<sup>418</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1125.

### 2.2.3. The Understudied Subject of the Securitization Spectrum

This section sheds light on the current state of research on the securitization spectrum. The previous section discussed how issues become matters of security. This section takes a closer look at how issues qualify for certain spheres or modi on the securitization spectrum. In the first step, we assess the three modes of the securitization spectrum. In the second step, further theorization and analytical approaches to assess different forms of securitization are discussed. In doing so, current limitations are outlined, and a more fine-grained theorization will be achieved.

The original securitization spectrum moves from non-politicized to politicized to securitized. An issue such as the Belt and Road Initiative can be placed anywhere on this spectrum – its positioning depends on the circumstances in which it occurs. The placement can vary between states and also across time.<sup>419</sup> From a domestic perspective – the placement can vary considerably within a state. How the positioning is presented on a state level indicates which view has achieved a hegemonic status. In IR theories, this claim of intra-state competition for discourse or preference hegemony has been widely acknowledged, at least since the introduction of the preference focus in liberalism.<sup>420</sup> The possible variations over time, between and within states, underscore the need for a methodological approach that is able to capture such complexity. Despite the enormous body of literature on securitization, the differentiation along the spectrum or even within the different modes has rarely been investigated. Most writings often take a dichotomous view of whether an issue is securitized or not. They neglect not only shifting emphasis on securitizing actors, referent objects, and security concerns but also the possibility of varying intensity and extensity of securitization. Disregarding the multifaceted reality results in excessive generalizations, which is not only of scientific but also political concern.<sup>421</sup> A first indication to explain this is found in the definitional pitfalls of the securitization spectrum.

Buzan et al. defined that an issue is non-politicized or depoliticized if “the state does not deal with it and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and deci-

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<sup>419</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 24.

<sup>420</sup> Moravcsik 1997.

<sup>421</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1123; 1126.



sion.”<sup>422</sup> The issue does not appear on any public agenda and is not subjected to governmental regulation. In contrast to this, politicized issues are “part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance.”<sup>423</sup> This distinction, logical in principle, does not correspond to the realities of sophisticated states for many topics.

In advanced countries, virtually all public issues are subjected to some form of regulation, as Hansen and Nissenbaum argued. Even though Hansen and Nissenbaum do not exclude the regulatory part of the original definition, they broadened the range of analysis towards non-politicization. State-regulated topics are included in the domain of non-politicized issues as long as they do not receive political and/or media attention.<sup>424</sup> Politicized issues are those that “are devoted to close media and political scrutiny, generating debate and usually multiple policy approaches.”<sup>425</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum’s refinement fits non-politicization to the realities of developed countries, whereas the threshold between non-politicized and politicized remains questionable. They do not specify, for instance, the threshold at which an issue becomes politicized due to media and political attention. The qualification between not publicly debated and ‘close’ scrutiny is thus up to interpretation. Non-politicized issues are further discriminated by how they are regulated. Non-politicized issues are regulated upon consensus and technical measures. In contrast, Hansen and Nissenbaum define politicized issues as those that are subjected to contestation.<sup>426</sup> The feature of bargaining and contestation commonly describes the modus of politicization.<sup>427</sup> The confrontation between consensus and contestation is yet problematic: It neglects possible contestation behind closed doors and does not provide a sharp dividing line.

The problem of demarcation continues along the boundary between politicization and securitization, which is more broadly problematized in the literature than the previous distinction. The problem, too, derives from the original definition of the Copenhagen School: Securitization establishes an issue as an “existential threat, requiring emergency

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<sup>422</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 23.

<sup>423</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 23.

<sup>424</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum 2009: 1159.

<sup>425</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum 2009: 1159.

<sup>426</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum 2009: 1159.

<sup>427</sup> E.g. Hansen 2012: 528; Bourbeau 2011: 42; Salter 2008: 324. Buzan et al. 1998: 4.

measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.”<sup>428</sup> The existential threat has to be intersubjectively established, sufficiently salient, and urgent to justify countermeasures outside normally binding rules or procedures.<sup>429</sup> The literature offers criticism of each of these defining characteristics, which illustrates the inadequacies of the approach. Emmers warns that the distinction between severe politicization and securitization remains blurred.<sup>430</sup> Calling securitization “a more extreme version of politicization.”<sup>431</sup> further exacerbates the confusion and overlap between these modes.<sup>432</sup>

The main criterion attached to securitization in the literature remains that of existential threat, which is a much-debated issue. The first question concerns what qualifies a threat to be existential. The original framework allows a wide range of possible existential threats in different security sectors for varying referent objects apart from the state.<sup>433</sup> Buzan et al. warned that a threat does not have to be actually existential to the referent object but that it must be framed by discourses in such a way.<sup>434</sup> While this reinforces the ontological primacy of discourses for the construction of threats, the statement further contributes to the definitional fuzziness of the approach. Again, the researcher is confronted with a range of interpretations, which gave birth to the debate of intensification in securitization.

The division line can be drawn between authors who support the claim that there are issues below the level of emergency or survival that qualify for securitization and those who are opposed to this. The conception of security as an extreme situation has been criticized as narrow, conceptually problematic, and insufficient for the analysis of empirical expressions of securitization.<sup>435</sup> Stritzel found that this is best represented by the introduction of ‘risk,’ which reconnects to the danger dimension of Daase. Risks operate in a domain of diffuse uncertainties that replaced the former supremacy of clearly

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<sup>428</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 24.

<sup>429</sup> Rychnovska 2014: 15; Buzan et al. 1998: 25.

<sup>430</sup> Emmers 2019: 179.

<sup>431</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 23.

<sup>432</sup> Emmers 2019: 179.

<sup>433</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 36-37.

<sup>434</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 47, fn. 9.

<sup>435</sup> Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 206; Rychnovská 2014: 12; Watson 2012: 290.

identifiable threats in security studies.<sup>436</sup> This leads back to the scholarly debate between ‘broadeners’ and ‘traditionalists’ of security studies. Neglecting security below extremity produces misleading results, as Williams warns because it fails to detect “how security logics can have effects even if they do not conform to the criteria of existential threat and emergency.”<sup>437</sup> In this view, securitization gradually intensifies on a “continuum running from risk to threat, or from uncertainty to danger”.<sup>438</sup>

Williams is yet not the only scholar subscribing to the idea of a wider spectrum of intensification.<sup>439</sup> Abrahamsen also underscored that securitization is better understood as a gradual or incremental process. Similar to Williams, she described a security continuum on which issues move along. In terms of the security continuum, Abrahamsen pointed out two practical considerations: First, issues only rarely jump from a normal political domain to the category of existential threat – as would be proposed by a strict reading of the securitization spectrum. Second, security issues do not necessarily ever reach the status of an existential threat, yet are managed as worrisome or troublesome risks in mundane security politics.<sup>440</sup>

While Williams and Abrahamsen acknowledged that the intensification of security issues is up to analytical determination, neither of them provided methodological guidance. A similar pattern can be found in the assessment of the securitization of migration by Rosen. He acknowledged that there is a perceived intensity of threat that proportionately justifies the extent of countering acts<sup>441</sup>. Rosen, however, does not explain how intensity or proportionate acts ought to be understood or even operationalized. This confirms Gaufmann’s observation that “there remains a lack of understanding of how particular degrees of securitization can be conceptualized.”<sup>442</sup> Although she hits the mark with her criticism, Gaufmann does not provide any solution to this shortcoming. In any way, these observations suggest that a distinction between degrees of securitization is, in principle, possible and relevant for subsequent policy measures.

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<sup>436</sup> Stritzel 2014: 18.

<sup>437</sup> Williams 2011: 214.

<sup>438</sup> Williams 2003: 521.

<sup>439</sup> Williams 2011: 218.

<sup>440</sup> Abrahamsen 59, 61.

<sup>441</sup> Rosen 2019: 37.

<sup>442</sup> Gaufmann 2017: 18.

The backdrop of the lack of conceptualization is that the status of emergency is discarded as a limited condition of securitization without guiding how to establish a useful analytical framework of intensification.<sup>443</sup> The urgency requirement of emergency as the demarcation line of security is understood as an extreme form of securitization. The entailed criterion of breaking the normal legal and social rules to counter a designated threat is still accepted as qualifying the securitization of an issue. This refers to the demand for extraordinary means to change everyday rules without necessarily adopting and implementing them.<sup>444</sup> As we have seen in our discussion of the danger dimension, a possible qualifying criterion is the expected harm that may ultimately – but not necessarily – constitute a real, existential threat. The original securitization framework is not capable of distinguishing such varieties of intensity, as Bourbeau criticized. Consequently, the CS cannot empirically problematize whether variation in levels of securitization exists or not.<sup>445</sup> This leads us to the second question in this section, which approaches have been developed to further qualify variation of securitization.

By classifying different categories of danger, we build on Bourbeau's critique that a simple binary qualification of an issue as securitized or non-securitized cannot explain variation in securitization.<sup>446</sup> The sparse previous studies on variations of securitization cover the whole range of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods access points, which all provide some bits to our research puzzle, but none qualifies as a suitable archetype. Given the author's prior research on DBAR perceptions in the USA, conducted with Becker, the methodology employed in this study is similar, though not identical, to the previously utilized approach.<sup>447</sup> Other qualitative approaches of securitization variations are found by Bourbeau, Buzan and Wæver, as well as Diez, Stetter and Albert.<sup>448</sup> Quantitative studies have been conducted by and Baele and Sterck, Vultee, and Karyotis and Patrikios.<sup>449</sup> Finally, Baele and Rousseau use a mixed-methods approach tending towards computer-assisted content analysis.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Williams 2011: 218.

<sup>444</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum 2009: 1159; Abrahamsen 2005: 58; Buzan et al. 1998: 23.

<sup>445</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 3; 42.

<sup>446</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 42.

<sup>447</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023.

<sup>448</sup> Bourbeau 2011; Buzan and Wæver 2009; Diez et al. 2006.

<sup>449</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015; Vultee 2011; Karyotis and Patrikios 2010.

<sup>450</sup> Baele and Rousseau 2023.

The frequency of the security reference is used in most of these studies from both perspectives as a qualifier of variation.<sup>451</sup> The approaches deal with this qualifier differently according to their basic logic. In quantitative studies, frequency or repetition is the key to measurement relations and establishing causalities. Among the quantitative and mixed-methods studies, Baele and Rousseau as well as Baele and Sterck provide the only sophisticated approaches to measure degrees of securitization.<sup>452</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios as well as Vultee focus on the impact of securitization, although they acknowledge the importance of frequency.<sup>453</sup> Vultee experiments with the influence of (de-)securitized media on public opinion. He states that the repetition or frequency of applying a particular narrative of a category is likely to fortify heuristic judgments about an issue. From this, it can be deduced that the “sort of repetition”<sup>454</sup> with which in our case the BRI is connected to certain topics and categories has an effect on its saliency and heuristic judgments.

In terms of frequency, Karyotis and Patrikios focus on religiosity. They found a positive relationship between religiosity and immigration threat perceptions in Greece<sup>455</sup>, but do not measure the intensification of securitization. Although the authors note that Greek migration discourses became “highly securitized in the early 1990s”<sup>456</sup>, they do neither explain the differences between high and low securitization nor how they reached their estimation. They only describe that offensive language plays an important role in legitimizing restrictive policies:

“The Greek political and security elites used symbolic language, metaphors, exaggerations, inaccuracies and a criminalization of the ‘Other’ in order to actively promote the construction of migration as a threat, as opposed to a multidimensional social phenomenon.”<sup>457</sup>

Similar rhetoric strategies have already been described in the previous sections and can thus be vetted in the analysis of BRI discourses. While Karyotis and Patrikios do not offer a measurement of securitization degrees, they indicate that there are differences in levels of securitization.

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<sup>451</sup> Similar to the above-mentioned statement of Rosen (2019: 37).

<sup>452</sup> Baele and Rousseau 2023; Baele and Sterck 2015.

<sup>453</sup> Vultee 2011; Karyotis and Patrikios 2010.

<sup>454</sup> Vultee 2011: 84.

<sup>455</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 52, 54.

<sup>456</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 46.

<sup>457</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 46.

Baele and Roussaeu as well as Baele and Sterck fill the gap by providing a measurement of the intensity of securitization with Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software. They explicitly aim to redress the binary logic of most securitization research. By contrast, securitization is understood as a gradual process moving on a continuum from low to high. The intensity of securitization is assessed by the semantic regularity, i.e., frequency of security words in both studies. On the positive side, this approach acknowledges degrees of securitization and enables comparison across policy fields, actors, and time.<sup>458</sup> It must be objected that by strictly scrutinizing the model, Baele and Sterck do not remedy the flaw of misrepresented securitization dynamics but even aggravate it. First, their fully automated document analysis includes a severe selection bias due to their reference glossary. The authors reason their glossary only superficially.<sup>459</sup> There is no convincing justification for including words like “compromise”, “decisive”, “globalization”, “resources”, or “state” as security terms.<sup>460</sup> To label these words ‘security terms’ is a questionable decision. It may inflate the securitization score if no security concerns are expressed in the counted text passages. Baele and Sterck are aware that they run the risk of overestimation<sup>461</sup> if the counted statement is not a threat narrative.<sup>462</sup> Nevertheless, they neither check the context of the counted utterances within the texts, nor the historical and political context beyond the document like, for instance, Bourbeau<sup>463</sup>. Therefore, Baele and Sterck are unable to account for the thematic distribution of their issue on the whole security spectrum, ranging from non-politicized to securitized. In addition, the approach does not provide any qualitative assessment of the securitization process.<sup>464</sup> This fallacy is avoided in Baele and Roussau’s mixed-methods approach that combines the original LIWC framework of Baele and Sterck and a qualitative reading of relevant publications.<sup>465</sup> This approach does yet involve the same

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<sup>458</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1123, 1125-1126.

<sup>459</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1128.

<sup>460</sup> See Appendix 2 in Baele and Sterck 2015: 1135-1137.

<sup>461</sup> The flaw of their fully-automated approach is also found in another example: Baele and Sterck include the term “illegal” in the lexicon and find that documents about “illegal migration score significantly higher than all three other groups of texts” (2015: 1132). The tautologic nature of this finding is aggravated by recognizing without scrutinizing the impact of a “recurrent use of words from the security lexicon” (Baele and Sterck 2015: 1132).

<sup>462</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1132.

<sup>463</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 47.

<sup>464</sup> This second shortcoming is certainly beyond the aim of Baele and Sterck’s study to complement qualitative research with a quantitative approach (2015: 1124), which they do, though in an imperfect way.

<sup>465</sup> Baele and Rousseau 2023: 203.

limitations as the original dictionary-based measuring of the intensity of securitized speech acts within a pre-defined data set. Although these lexical-based approaches have serious limitations, they demonstrate that it is possible to operationalize degrees of securitization and check the implications of these counts by qualitative measures.

This brings us to the qualitative studies about variations of securitization in this literature review. Heidbrink and Becker's qualitative content analysis of Digital Belt and Road statements in the United States is the most similar framework to the approach used in this study. Their study captures positive, neutral, and negative speech acts and transfers them into the four security categories: political, normative, economic, and military. This approach enables to provide a nuanced picture of desecuritized and securitized frames.<sup>466</sup> Although the approach provides a useful starting point to identify the intensity of securitization – in terms of negative utterance – in comparison to non-securitized (neutral and positive) statements, the authors do not elaborate on the possibility of scaling this intensity. Moreover, their security categories do not correspond to the previously discussed policy areas of Daase's issue dimension, which complicates to assess the actual thematic variety and changes of the security discourse.

As already touched upon, both Bourbeau and Diez et al. model intensities of securitization. Both refer to the frequency of securitization moves and the security practices.<sup>467</sup> In doing so, both models provide an assessment of securitization from low to high and bridge the illocutionary-perlocutionary divide in securitization research. Neither of them, bases their model on a taxonomy of security dimensions or policy fields. Despite all criticism, Baele and Sterck demonstrated that there are great varieties in the intensity of securitization if one distinguishes the policy field.<sup>468</sup> Still, Baele and Sterck do neither systematically distinguish the problem area as we reviewed in section 2.1.3. In short, none of the models comprehensively systematizes the variations within the discursive structures along the issue dimension of security.

Furthermore, both models have their distinct drawbacks, which are taken into account for developing our research approach. Diez et al. do not provide a discrete model of securitization intensity, but a model of conflict stages for European border disputes. These

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<sup>466</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 314-317.

<sup>467</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 19, 63; Diez et al. 2006: 567-568.

<sup>468</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1130.

stages can be applied to other issues of securitization, but they lack clear demarcation lines, so that the identified conflict stages cannot be precisely delineated. Where exactly a conflict is located on Diez et al.'s continuum can be judged differently between different observers.<sup>469</sup> The mere threshold of securitization<sup>470</sup> and its interplay with politicization remains questionable, which further underlines the fuzziness of their approach.

Fuzziness can also be detected in Bourbeau's model. Bourbeau uses a combination of nominal and ordinal indicators to define a securitization outcome on a continuum from weak to strong.<sup>471</sup> He combines dichotomous indicators, which simply note whether or not an aspect occurs, with personal assessments of intensity ranging from low to high, which ultimately defined the difference between the examined cases of Canada and France. Similar to Diez et al., the final interpretation of these factors is in the eye of the researcher. As with all qualitative approaches, thorough disclosure of the attribution is required to reproduce the findings. However, Bourbeau does not mention when exactly which degree is reached in these criteria.

Two other issues of Bourbeau have to be discussed here, which should be addressed with our model. First, Bourbeau does not discuss changes in securitization over time<sup>472</sup> or within cases, even though his model offers this opportunity.<sup>473</sup> Second, the model is specifically designed for gauging the securitization of migration. While the institutional indicators may also be applied to other issue areas, the security practices under assessment ("interdiction" and "detention"<sup>474</sup>) cannot. This enhances Bourbeau's internal validity but decreases its external validity. By contrast, a model based on the more general security dimensions may be applied to a greater variety of issues but loses specificity.<sup>475</sup>

By contrast, the qualitative refinement of the securitization scale provided by Buzan and Wæver allows for categories of securitizations of all kinds on three dimensions: comprehensiveness, level of analysis, and support.<sup>476</sup> However, the two pioneers of the Co-

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<sup>469</sup> Diez et al. 2006: 568-569.

<sup>470</sup> They base their approach on the "existentiality"-criterion (Diez et al. 2006: 567), but neither define it nor problematize the corresponding theoretical debate as it was done in this paper.

<sup>471</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 19, 28.

<sup>472</sup> Also applies to Baele and Sterck (2015), whereas Diez et al. (2006) analyze historic changes.

<sup>473</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 134.

<sup>474</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 19.

<sup>475</sup> This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>476</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 259.



penhagen School do not elaborate on the securitization spectrum at all. Implicitly, there are nevertheless some links to the preceding theoretical considerations. Buzan and Wæver classify the level of analysis/aggregation ranges from individual to global, which bears a resemblance to Daase's spatial and reference dimensions. While Daase provides these scales to classify a genealogy, Buzan and Wæver focus on the scale of master signifiers of security. They ask whether there are overarching securitizations, so-called macrosecuritizations, that function as frameworks to organize, subsume, and structure lower-level securitizations beyond national borders.<sup>477</sup> They have put forward a three-dimensional model to measure the degree of comprehensiveness, covering a range from niche to partial to comprehensive securitization across different sectors. This degree of comprehensiveness is then combined with a second dimension that considers political unit levels, from individual to global-universal, and a third dimension that evaluates support from relevant audiences. They argue that the higher an issue ranges across all three dimensions, the more it will evolve into a macrosecuritization. This macrosecuritization integrates and guides lower-level securitization in different policy areas and between countries as it signifies an intersubjective sense of threat.<sup>478</sup>

Regarding the degree of comprehensiveness, Wæver and Buzan's macrosecuritization model shares similarities with the approach of this study presented in Chapter 4. Particularly in terms of comprehensiveness, both models converge as they aim to identify sectors of securitization. Defining comprehensiveness solely in terms of sectors is deemed inadequate by the authors, as securitization can be multi-sectoral yet incomplete within sectors, or vice versa – complete within one but not reaching into others. They pragmatically (and somewhat paradoxically) conclude that greater comprehensiveness should nevertheless be understood as encompassing more sectors. Their warning is valuable as it anticipates the limitations of any measure of securitization degrees, necessitating a pragmatic resolution. Still, the approach falls short of providing a comprehensive list of relevant sectors and precise assessments for comprehensiveness. Neither of the axes offers clear thresholds for accurate quantification.<sup>479</sup> This limitation is addressed by our approach, which presents a framework of five security categories defined to gauge the

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<sup>477</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 256, 265. Vuori (2024) provides one of the few in-depth analyses of Chinese macrosecuritization, studying how the PRC aligned with and framed global security discourses.

<sup>478</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 258-260.

<sup>479</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 258, fn. 13.

extensiveness—or comprehensiveness—of securitization. Our framework indeed offers a simplified model to evaluate the main trends of security concerns, while a closer examination of their presence and nature in the dataset, juxtaposed with other (non-securitized) statements, provides further insights into the quality of comprehensiveness, taking into account Wæver and Buzan’s cautionary note.

Nevertheless, the extension of Buzan and Wæver demonstrates that within securitization theory refinements on degrees are both viable and valuable for analysis. Thus, Buzan and Wæver’s model of reach from a micro to macro level acknowledges a wider spectrum of securitization(s) but does not provide an analytic framework to gauge discursive nuances of securitization. The concept brings up further sub-questions for this research: How can securitization assessments strike a balance between quantity and quality of sectoral comprehensiveness? To what extent, if any, does the BRI span the spectrum from niche to partial or comprehensive securitization? To what extent can insights be gleaned from scrutinizing BRI discourses about a macrosecuritization of a rising China, reflected in an intersubjective convergence of symbols or labels used – essentially, a concordance of discourses?

At this point, it needs to be warned that macrosecuritization should not be confused with hypersecuritization. Hypersecuritization, coined by Buzan, exceeds the usual level of perceived threats by exaggeration and inappropriate counter-measures.<sup>480</sup> While macrosecuritization aims to capture the level and nature of securitizations, hypersecuritization represents the idea of distorted security agendas involving an over-application of security measures. While these models are not mutually exclusive, they each have a distinct analytical idea to delve into multi-dimensional security scenarios. Again, this underlines that there is a spectrum within the domain of securitization lacking a consensual model of proportion.<sup>481</sup> Reviewing the hypersecuritization model, we encountered a forecast that warrants consideration when interpreting the results: Buzan predicted that hypersecuritization could be triggered in the US, driven by its pursuit of preserving its superpower status in the face of China’s ascent.<sup>482</sup> As a consequence, disproportionate

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<sup>480</sup> Buzan 2004: 172.

<sup>481</sup> Hansen and Nissenbaum criticize that “exaggeration” is hard to define which impedes the clarity of “hypersecuritization” (2009: 1164).

<sup>482</sup> Buzan 2004: 188.

security measures and grave threat perceptions could have an impact on the geopolitical competition and power dynamics between the two great powers and their allies. Eventually, our model allows us to determine whether this prophecy can be empirically validated for the two close allied nations, Germany and the UK, in connection to China's BRI.

To conclude, this section underlined that the boundaries between the modes of non-politicized, politicized, and securitized are blurry. There are diverse answers to the question of whether securitized always has the same thrust or whether there are different variants within this mode. The existing literature landscape offers attempts to compensate for these shortcomings. Both quantitative and qualitative developments of the spectrum provide insights into how political actors move issues along the securitization continuum to achieve a certain degree of flexibility for political action.<sup>483</sup> The securitization spectrum has not been adequately theorized despite repeated calls for further exploration.<sup>484</sup> There is no sophisticated model of various types or degrees of securitization in the reviewed literature. Securitization is regularly treated as a dichotomous phenomenon rather than a continuum. The model developed in this study addresses this shortcoming and thus contributes to the theorization of the securitization spectrum.

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<sup>483</sup> Abrahamsen 2005: 60.

<sup>484</sup> Emmers 2019: 179; Gaufmann 2017: 18; Hansen 2012: 545; Williams 2011: 218; Abrahamsen 2009: 59.

### **3. Research Landscape of Securitized Belt and Road Discourses**

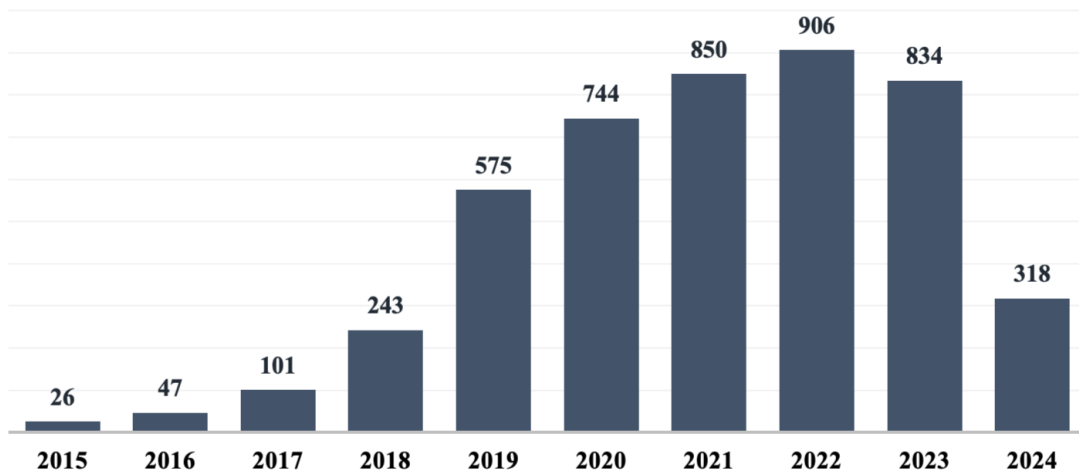
This study aims to contribute to the research landscape about the securitization of China's Belt and Road Initiative. This section lays the final brick of our research foundation by systematically reviewing the existing studies on the topic. In this way, this section i) allows us to situate the study in the wider disciplinary area, ii) illustrates the range of research approaches, iii) justifies the methodological choices of our study, and iv) outlines the context-specific literature that serves to interpret and evaluate our findings. This way, this section extends and exceeds the previous chapters that situated the present study in constructivist security studies.

We can roughly distinguish two research directions that will structure this section: The first research direction leads us to studies on the Belt and Road Initiative. This is the heading of a broad research area that needs to be further subdivided. After a general overview of the evolving academic interest in the BRI, the literature review in this study focuses on how the BRI's security implications and securitization were previously studied in line with our primary research interest. This assessment is complemented by studies exploring perceptions of China and the BRI. Country-specific studies on the BRI are therefore considered the second broad research area complementing our research puzzle. Accordingly, relevant literature on Germany and the UK is analyzed, which ensures that the analysis is contextually embedded in national discursive habits, strategic cultures, and institutional backgrounds. The literature review serves to offer a comprehensive analysis of current research and to reveal prevailing viewpoints regarding the relationship between the BRI and security. As revealed in the review's conclusion, three distinct themes emerge from the existing literature, demonstrating that the BRI is confronted with security challenges, possesses the capacity to tackle security issues, and generates itself to security concerns. This underscores the innovative nature of the comparative approach taken in this study as well as the analytical value of a literature review integrating instead of merely describing the current state of knowledge.

### 3.1. The Growing Body of BRI Research

In a general view, there is a growing body of literature about the BRI, which is published across all kinds of scientific disciplines.<sup>485</sup> The following pages do not contain an exhaustive list of all available studies, which have massively increased since the BRI's official adoption.<sup>486</sup> For example, the Web of Science database includes more than 5,300 articles on the Belt and Road published between 2015 and 2020, as illustrated in Figure 2.<sup>487</sup> Instead, a selection of content-relevant papers is presented to outline the complex world of BRI research and provide a basis for the subsequent analysis of the Chinese perspectives of the BRI (Chapter 5), and particularly German and British attitudes on the issue (Chapter 7 and 8). These studies of different countries are supported by a review of existing research on the BRI. The aim is to explore its historical origins, international preferences, research methods, and frequently discussed security issues, especially in the context of the US-China power rivalry.

**Number of Belt and Road Articles per Final Publication Year in the Web of Science Core Collection**



*Figure 2: Number of BRI Publications in the Web of Science Database. Source: Own illustration; Web of Science / Clarivate 2024, accessed 04. June 2024.*

<sup>485</sup> Cao and Alon (2020: 2) found that more than 100 disciplines published articles on the BRI in the Web of Science database, with authors from more than 100 countries. This underscores the global attention to the BRI, both geographically and across science disciplines.

<sup>486</sup> This impression is also confirmed by Costa (2020: 24) and Cao and Alon (2020: 6). The latter also highlight that Thomson Reuters' Web of Science is the first choice for evaluating scholarly publications (Cao and Alon 2020: 5).

<sup>487</sup> The results are based on the Web of Science Core Collection for the keywords "Belt and Road," "Belt and Road Initiative," and "BRI." On 04 June 2024, we derived 5,357 articles. As the keywords do not include any specific forms of the BRI, such as the Arctic Silk Road or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, it can be assumed that the total number of studies on BRI-related issues is even higher.

At first sight, the Chinese perspective (the signaling ‘ego’) seems to be the most formidable challenge for non-Chinese scholars. This challenge can be met with a solid body of writing about the BRI from China’s perspective.<sup>488</sup> In addition, Chinese researchers themselves publish a growing number of articles on the BRI that offer a starting point for this perspective.<sup>489</sup> This indicates the opportunity to elaborate on Chinese narratives more nuancedly and critically reflect on differences in Chinese and international publications of the BRI. Chinese researchers explore the BRI’s meanings, opportunities, and challenges. They also express practical concerns but do so in a largely supportive, positive vein, according to Cheng.<sup>490</sup> For example, the article by Guo et al. highlights the various challenges, particularly environmental threats, in many BRI countries. Countries and societies are vulnerable to fragile environments, natural disasters, and climate change, the effects of which are exacerbated by poor infrastructure. The BRI is likewise affected by these challenges but is presented by the authors as a contribution to mitigate them by fostering a community of products and services.<sup>491</sup> Such optimistic ideas about the BRI as an infrastructure and collaboration platform are quite common among Chinese-based scholars. According to a survey conducted by Denghua Zhang, Chinese scholars rate the BRI as a strategic priority of China’s foreign policy. Despite being cautiously optimistic about the Initiative, Chinese scholars are also concerned about its practical pitfalls, such as lack of maintenance of built infrastructure or adaption to local needs.<sup>492</sup> Due to the abundance of research on Chinese BRI motives, Part II is devoted in detail to this sender perspective as a combination of critical literature analysis and content analysis of main BRI documents.

By contrast, non-Chinese scholars are much more critical concerning the BRI and focus more commonly on the Initiative’s pitfalls.<sup>493</sup> These diverging knowledge structures have already been documented, for example, by Liu and Bennett in a systematic litera-

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<sup>488</sup> Blanchard 2021: 247.

<sup>489</sup> See e.g., Chan and Song 2020; Ji 2020; Dunford and Liu 2019; Wang and Liu. 2019; Liu et al. 2018; Guo 2018; Guo et al. 2018; Wang 2017; Zheng 2017; Zhao 2016.

<sup>490</sup> Z. Cheng 2019: 789.

<sup>491</sup> Guo et al. 2018: 659-660. Similarly in Guo 2018: 27. Both articles focus on ecological and environmental risks against which the digital branch of the Belt and Road offers solutions, which links particularly the subject dimensions of ecologic and cyber security.

<sup>492</sup> Zhang 2023: 33, 41, 47-49.

<sup>493</sup> Z. Cheng 2019: 789. Some Chinese scholars like Wang Yiwei (2017: 153-162) are aware of these critical ‘Western’ perceptions and actively challenge them in their writings, which underlines the narrative varieties concerning the BRI.

ture evaluation of the BRI's ecologic impact, which they refer to as the geopolitics of science.<sup>494</sup> This scholarly divide is further corroborated in the BRI literature reviews by Blanchard<sup>495</sup> or Cao and Alon.<sup>496</sup> Both reviews report that the BRI research landscape has been expanding in terms of numbers and topics since its inception. Blanchard detects a growing field of research regarding the military value for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which he considers narrow in scope and "very 'guns and bombs' oriented"<sup>497</sup>. Cao and Alon find that the BRI is both discussed as an opportunity to ensure security as well as a security challenge in scientific publications.<sup>498</sup> They note that particularly the maritime road is perceived "intensely securitized"<sup>499</sup>. This corroborates Blanchard's view as this assessment of the maritime road relates directly to potential military use and power projection by sea. Both reviews show that security is indeed an issue in BRI research. Neither review goes into detail about the current state of BRI security research or securitization, even though Cao and Alon refer to it verbatim. The key takeaway remains that there is a growing body of literature that examines BRI in relation to domestic and international security.

While these reviews do not directly address securitization, they do identify potential security concerns that could lead to securitization.<sup>500</sup> In this regard, Blanchard's assessment stands out that the BRI has caused many anxieties, which are associated with exaggerated accounts of the project.<sup>501</sup> This assessment is corroborated by Arifon et al., who find much awe and worry about the BRI's size and ambition.<sup>502</sup> The gamut of superlatives is striking in several scientific papers describing the BRI as the "most ambitious,"<sup>503</sup> "most important,"<sup>504</sup> "largest,"<sup>505</sup> and even "most challenging"<sup>506</sup> Chinese pro-

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<sup>494</sup> Liu and Bennett 2022: 172, 177.

<sup>495</sup> Blanchard 2021.

<sup>496</sup> Cao and Alon 2020.

<sup>497</sup> Blanchard 2021: 245.

<sup>498</sup> Cao and Alon 2020: 20-21.

<sup>499</sup> Cao and Alon 2020: 21. For this assessment, Cao and Alon refer to a paper by David Brewster (2017: 270, 273), which will be discussed below.

<sup>500</sup> BRI security aspects without connections to securitization are described, e.g., by M. Li (2020), Tybring-Gjedde (2020), Rolland (2019a; 2019b), Brown (2018; 2015), Ghiasy and Zhou (2017), and Haiquan (2017).

<sup>501</sup> Blanchard 2021: 236; 239.

<sup>502</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 9.

<sup>503</sup> Cao and Alon 2020: 2; Zhao 2019: 2.

<sup>504</sup> Garcia Herrero and Xu 2019: 1. Please note that there are two different spellings for Garcia Herrero/ García-Herrero, which are used here according to the spelling used in the respective source, although they refer to the same person.

ject. These observations implicitly link to securitized BRI perceptions because exaggeration is a typical instrument in speech to invoke a sense of emergency.<sup>507</sup> Indications for securitization can thus be gleaned from literature not specifically focused on securitization, providing insights into security concerns and modes of expression.

Concerning these modes of expression, there is a growing international literature by sinologists, political scientists, and other researchers examining Chinese and international BRI narratives. These publications make the broad panoply of the BRI, as well as the linkage between language and politics, accessible to a wider audience. Most contemporary publications about China appear to contain a section on the Belt and Road, underlining the importance of the project for China's international strategy.<sup>508</sup> Details about the motives for and effects of the BRI can be found in the edited volumes, monographs, and articles specializing in it.<sup>509</sup> For instance, the edited volume "The Belt and Road Initiative: An Old Archetype of a New Development Model" by Leandro and Duarte<sup>510</sup> analyzes the BRI from very different perspectives, including the Chinese discourse<sup>511</sup>, US-Chinese rivalry<sup>512</sup>, and German attitudes<sup>513</sup>. Among these comprehensive edited volumes are also the "Routledge handbook of the belt and road" edited by Cai and Nolan<sup>514</sup>, "China's Globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative" edited by Berlie<sup>515</sup>,

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<sup>505</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020: 442.

<sup>506</sup> Costa 2020: 34.

<sup>507</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 46; Buzan 2004: 172.

<sup>508</sup> See e.g., Noesselt (2018a: 159, 207-214) or Brown (2020: 160). Both authors provide a comprehensive introduction into Chinese politics and history and also the fundamentals of the BRI.

<sup>509</sup> Besides, popular science books such as those by historian Peter Frankopan (2015; 2019) demonstrate that the discussion of the BRI has also found its way into the broader, international public. His first book has also been translated into several languages, including Chinese, German and Spanish, which indicates high international interest.

<sup>510</sup> Leandro and Duarte 2020.

<sup>511</sup> Costa 2020.

<sup>512</sup> Gupta 2020.

<sup>513</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020.

<sup>514</sup> Cai and Nolan 2019. The volume consists of a great variety of topics and is of particular interest concerning the organization of the BRI and the Chinese vision. The organizational structure, domestic interests and cooperation mechanisms are discussed in the volume by G. Cheng (2019), Fu (2019); Xu and Wang (2019a; 2019b), Liu (2019); Y. Wang (2019a; 2019b), Wang and Jiang (2019a; 2019b), Wang and Li (2019).

<sup>515</sup> Berlie 2020a. Jean A. Berlie also contributed two chapters to the volume. In one chapter, he described the history of the Belt and Road and the reaction of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Berlie 2020b). In another chapter, he examined the status of Xinjiang for the BRI, which is an integral component of the Chinese development vision (Berlie 2020c).



„China’s New Silk Road: An Emerging World Order” edited by Mendes<sup>516</sup>, and “Re-thinking the Silk Road” edited by Mayer<sup>517</sup>. Common to all these volumes is an attempt to capture the current state of BRI and Chinese perspectives and motivations, with chapters varying widely in terms of their thematic or regional focus. Such volumes provide diverse insights that are useful for contextualizing our research findings, although they hardly contain in-depth assessments of the BRI’s securitization.

This also applies to the wide range of research articles about the BRI. Clarke, for example, published a series of articles in which he argues that the BRI is a convergence of China’s domestic interests and foreign policy-making confronted with challenges in both dimensions.<sup>518</sup> The domestic politics of BRI are explored by several authors such as Jie Yu and Zhao<sup>519</sup>. Both authors assess the BRI’s impact on EU-China relations, which has evolved into a research field of its own.<sup>520</sup> This is of particular interest considering the EU membership of Germany and the UK until Brexit on 31 January 2020. Accordingly, the EU research field offers insights into these countries’ attitudes toward the BRI as well as integration and disintegration concerns.<sup>521</sup> That being said, EU-China studies often carry the limitation that insights into single member states are but skin-deep to the benefit of supranational comparison. Aggregate supranational results may not accurately reflect or may even distort developments in specific states due to their summative nature. Special attention must be paid to whether the results are based on a

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<sup>516</sup> Mendes 2019. In this volume, Gallelli and Heinrich (2019) analyze President Xi’s Belt and Road speeches, which enriches the debate about official political discourses and thus the Chinese vision of the BRI. In another chapter, Golden (2019) discusses how the BRI is changing conventional IR theory, as it entails Chinese IR paradigms.

<sup>517</sup> Mayer 2018b. In this volume, Qoraboyev and Moldashev (2018: 124-125) and Wang (2018: 274, 276) touch upon the issue of securitization without discussing it in-depth. Le Corre (2018) investigates European experiences with Chinese investments. Röhr (2018) analyzes the German response toward the BRI.

<sup>518</sup> Clarke 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

<sup>519</sup> Yu 2018; Zhao 2016. The domestic context is examined, for instance, by Berlie (2020b; 2020c), Costa (2020), Dunford and Liu (2019); Y. Wang (2019a; 2019b), He (2018), Yu (2018), and Yu (2017).

<sup>520</sup> This assessment is supported by Cao and Alon (2020: 20), who identified the EU-China relations as a hotspot topic in scientific BRI publications.

<sup>521</sup> E.g., Miao 2021; Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020; Arifon et al. 2019. Within the EU-China relations literature, there is a thematic cluster focusing on the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC; also known as 16+1), see e.g., Gurol and Rodríguez (2022); Jakimów (2019).

selection of member states, the time period covered by the studies, and the level at which the results were aggregated.<sup>522</sup>

Linked to this branch of research are a variety of strategic (power) analyses, especially regarding the 2018 EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia<sup>523</sup> and the “Free and Open Indo Pacific” (FOIP) strategy headed by the USA and Japan. Researchers interpret these strategies as responses<sup>524</sup> or even counterinitiatives<sup>525</sup> to the BRI.<sup>526</sup> They underpin the significant differences in scope, range, and poignancy in terms of their status, relation to each other, and compatibility with the BRI.<sup>527</sup> Indeed, neither the EU connectivity strategy nor the 2021 EU Global Gateway initiative nor the FOIP strategy has specified how to deal with the BRI.<sup>528</sup> The strategic gap remained in the widely shared joint communication by the European Commission ‘EU-China – A strategic outlook’. Despite highlighting the EU’s connectivity strategy, the document does not refer to the BRI at all. Accordingly, it remains undetermined how the EU placed the BRI in its triptych of China as a cooperation partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival established in this 2019 joint declaration.<sup>529</sup> Nevertheless, the three initiatives share similar foci on infrastructure, transportation, and trade, while differing significantly in readings of norms, core principles, and identity-based interests.<sup>530</sup> In view of pronounced differ-

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<sup>522</sup> For example: Arifon et al. (2019: 4) examine German, French, British and Spanish newspaper articles about the BRI over the period from 1 January 2016 to 28 February 2018. Thus, the aggregate findings on word frequencies and other aspects contain Spanish data, limiting the use of the aggregate results for interpretation in this study. Nevertheless, such studies contain important information also on a disaggregated country level, which can be used for interpretation in this study. A similar consideration applies to the period under investigation, which is much shorter than that in this study. Since the longitudinal section is different, the results may vary accordingly. This phenomenon is referred to as time period bias.

<sup>523</sup> The Joint Communication released on September 19, 2018, under the title “Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy” (JOIN(2018) 31 final) does not contain any mention of the BRI. The document outlines the EU’s approach for connecting Europe and Asia based on the “principles of sustainable, comprehensive and international rules-based connectivity” (European Commission 2018: 13).

<sup>524</sup> Böttger et al. 2019: 310; Ekman et al. 2018: 67.

<sup>525</sup> Mohan 2020:179-180; Taeuber 2020: 94.

<sup>526</sup> According to Calabrese (2020: 313, 319), the US view of FOIP has even evolved from the more benign view as a response to the approach of a counterinitiative under Trump.

<sup>527</sup> Benedikter and Nowotny 2020: 43, 46; Heidbrink 2020: 4-5.

<sup>528</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 283; Benedikter and Nowotny 2020: 43, European Commission 2018. According to Colley and van Noort (2022: 83), the EU introduced the Global Gateway initiative in November 2021 to bolster investments in high-quality infrastructure and maintain rigorous social and environmental standards. The initiative seeks to raise as much as 300 billion Euros over six years, focusing on digital, climate and energy, transportation, health, education, and research.

<sup>529</sup> European Commission 2019: 1, 5.

<sup>530</sup> Holzer 2020: 189-193.

ences, there is a frequent remark to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) between the United States, Japan, Australia and India. The QUAD is expected to foster FOIP as an alternative platform to the BRI, though the literature indicates that the concept largely falls short of this lofty rhetoric.<sup>531</sup>

In a similar vein, this strand of literature discusses the so-called US ‘pivot to Asia’-strategy. Although the first Silk Road Strategy Act was passed by the USA in 1999, it did not attain strategic quality at the time. The idea was revived in 2011 under the Obama administration and elevated to the strategic level. What remained was the focus on Afghanistan as a central hub and strengthening economic cooperation in the region. The new pivot was aimed at preventing a deterioration of the Afghan security situation after the withdrawal of US troops. More broadly, the pivot to Asia intended to foster trade by reducing trade barriers and improving infrastructure, establish a regional energy market, enable people-to-people exchanges, secure US strategic advantages, and strengthen ties with key partners such as India.<sup>532</sup> The pivot to Asia under Obama was seen as a strategic rebalance to China’s rise in the region, albeit one that sought constructive relations.<sup>533</sup> For example, US Ambassador Richard Hoagland favorably underscored that Obama’s New Silk Road was complementary to the BRI.<sup>534</sup> The remarkable similarity in name, instruments, and strategic impetus creates the impression that the Chinese BRI is a response to the earlier US pivot to Asia.<sup>535</sup> That said, the New Silk Road Diplomacy has political antecedents in China, dating back to a 1994 concept coined by then-Prime Minister Li Peng.<sup>536</sup> Consistent with the pessimistic assessment, Kolmaš and Kolmašová argue that the US pivot to Asia has never really materialized, either under President Obama or under President Trump.<sup>537</sup> Similar observations are made concerning the 2021 EU Global Gateway strategy and the 2021 US “Build Back Better World” (B3W) as “BRI alternatives.”<sup>538</sup> It remains an open question in strategic studies whether these ‘Western’ policies constitute actual counter-initiatives to the BRI

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<sup>531</sup> Calabrese 2020: 315; Ekman et al. 2018: 67-68.

<sup>532</sup> Siying 2019: 508-511.

<sup>533</sup> Kolmaš and Kolmašová 2019: 61-62.

<sup>534</sup> Siying 2019: 511.

<sup>535</sup> Wu 2020: 58.

<sup>536</sup> Kozłowski 2018: 312; 315.

<sup>537</sup> Kolmaš and Kolmašová 2019: 77.

<sup>538</sup> H. Yang 2022: 824. Similarly: García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 14; Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 385.

or can be evaluated as alternatives at all. Similarly, a bifurcated assessment is found in these studies concerning the BRI's security significance: The BRI is presented as a potential security challenge that requires political answers as well as a potential stability provider that may be compatible with European or US infrastructure plans.

Concerning the origins of the BRI and the often-stated nexus between the domestic and international dimensions, Blanchard criticizes in his literature review that much academic literature speculates about the “true”<sup>539</sup> rationales underlying the BRI. He adds that “the BRI will have effects regardless of China’s ‘real’ intentions.”<sup>540</sup> In making this statement, Blanchard disregards the constructivist argument that perceptions influence political decision-making. The constructivist argument is supported by statements such as that of Yong Wang, who warned against the risk of misperception of the BRI, against which China is pursuing confidence-building diplomatic countermeasures.<sup>541</sup> Ultimately, such threat perceptions may lead to confrontational power politics.<sup>542</sup> A global view of the BRI and possible rationales should not be discounted, which is why the approach in this study rejects Blanchard’s assessment.<sup>543</sup> Similarly, Hang Yuan called for more research on China’s approach to the world through BRI analysis so as not to omit important signals and develop hasty assumptions.<sup>544</sup> Following Wendt’s social act, our approach indicates how the signals sent by China are interpreted. To understand the signal-response chain, it is inevitable to undertake a fundamental examination of the initiative itself, including the domestic component. Thereby, it can be inferred how and which BRI signals are constituted. These considerations relate to discourse-related studies about the BRI, which Blanchard does not address in his article. He did, however, note a missing link in BRI studies to the literature concerning the classical triad of politics, polity, and policy in Chinese decision-making.<sup>545</sup> This contextual link will be established in Chapter 4 in order to elaborate on the signal-reaction-nexus of the social act. By exploring the Chinese rhetoric of BRI, it is possible to gauge the co-production

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<sup>539</sup> Which hints at a substantially positivist understanding of science as discussed in Chapter 2.2.1.

<sup>540</sup> Blanchard 2021: 238.

<sup>541</sup> Wang 2016: 460.

<sup>542</sup> Thaliyakkattil 2019: 247.

<sup>543</sup> Blanchard 2021: 240.

<sup>544</sup> Yuan 2020: 33-34.

<sup>545</sup> Blanchard 2021: 246. This shortcoming is addressed in this study by incorporating Gallelli and Heinrich (2019), Y. Wang (2019a; 2019b), He (2018), Noesselt (2018a; 2018b), J. Yu 2018, Hough and Malik (2015), and others.

or dissociation of the Chinese BRI vision in the selected cases and its perception as a security issue. For this purpose, the corresponding body of literature on Chinese foreign policy is necessary for understanding the meaning behind the mere words.

Regarding our research question, it is striking that to date and to the best of our knowledge, no thorough and comparative study specializing in the issue of securitization has been published on the BRI. Nevertheless, there are articles and individual book chapters that touch on or explore securitization or desecuritization in the context of BRI. Note that securitization is also a financial term, which should not be conflated with the political science concept. Take, for example, the publications by Hans Tjio, or Alessandro Arduino and Xue Gong that focus on the BRI's financial assets.<sup>546</sup> This literature on the economic securitization term, however, provides insight into the BRI's risk assessment and possible challenges ahead.<sup>547</sup> Such insights enrich a broader debate on security, particularly in Daase's economic category within the subject dimension.

### **3.2. BRI Signaling Versus Reception Literature**

Taking a closer look at the existing landscape of securitization-related research, it can be divided into (de)securitization attempts by China on the one hand and international receptions on the other hand. Starting with China's relation to BRI (de)securitization, the most comprehensive publication is written by Paulo Duarte. According to him, the BRI itself is the extraordinary means orchestrated by the Chinese government as the primary security actor to counter multiple perceived threats politically, economically, militarily, and culturally. Security concerns center on the future of the Communist Party of China (CPC). From this point of view, Chinese society is determined as an audience which approves the means of BRI as an emergency measure.<sup>548</sup> Duarte, hence, directly builds on the Copenhagen School's concept of securitization.<sup>549</sup> While the perspective seems quite promising, the study lacks a clear methodological approach to demonstrating domestic threat construction as well as a critical evaluation of the Copenhagen

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<sup>546</sup> Tjio 2020; Arduino and Gong 2018. This is also the meaning in Wolff's report, where he suggests the securitization of loans as a novel financial instrument for development banks in Belt and Road countries (Wolff 2016: 10).

<sup>547</sup> Arduino and Gong 2018: 5-8.

<sup>548</sup> Duarte 2019: 144-1445; 153.

<sup>549</sup> Duarte 2019: 143-144.

School's concept of securitization.<sup>550</sup> In line with Blanchard's and Cao and Alon's critique, Duarte's examination falls short of empirically situating the BRI in the domestic bureaucracies and Chinese governance philosophy.<sup>551</sup> Similar to Duarte, Banik and Lüderert propose to understand the BRI as a "novel spatial security arrangement"<sup>552</sup>. Not only are the same methodological and empirical weaknesses evident for Duarte as well as Banik and Lüderert. The latter do not even refer to securitization in their article, although their piece is titled "Assessing Securitization: China's Belt and Road Initiative"<sup>553</sup>.

The analysis provided by Dave and Kobayashi presents a similar perspective as well as comparable methodological weaknesses. Dave and Kobayashi argue that the CPC drives the securitization of the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). Underlying this are considerations of combating the "three forces of evil" (separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism), improving border security, and addressing economic weaknesses. In this sense, economic modernization along the SREB is a linchpin for building security at home and abroad.<sup>554</sup> The rhetoric around the "three evils" is broadly perceived as a key securitizing narrative by Chinese authorities justifying strict security measures in Xinjiang and Hongkong, as underscored by Vuori, which also demands attention and sensitivity when analyzing BRI debates.<sup>555</sup> From a foreign policy perspective, this securitization drive allows China to exert a high degree of influence on regional security arrangements and strengthens the power of the Central Asian regimes.<sup>556</sup> This interpretation is consistent with what Michael Clarke describes as a convergence of China's domestic and foreign policy factors, whereas Clarke does not associate it with securitization.<sup>557</sup> Dave and Kobayashi, on the other hand, refer to securitization repeatedly, but they do not define the term or locate the concept in the literature. This omission also applies to other publications that mention the securitization of the BRI regarding its do-

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<sup>550</sup> The methodological vagueness also becomes apparent in Duarte's expression "what are the *extraordinary means* to *securitise*" (2019: 144, emphasis in original). Extraordinary means are, however, not taken to securitize according to the Copenhagen School. These means are urged and adopted measures legitimized by acts of securitization.

<sup>551</sup> Blanchard 2021: 246; Cao and Alon 2020: 19-20.

<sup>552</sup> Banik and Lüderert 2020.

<sup>553</sup> Banik and Lüderert 2020.

<sup>554</sup> Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 273; Brakman et al. 2019: 3. For details on motifs and security considerations of the BRI, see Part II.

<sup>555</sup> Vuori 2024: 143-147.

<sup>556</sup> Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 269. Similarly, Klinger 2020: 659. This corresponds to the observation described in section 2.2.2 that securitization strengthens the executive branch (Buzan et al. 1998: 208).

<sup>557</sup> Clarke 2018: 85.

mestic and international reception. Due to the various meanings of securitization, any lack of definitions is particularly problematic.

Similarly, Julie Michelle Klinger's analysis of Chinese energy endeavors along BRI includes these multiple meanings of securitization but does not refer to the Copenhagen School. She describes how the BRI provides a framework for political and economic elites in China and abroad to address multiple security concerns. These include attracting investment, maintaining resource security, and addressing environmental issues, for which securitization provided legitimacy.<sup>558</sup> China's external action along the BRI also faces local headwinds and security challenges, such as anti-Chinese protests in Pakistan's Balochistan province.<sup>559</sup> Balochistan is of central importance for the overland connection between China and Pakistan, which was to be expanded with the BRI as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).<sup>560</sup> To manage the various uncertainties along the Belt and Road, China may be forced to protect its investments and workforce abroad, which consequently fuels securitization.<sup>561</sup> Qoraboyev and Moldashev corroborate this impression as they note similar security concerns about Chinese investment and repercussions in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. According to them, "[t]he securitization of Chinese initiatives is common in Central Asian societies."<sup>562</sup>

Such threat perceptions are not exclusive to Central Asia. Thaliyakkattil claims that the BRI led most regions to have intensified threat perceptions toward China. As a result, regional and global powers undertook attempts to balance and push back.<sup>563</sup> India and the United States, in particular, have been provoked to roll back on China's power in the Indian Ocean region by the combination of the BRI's securitization and general threat

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<sup>558</sup> Klinger 2020: 658, 662, 666.

<sup>559</sup> Klinger 2020: 661, 664-665.

<sup>560</sup> Wolf 2020: 77. In addition to the dangers for Chinese investments and workers, there are also uncertainties about the motivation behind the terrorist acts. According to the extensive study on the CPEC Wolf (2020: 106), the terrorist acts against the CPEC can be divided into two separate interest groups. On the one hand, there are terrorists who see their attacks as directed against Beijing itself; on the other hand, there are those who do not necessarily see them as anti-Chinese but as a signal to the Pakistani state. This increases the uncertainty and complexity of security challenges to the BRI on the ground.

<sup>561</sup> Van der Putten, et al. 2016: 10.

<sup>562</sup> Qoraboyev and Moldashev 2018: 124.

<sup>563</sup> Thaliyakkattil 2019:87. This claim can be contradicted based on studies such as that of Turcsányi and Kachlikova (2020) or Arifon et al. (2019). Other surveys show that perceptions of China and the New Silk Road vary widely internationally, with both positive and negative sentiments (Turcsányi et al. 2020: 11, 13; Garcia Herrero and Xu 2019: 5, Annex 3).

perceptions toward China.<sup>564</sup> jedoch ordnungspolitische Interessenskonflikte und Regulierungsbedarf argues in a similar vein the US acted in a realistic balancing manner based on geopolitical considerations. These considerations reinforced the securitization of the South China Sea, which is also part of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR).<sup>565</sup> Although none of these publications discuss BRI securitization in detail, they provide evidence that securitization exists and varies widely.

Among the few studies that specifically address the securitization of BRI is the country study of the US by Abdur Rehman Shah. His mixed-method study based on discourse analysis and expert interviews underlines that the United States under the Trump administration embraced an all-encompassing securitization approach. By combining the Copenhagen and Paris School's approaches to securitization, Shah identified a major shift from strategic skepticism under President Obama toward comprehensive confrontation under President Trump. US government officials act as securitizing actors who securitized the BRI and China in general by identifying multidimensional threats to warn an international audience of potential BRI target states. Emergency measures included both rhetorical means such as warnings as well alternative investment programs such as the "Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development Act of 2018" (BUILD Act).<sup>566</sup> Shah's article represents one of the few substantial securitization case studies with regard to the reception of the BRI, next to that by Heidbrink and Becker.<sup>567</sup> In contrast to Heidbrink and Becker's approach, Shah neglects potential desecuritizing counter-narratives in the US. While both studies share their result of heightened securitization, both approaches inadequately specify security dimensions and assessments of securitization degrees.

In a similar but broader vein, the analysis of European think tank reports conducted by Igor Rogelja and Konstantinos Tsimonis places the construction of securitization in the center of attention. While their analysis produced some of the most useful insights on discursive threat representations, the Belt and Road Initiative is only subsumed under the broader headline of Chinese economic activities in Europe. Based on the Copenha-

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<sup>564</sup> Thaliyakkattil 2019: 245, 247. Similarly, Van Noort and Colley (2021: 58-59) find grave concerns by the US and Indian governments leading to rejecting the BRI.

<sup>565</sup> Wang 2018: 274, 276.

<sup>566</sup> Shah 2021: 1-3.

<sup>567</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023.



gen School's concept, the authors find overwhelming evidence of securitized representations building on a foundation of derogatory rhetoric.<sup>568</sup> More specifically, the securitization builds on three discursive pillars: i) centralizing agency involving a double deprivation of Chinese actors and interests and European actors decision-making ability<sup>569</sup>, ii) the sanctity of the EU's unity that involves disregarding internal division and inter-governmental nature of foreign policy<sup>570</sup>, iii) authoritarian other, whereby standard political procedures are framed as a threat due to a perceived hostile normative incongruence<sup>571</sup>. Nevertheless, their selected corpus is prone to a negative bias, as most of the analyzed think tank reports were published in Western Europe.<sup>572</sup> As this region is also the focus of our study, corresponding parallels of negative perceptions are expected and scrutinized, especially since Rogelja and Tsimonis do not provide an assessment of specific country discourses.

In view of these negative perceptions, yet without referring to securitization, Nadège Rolland analyzed the domestic and international political headwind, which she found not only in Asia but also in Europe and the United States. She outlines how China has adapted the BRI to address these concerns and possible backlash. China is indicating a willingness to learn from international pressures and security concerns by adapting in accordance with the social act.<sup>573</sup> Adaption does not mean shifting the BRI's original objectives but considering synergies with local needs and homegrown development programs as well as framing perceptions of the BRI more positively. Both of which have been urged by President Xi Jinping himself in 2018.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 103-105.

<sup>569</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 112-119.

<sup>570</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 119-123.

<sup>571</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 123-128. This directly refers to the concept of Othering as part of securitization as discussed in Chapter 2.2.

<sup>572</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 110-111. Indeed, a survey among think tanks from more eastern and southern European countries published by Ji (2020: 189) reveals that the BRI is viewed as a net opportunity by more than 40 percent of the surveyed think tanks. Risk perceptions also exist (20 percent) along with concerns about Chinese influence (Ji 2020: 1887-189). The discrepancy between the results of Ji and Rogelja and Tsimonis underpin the multifaceted nature of BRI-perceptions among think tanks as well as the importance of taking a closer look at the selected cases and research methods.

<sup>573</sup> Holzer 2020: 195; Rolland 2019c: 217-221, 229-230. See also Thaliyakkattil 2019:87.

<sup>574</sup> Rolland 2019c: 228-229. Malik (2020: 3-4) argues that criticism is a constitutive element for innovation as in the form of the BRI. According to innovation theory, lacking legitimacy is natural for novelties and needs to be reached through contestation, justification and adaption in order to support its development, take roots and diffuse in a competitive world.

Such activities are entrenched in studies of Chinese narratives, soft power, and desecuritization. These strands of literature share a common message that the BRI is not only a matter of material power projection, but also about winning the hearts and minds abroad to achieve political ends.<sup>575</sup> To put it in the words of soft power pioneer Joseph S. Nye, Jr.: “Winning hearts and minds has always been important, but it is even more so in a global information age.”<sup>576</sup> Nye’s message reached Chinese policymakers long before the launch of the BRI, when then-President Hu Jintao called in 2007 for enhancing the appeal of Chinese culture as embedded in soft power. President Xi also called for boosting Chinese soft power, which he directly linked to a favorable Chinese narrative and improved communications.<sup>577</sup> His request to “tell the Chinese story well”<sup>578</sup> at the 2018 National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference prompted scholars to investigate Chinese official messaging and its international reception.<sup>579</sup> President Xi’s prominent position explains why several studies have relied on his speeches to decipher Chinese storytelling.<sup>580</sup> As the Chinese vision of BRI still appears to be “opaque”<sup>581</sup>, the already well-developed research landscape on Chinese discourses allows us to decode the meaning of BRI official messaging.<sup>582</sup> Another frequent approach is the analysis of media both in terms of Chinese broadcasting and international reactions.<sup>583</sup> Evidence

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<sup>575</sup> E.g., Jiang 2022; Yang 2022; Gloria 2021; Yang and Van Gorp 2021; Rolland 2019c: 228; Yağcı 2018.

<sup>576</sup> Nye 2004: 1.

<sup>577</sup> Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 60-61.

<sup>578</sup> Cited in People’s Daily Review 2018.

<sup>579</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 1-2; Chan and Song 2020: 418; Langendonk 2020: 247-248; Y. Yang 2020: 300; Hagström und Gustafsson 2019: 389-390; Huang and Wang 2019: 2984-2985; Rolland 2019c: 228. Huang and Wang (2019: 2984-2985) point out that Xi Jinping already demanded telling the Chinese story well in 2013, which indicates that strategic storytelling has been part of the BRI from its very beginning.

<sup>580</sup> E.g., Costa 2020; Y. Yang 2020; Gallelli and Heinrich 2019.

<sup>581</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 33.

<sup>582</sup> Bandurski, et al. (2021) even published the ‘Decoding China Dictionary’ that explains the meaning of key foreign policy terms in Chinese international messaging such as cooperation (合作; hezuo) and security (安全; anquan). The dictionary highlights the meaning imbued in such terms varies considerably. When the BRI is referred to as an instrument to increase China’s discourse power abroad as by Holzer (2020: 193), the Chinese expression of ‘discourse power’ (话语权; huayu quan) is connected to the ‘right to be heard’, that is perceived to have long been denied by foreign powers. Consequently, the term implies a defensive attitude rooted in the historical memory of the Chinese century of humiliation. Foot (2019: 156-157), on the other hand, describes China’s attempts to build and exercise discourse power in a more proactive way as to shape ideas of order. Understanding Chinese signaling across the BRI hence requires cultural ‘decoding’ for understanding its political implications. See Section 5.2 for more information on Chinese political expressions, so called tifa (提法), connected to the BRI.

<sup>583</sup> Chan and Song 2020; Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020; Arifon et al. 2019; Huang and Wang 2019; Cheng 2018.

from these studies shows deliberate positive framing of BRI with recurring phrases, such as “win-win” or “mutually beneficial”.<sup>584</sup> The effects of and reasons for telling a convincing BRI narrative are explored in economic analyses such as by Fung et al. They explain that soft infrastructure, including knowledge, language, confidence, and affinity, complements hard infrastructure goals and enhances the success of connectivity plans. Situated in ‘narrative economics’, the article underlines the interdisciplinary imperative of researching political rhetoric.<sup>585</sup>

The positive rhetoric is accompanied by discursive moves that attempt to desecuritize the BRI’s geopolitical notion, as explained by Chan and Song. This geopolitical desecuritization manifests itself in manifold ways. Among them, three elements stand out: first, the emphasis on inclusiveness, which is also repeatedly construed as an invitation to the United States to cooperate within the framework of the BRI; second, the emphasis on the geo-economic benefits of boosting connectivity; and third, the emphasis on promoting ‘soft’ measures such as special economic zones and free trade agreements. With the help of infrastructure projects, trust is to be built abroad. China is signaling to promote regional development by resorting to a “non-coercive, non-military (non-security-focused) approach”<sup>586</sup>. A desecuritized image of BRI is created as a quest for political autonomy in the spirit of Chinese non-hegemonic developmentalism.<sup>587</sup> Malik supports this assessment by finding that the 2019 official progress report of the BRI<sup>588</sup> makes no reference to conflicts, tensions, and competition.<sup>589</sup> Desecuritization is achieved by avoiding geopolitical references through depoliticized language that aims to evoke an amicable atmosphere.<sup>590</sup> In this respect, what is not said significantly determines desecuritization, as Małgorzata Jakimów concludes.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Turcsanyi and Kachlikova 2020: 73; Arifon et al. 2019: 16-17.

<sup>585</sup> Fung et al. 2018: 331.

<sup>586</sup> Dadabaev 2018: 76.

<sup>587</sup> Chan and Song 2020: 425, 429.

<sup>588</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019. The 2019 progress report is also part of the corpus used for the analysis of the Chinese BRI vision in Chapter 4 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>589</sup> Malik 2020: 9.

<sup>590</sup> Costa 2020: 35; Jakimów 2019: 374.

<sup>591</sup> Jakimów 2019: 374.

Other studies similarly notice that BRI communications should mitigate fears and perceptions of threats from both regional partners and the international community.<sup>592</sup> In a more positive reading, the idealistic universalism on which the BRI's communication strategy is based aims to inspire people inside and outside China, as Brakman et al. argue. The signals are frequently met with resistance and hesitance and do not consistently achieve the desired outcome.<sup>593</sup> By and large, the studies convey, directly and indirectly, that China's outward communication strategy is aimed at desecuritizing the BRI as it serves as China's flagship soft power upgrade. More broadly, this desecuritized portrayal of the initiative serves the overarching goal of promoting "China's rise as an unthreatening development."<sup>594</sup>

### **3.3. A Closer Look at the Receivers**

On the receiving end, the previous chapters demonstrated that Chinese signals were registered and responded to differently. This section will delve deeper into the literature on non-Chinese perceptions of the BRI, specifically in Germany and the UK. This will guide the section in eventually justifying their specific relevance as case studies for BRI perceptions. Literature on the United States is also reviewed due to its prominent role in global affairs, historical security partnerships with both European states under consideration, and frequent inclusion in BRI analyses of evolving international relations and power dynamics. Washington's reaction illustrates the need to avoid automatically assuming a positive relationship between BRI engagement and Chinese soft power, as Blanchard warns, which is also relevant for engaging with other countries' sentiments.<sup>595</sup> Indeed, Voon and Xu find that China does not generate more soft power in BRI countries than in non-BRI countries despite a larger share of Chinese investment. Supposedly, offsetting factors such as adverse perceptions about Chinese mismanagement or the loss of local autonomies and identities cause this effect. They see evidence of this in the significantly poorer soft power found in maritime road countries as opposed to the land belt.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Costa 2020: 35; Duarte 2019: 150.

<sup>593</sup> Brakman et al. 2019: 8-9. They too highlight negative reactions from the US and India.

<sup>594</sup> Vuori 2018: 13.

<sup>595</sup> Blanchard 2021: 246.

<sup>596</sup> Voon and Xu 2019: 130.

A big data analysis of media articles by Garcia Herrero and Xu corroborates this finding. According to them, negative BRI perception correlates with the intensity of trade coverage, yet Garcia Herrero and Xu do not elaborate on the underlying causalities.<sup>597</sup> Across the 130 countries examined over the period of May 2017 to April 2018, they note a generally positive reception of the BRI, which they also confirmed for the two countries of interest in our study. The tone of coverage in the UK is more positive than in Germany. Both countries feature media sentiment values that are only slightly positive and below the average media attitudes.<sup>598</sup> When García-Herrero and Schindowski replicated the same methodology for media analysis in 2023, they discovered considerably different results. Although German media still featured a positive attitude, sentiments plummeted between 2017 and 2021/22. The UK and the US displayed similarly negative perceptions toward the BRI, which indicates an overall downturn in perceptions among the countries under review.<sup>599</sup> In addition, García-Herrero and Schindowski observe that European perceptions toward the BRI vary widely across the individual member states. Although the average tone of media coverage on the BRI in the EU was still slightly positive by 2022, it has generally declined over the years.<sup>600</sup> Similarly, Van der Putten et al. caution that opinions within European governments are diverse, although a majority of European governments are showing a neutral or rather positive perception of the BRI.<sup>601</sup>

Further evidence supporting positive European<sup>602</sup> media sentiment is provided by Turcsányi and Kachlikova. According to them, the European media feature a high degree of intertextuality to China's official BRI narratives as being economically benefi-

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<sup>597</sup> Garcia Herrero and Xu 2019: 7-8.

<sup>598</sup> France 1.23, United Kingdom and the USA 0.53, Germany 0.33, mean 0.7, median perception 0.66 (Garcia Herrero and Xu 2019: 2-3, Annex 8-9). The possible range of scores was from -100 to +100, with sentiment scores recorded ranging from the worst of -2.8 for the Maldives to the best of 7.98 in Botswana. Chinese media also feature a very positive tone, whereas the BRI's home country is only placed 15<sup>th</sup> on the list (Garcia Herrero and Xu 2019: 3, 6). The positive tone in Chinese media is also confirmed by Xiao et al. (2019: 74-75) and Arifon et al. (2019: 16).

<sup>599</sup> García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 5, 29-01. Although the authors seem to repeat the 2019 Garcia Herrero and Xu study approach largely, their numbers should not be directly compared as the database in question has expanded over the years and now includes a different sample size. In their 2023 report, German attitudes score 0.51, the UK's -0.45, and the USA -0.78 (García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 29-30; Appendix 8 and 9).

<sup>600</sup> García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 14.

<sup>601</sup> Van der Putten et al. 2016: 8.

<sup>602</sup> Note that 'European' is not enclosed in brackets in the text for ease of reading, although the research underscores that there is hardly a uniform "European" attitude toward the BRI.

cial.<sup>603</sup> Concerning the only country of their analysis that is included in our case studies, the authors report that the BRI received quite little attention in the British media. The British reports were written without negative outliers and contained almost no geopolitical or security-related frames.<sup>604</sup> Turcsányi and Kachlikova's data finds that the selected media altogether report positively on the BRI, noting that a negative shift took place from mid-2017.<sup>605</sup>

A similar negative shift is noted in the US context, which Joel Wuthnow describes as a "diplomatic failure for Beijing"<sup>606</sup>. US officials expressed largely benign attitudes toward the BRI until mid-2017. The BRI was never explicitly critiqued by President Obama. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs even reported that Trump signaled a willingness to cooperate in BRI projects during a meeting with State Councilor Yang Jiechi.<sup>607</sup> This attitude has shifted to modest antagonism toward the BRI that finds evidence in speeches of the president and high-ranking administration members like Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, his successor Mike Pompeo or Secretary of Defense James Mattis.<sup>608</sup> Shah as well as Lawrence et al., equally, conclude that the Trump Administration has taken a sharply critical attitude toward BRI.<sup>609</sup> Echoing this sentiment, Tariq H Malik concludes that the United States reacted with sharp criticism toward the BRI. The analyzed US American media coverage from 2014 to 2019 stresses political threats, diverging China's focus on economic benefits. European media, however, emphasize economic competition, according to Malik. Despite the critical connotation of competition, the economic focus converges with Chinese logic - which seems consistent with Turcsányi and Kachlikova's findings.<sup>610</sup> Similarly, Ekman et al. observe that the United States moved from an indifferent attitude toward the BRI to a conflictual stance. In ac-

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<sup>603</sup> Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 60. They examine two leading media outlets in the United Kingdom, Spain, and Poland from the BRI's initial announcement in mid-2013 until the first Belt and Road Forum in mid-2017 (Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 64-65).

<sup>604</sup> Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 67-68. Although the authors check the articles for security frames, they do not critically reflect on the term and delimit it from their other categories such as geopolitics and politics (Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 64).

<sup>605</sup> Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 74-75.

<sup>606</sup> Wuthnow 2018.

<sup>607</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs the People's Republic of China 2017.

<sup>608</sup> Wuthnow 2018.

<sup>609</sup> Shah 2021: 2; Lawrence et al. 2019: 26.

<sup>610</sup> Malik 2020: 18-19. Malik's findings should be taken with a grain of salt, as he does neither specify what is meant by 'Europe' nor what the corpus of his media investigation is composed of (e.g., in terms of number of articles, publishers, country of origin).

cordance with Wuthnow, Ekman et al. find that the diplomatic deterioration happened after the first Belt and Road Forum (BRF). The first BRF was even attended by a US delegation headed by White House adviser Matthew Pottinger, which was interpreted positively as political relaxation. In retrospect, the US BRF participation was more of a calm before the storm of the ensuing trade war and hardening rhetoric vis-à-vis China.<sup>611</sup>

In stark contrast, Xiao et al. find a positive shift in the US over the same time period. According to their media analysis, “(...) since Trump took office, the American government has gradually changed its attitudes toward the initiative. Although there are still many negative comments, the positive voice has gradually increased”<sup>612</sup>. Such shifts demonstrate that perceptions and discourses are amenable to change. The contradictory observations call for a cross-check in future analysis of whether there is indeed a strategic shift in US attitudes toward the initiative and in what direction it is changing. The US perspective remains of paramount importance because of the country’s central position in world affairs. Due to this position, the US is credited with being the driving force behind images of China throughout the ‘Western’ hemisphere.<sup>613</sup> Consequently, Washington’s attitude toward the BRI would eventually influence other countries’ subsequent decisions.<sup>614</sup>

Similar conflicting evidence exists for European attitudes. Arifon et al. note a controversial and even apprehensive attitude toward the BRI in the European press.<sup>615</sup> These differences in results may be related to the research designs, as these authors studied only one newspaper each in Germany, France, the UK, and Spain in a different time period. While Arifon et al. do not break down their findings to the country-level, they stress the exemption that primarily German authors also reported the economic benefits of the BRI, which will be scrutinized in our research on elite discourse.<sup>616</sup> The economic opportunities are also acknowledged in American media, as Xiao et al. report.<sup>617</sup> On the other hand, US media are described as having a rather simplified presentation of the

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<sup>611</sup> Ekman et al. 2018: 65-67. Shenin (2018: 61) confirms a negative shift in the US after the first BRF.

<sup>612</sup> Xiao et al. 2019: 75.

<sup>613</sup> Grzywacz 2020: 181.

<sup>614</sup> Shah 2021: 11; Xiao et al. 2019: 72.

<sup>615</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 17.

<sup>616</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 4, 18.

<sup>617</sup> Xiao et al. 2019: 74.

BRI concentrating on its geopolitical power implications.<sup>618</sup> Xin and Matheson note that coverage in the UK and the US displays a highly critical attitude toward the BRI.<sup>619</sup> Similar negative attitudes were reported in a European survey conducted by Turcsányi et al. in late 2020. The UK and Germany featured similar, slightly negative levels of BRI perceptions.<sup>620</sup> While the data indicates a certain degree of convergence between the two European countries, the study does not offer any details about possible reasons and how these perceptions might differ qualitatively. As the survey reflects public opinions, it does not examine the political elite discourses of the BRI.

Elite positions concerning the BRI have been analyzed by van Noort and Colley.<sup>621</sup> The scholars' 2021 article delved into the nature and reception of BRI-related strategic narratives in seven countries, including the United States and Britain. In their latest book, released in 2022, they expanded the sample to eight countries. Germany was not included in either of their studies. While the authors took a comparative perspective, they focused on a specific time period in both publications, around the Second BRF in 2019. The potential shifts in perceptions of respondent states are only analyzed in depth in the 2022 article on a qualitative basis. Although the researchers stress the discursive construction of BRI policies and relate this to material perceptions and ontological security, they do not refer to securitization.<sup>622</sup> Still, their study reveals striking differences and useful results between the BRI reception of the US and the UK, which finds reference in our securitization study. They find that Washington rejected the BRI both in terms of potential material benefits and for reasons of ontological security. The former rejection builds on the perception that the BRI does more harm than good to the targeted states. This harm assessment is linked to concerns about building political leverage in terms of debt-trap diplomacy, expressed by high-level politicians such as then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The BRI is perceived to undermine international norms and state sovereignty, which the United States defines itself as defending in its self-image as the leader

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<sup>618</sup> Xiao et al. 2019: 74-75; Xin and Matheson 2018: 4261-4262. Geopolitical accounts can also be found in other countries, as Harnisch (2018: 33) reveals in a German media analysis. In addition, he states that both chances and risks are reported in German media.

<sup>619</sup> Xin and Matheson 2018: 4261-4262.

<sup>620</sup> Turcsányi et al. 2020: 2-3, 13. Public opinion was surveyed in Serbia, Russia, Latvia, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia, Spain, Sweden, the UK, Germany, and France.

<sup>621</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022; Van Noort and Colley 2021.

<sup>622</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 43-44.



of the liberal international order.<sup>623</sup> The assessment of US opposition against the BRI continues the negative shift in Washington, as observed by Wuthnow and Ekman et al.<sup>624</sup>

Furthermore, van Noort and Colley highlight differences between the UK and the US. In contrast to the United States, the United Kingdom has reacted positively to the BRI's launch, not to say enthusiastically, as Tim Summers put it.<sup>625</sup> With the launch of the 2015 'Golden Era of China-UK relations' by the David Cameron administration, the two scholars note a striking convergence of UK discourses with China's strategic BRI narratives and strong interest in cooperation. Theresa May and Boris Johnson's successive British governments have been noted to be more hesitant about cooperating with BRI. This caution has been linked to concerns about possibly disrupting the 'special relationship' with Washington.<sup>626</sup> In search of an explanation for this, Van Noort and Colley distinguish the UK's positive view of the BRI's material benefits from the more critical view regarding the normative implications of full affiliation with the initiative.<sup>627</sup> The UK joined the AIIB against Washington's warnings and viewed itself as a strategic hotbed for BRI financing, with London as the central European financial hub.<sup>628</sup> Beijing, in turn, has a great stake in the British financial hub due to its desire to internationalize its Renminbi (RMB).<sup>629</sup> According to van Noort and Colley, the UK's participation in the AIIB can be explained by the fact that this confirms the UK's self-image as a global trading center and supporter of multilateral institutions in a rules-based international order. In addition, it creates a role as China's helper in raising the quality and standards of the BRI, which also supports the UK's ontological security.<sup>630</sup> Yet due to its rather peripheral geographic location, the UK was observed to focus on pragmatic third-country cooperation under the aegis of the BRI.<sup>631</sup>

In a broader picture, Sino-British relations are characterized by ups and downs that regularly impinge cooperation. Diplomatic relations were suspended after then-Prime Min-

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<sup>623</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 47, 58, 62.

<sup>624</sup> Ekman et al. 2018: 65-67; Wuthnow 2018.

<sup>625</sup> Summers 2016: 63.

<sup>626</sup> Colley and Van Noort 2022: 103-104.

<sup>627</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 47, 55-56.

<sup>628</sup> Summers 2016: 64, 66.

<sup>629</sup> Van der Putten et al. 2016: 7.

<sup>630</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 55-56.

<sup>631</sup> Summers 2016: 66.

ister David Cameron met the Dalai Lama in London in May 2012. The diplomatic ties were fully restored with a visit by Xi Jinping in October 2015. That was the moment when both countries affirmed ushering in a Golden Era in their relations – a term that was used regularly in the following years.<sup>632</sup> The Golden Era coincided with a period in which the Conservative Party welcomed FDI from China to balance public budgets in the face of budgetary shortfalls in previous governments. In 2020, the Golden Era was already coming to an end. This was related in the literature to erupting conflicts over China’s policies in Hong Kong, which were perceived to undermine the idea of ‘One Country, Two Systems’<sup>633</sup>, human rights concerns and controversies about the Chinese 5G equipment.<sup>634</sup> Particularly, Hong Kong as a former British colony constitutes a central issue in bilateral relations of recurring frictions.<sup>635</sup> Van Noort and Colley argue that these frictions can be attributed to the UK’s identity elements. Though China is recognized as a partner for Britain, it is perceived as an active challenger to international rules, standards and human rights, especially since the BRI includes a development strategy for Xinjiang. The treatment of Uyghurs in this region is viewed with great concern in the UK, which contributed to refraining from embracing BRI cooperation after 2018.<sup>636</sup>

Echoing these results in a broader cross-European Sinophone Borderlands survey, Summers, Hui Man, and Turcsanyi find that British views of China have deteriorated

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<sup>632</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 55; Walker 2020: 11-12, 14; Brown 2016: 6; Summers 2016: 63.

<sup>633</sup> The “one country, two systems” formula was originally designed to manage the status of Taiwan. However, it is currently, first and foremost, connected to the ruling of Hong Kong and other special administrative regions. The formula legitimizes and guarantees the parallel existence of socialist and capitalist economic and social structures under the ruling of the PRC. It is attributed to Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s and considered the basis for terminating Hong Kong’s status as a British Crown colony. On December 19, 1984, the PRC and the UK signed a joint declaration to return Hong Kong to the PRC on July 1, 1997, under the “one country, two systems” formula (Brown 2020: 109-110; Noesselt 2018a: 75, 78). It is related but not to be conflated with the One-China principle that describes the diplomatic recognition and formal sole representation of China by the PRC and the CCP. The special administrative regions of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan are treated as Chinese provinces under the CCP’s One-China policy. Although the United States has officially recognized the PRC’s sole representation status, Beijing’s ruling over Taiwan is a recurrent issue of diplomatic tensions linked to the One-China principle (Noesselt 2018a: 73-74, 216-217).

<sup>634</sup> Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 374-376; Lunn and Curtis 2020: 3.

<sup>635</sup> Brown 2016: 13-16, 41. In their analysis of UK parliamentary debates on China, Wei et al. (2020: 12) found that human rights issues have moved to the background of debates and attention tended to decrease over the period from 2011 to 2017. Since the issue of human rights belongs to the same thematic cluster as Hong Kong, this finding needs to be reviewed in the context of renewed diplomatic tensions following the 2019 mass protests and the 2020 Hong Kong national security law, as described by Lunn and Curtis (2020: 9-11).

<sup>636</sup> Leoni 2022: 319; Van Noort and Colley 2021: 55-56.

since 2018. Despite predominantly negative perceptions of the country and the BRI, the British government has but refrained from following the US framing of China as a strategic challenge to maintain room for engagement.<sup>637</sup> Similarly, Leoni notes a shift from economic to security interests in UK-China policy in 2019 and 2020. The UK is increasingly rhetorically aligning itself with US security concerns, while advocating a more nuanced approach.<sup>638</sup> This is also reflected in the UK's strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region, to which has historic ties to the region and is even engaged in the Five Eyes. The Five Eyes is an intelligence-sharing network composed of the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Besides NATO, the Five Eyes is regarded as a central security alliance for the UK with great influence on London's security calculations for post-Brexit China policies.<sup>639</sup> The UK-US alignment is viewed to have culminated in the March 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy titled "Global Britain in a Competitive Age." China is called a systemic challenge and even the greatest threat to UK economic security. Still, cooperation is envisaged on transnational issues such as climate change, where China's partner role is gaining importance.<sup>640</sup> A cautionary tone is struck regarding the BRI, which is described as a means of Chinese global power projection.<sup>641</sup> Although the Integrated Review was published outside the observation period of the QCA in this study, it underscores the sharp turn in British China policy in a broader context.

Turning to the German context, we find that Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska, who has written a series of articles concerning Germany's BRI approach, indicates the intricate relationship between Berlin and Beijing, marked by mutual economic interdependence.<sup>642</sup> For both Germany and China, the other country is one of the most important trading partners, so from Germany, the BRI as an economic expansion was received with interest yet with increasing skepticism.<sup>643</sup> Berlin was among the first European capitals to welcome China's BRI initiative as early as October 2014 – thus prior to the NDRC's first official action plan of the BRI – but concerns about the BRI seem to be

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<sup>637</sup> Summers et al. 2022: 176-177; 190-191.

<sup>638</sup> Leoni 2022: 319-320.

<sup>639</sup> Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 374

<sup>640</sup> HM Government 2021: 22, 62.

<sup>641</sup> HM Government 2021: 26.

<sup>642</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018; 2019; 2020.

<sup>643</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 97, 105; 2019: 143-145; 2020: 438.

growing.<sup>644</sup> Although the BRI was welcomed in terms of improved connectivity and the opening up of third markets, tenders for BRI projects were too opaque for the German government, and the allied United States took a critical view of German participation in the AIIB.<sup>645</sup> As a consequence, after an initially fairly positive response, the German government signaled reservations about the compatibility of the BRI with EU investment policy and internal coherence. Yet Berlin looks for ways to incorporate the BRI into existing bilateral and multilateral approaches, such as the regular intergovernmental consultations, the “Chinese-German G20 Cooperation for Sustainable Infrastructure Investment”, the OSCE or the EU-China Connectivity Platform.<sup>646</sup> These are attempts to institutionalize the coordination of interests and policies with Beijing and other partner countries.<sup>647</sup>

German reactions can be divided into support for BRI, particularly in third countries, and simultaneous conflict potential due to diverging ideas of order in both domestic and international climes. Germany is found to recognize a stabilizing potential in the BRI. Concerns are expressed about China's influence in EU policymaking, developmental sustainability principles, and non-reciprocal market access opportunities. According to Harnisch, the heightened attention correlates to more tangible direct impacts when the BRI was rolled out.<sup>648</sup> This generated greater German interest in the BRI after 2016, related to an increasingly critical view of Chinese acquisitions of companies of perceived strategic importance, such as Kuka.<sup>649</sup> In fact, the takeover of the German robotics company Kuka in 2016 is sometimes considered to be a turning point in bilateral relations because Germany subsequently tightened its investment laws and urged more strongly for the creation of a level playing field. This is associated with a growing perception that Chinese investment may provide leverage for political pressure in Germany, the EU, and third countries.<sup>650</sup> Simon Taeuber even propounds the view that around the time of the Kuka takeover, German stakeholders started to openly contest the BRI.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 101, 105; Harnisch 2018: 33-34; Röhr 2018: 227.

<sup>645</sup> Huang 2021: 37.

<sup>646</sup> Gaspers and Lang 2016: 26, 28-29.

<sup>647</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 106, Harnisch 2018: 43.

<sup>648</sup> Harnisch 2018: 33-34, 43-44.

<sup>649</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 97, 101, 106; 2019: 144; 2020: 444; Harnisch 2018: 35.

<sup>650</sup> Huang 2021: 36-37; Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020: 445-447.

<sup>651</sup> Taeuber 2020: 94, 100-101.

In contrast, van der Putten et al. and Gaspers and Lang feel that the German government's interest in the BRI is declining.<sup>652</sup> Röhr, on the other hand, states that stakeholders in Berlin adopt a wait-and-see-attitude because they do not have come to a final political conclusion about the BRI. He also notes the mixed feelings as well as concerns about missing reciprocity and China's growing political influence in the EU.<sup>653</sup> The German media landscape on the subject is described with similar restraint in the literature: Public media attention on the BRI increased, though it appeared that there was no substantive mainstream conversation about the initiative in Germany outside of political and academic epistemic communities in the period under review.<sup>654</sup>

In a more general view, Germany is known to frequently apply the concept of 'silent diplomacy' towards China, especially in the later Merkel administrations. The term means that critical issues, especially human rights, are sidelined in favor of economic interests. This approach is yet controversial in Germany itself, highlighted by the regular China-Germany Human Rights Dialogue and Berlin's self-proclaimed pursuit of a value-based foreign policy.<sup>655</sup> In their study of the underestimated role of the German Bundestag, Kefferpütz, Pongratz, and Brussee found that the value-based approach was driven by a cross-party bloc of MPs in the Scholz government's coalition agreement.<sup>656</sup> The researchers draw a distinction between an increasingly critical tone in the Bundestag toward China and the government's often more pragmatic style, which could be related to differing responsibilities.<sup>657</sup> A value-based approach is also evident in the 2020 Indo-Pacific Guidelines. Although Germany has fewer alliance ties to the region than the UK, it has also directed strategic attention there, seeking like-minded cooperation partners and signaling some reservations toward China.<sup>658</sup> These diverse attitudes and policies thus require scrutiny in the following analysis. Summarizing the researcher's impressions, there is a discrepancy in German BRI attitudes: They appear to encompass a mélange of caution, pragmatism, and moderate cooperation.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Gaspers and Lang 2016: 26; Van der Putten et al. 2016: 8.

<sup>653</sup> Röhr 2021: 208-209.

<sup>654</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 99, 101; Harnisch 2018: 32-33, 37-38; Röhr 2018: 234.

<sup>655</sup> Huang 2021: 34-35.

<sup>656</sup> Kefferpütz et al. 2022: 14.

<sup>657</sup> Kefferpütz et al. 2022: 7-8.

<sup>658</sup> Sakaki 2024: 55-56.

<sup>659</sup> Harnisch 2018: 33-34; Röhr 2018: 232-234, 237-238; Gaspers and Lang 2016: 27-29.

This *mélange* involves reservations that contributes to explaining why none of the countries selected for this study is officially a BRI participant as none of them has signed a Memorandum of Understanding so far. As noted by Atkins et al., abstaining from signing a MoU actually conveys a stronger signal than signing one. According to their analysis, joining the BRI through MoU signings is not particularly costly. These MoUs typically lack strict terms or cooperation mechanism, thereby constraining the often-presumed increased Chinese influence. As China has been mostly unable to foster MoUs in advanced industrialized democracies, their non-participation highlights a specific pattern of skepticism toward the BRI. Even in the case of Italy, which signed an MoU in March 2019, public sentiment towards China soured following the signature, leading to Italy's withdrawal from the MoU in 2021. Therefore, MoU's should not be overestimated as a staunch signal of alignment, whereas refraining from signing could well be interpreted as a stronger signal of doubt.<sup>660</sup> As of 2024, more countries in the world have signed a BRI MoU than abstained, among them 17 countries from the European Union.<sup>661</sup> This reinforces the notion that abstaining from signing MoU is a potent signal. The sheer number of signatories also underscores the absence of strict criteria regarding what constitutes a primary BRI target region. Suggesting that the UK and Germany's non-participation in MoUs is due to their perceived exclusion from the BRI's main target regions lacks evidence. Their non-signing of a MoU should rather be viewed as providing additional insights into Atkins et al.'s research on the reasons for skepticism among advanced industrialized nations. That being said, both the UK and Germany are deemed important in the literature for Beijing's BRI for several reasons. These encompass their roles as potential destinations for BRI-related projects, cooperation partners in third countries, and other pertinent political and economic calculations.<sup>662</sup>

Moreover, both Germany and the UK are of significance for China and the BRI due to their geostrategic position.<sup>663</sup> The two chosen countries, along with the US and France, are considered "the top four Western democracies."<sup>664</sup> They have significant weight in economic and military world politics, especially due to their shared security cooperation

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<sup>660</sup> Atkins, et al. 2023: 11.

<sup>661</sup> Nedopil 2023.

<sup>662</sup> Van der Putten et al. 2016: 6-9. See also Harnisch (2018: 31) concerning Germany.

<sup>663</sup> Xiao et al. 2019: 72.

<sup>664</sup> Gravelle et al. 2017: 760.

within NATO.<sup>665</sup> Both Germany and the UK share several years of in-depths partnership with China. In 2004, China signed strategic partnerships with Germany and the UK, which have been updated to comprehensive strategic partnerships in later years. The interest attached to these partnerships was quite different. With Germany, Beijing is striving for stronger economic partnership. The UK is still of great importance to China as a financial powerhouse, as a trade and investment partner, and also because of its historical ties to Hong Kong.<sup>666</sup> While all of these aspects only simplify the complex bilateral and multilateral relationships, they nevertheless illustrate the relevance of the selected European states for the analysis presented here. This is also in line with the examined country-specific BRI research.<sup>667</sup> The perceptions of the selected countries are thus not only of analytic value but also political importance, both for domestic policy-makers and for China seeking comprehend the respective playing field. In general, the consensus view in the literature seems to be that BRI perceptions of stakeholders at the central governmental level are diverse. The researchers note that policy-makers are embracing a wait-and-see approach to the BRI, manifested in reactive responses or even the absence of such.<sup>668</sup> Since the literature abounds with such inconclusiveness concerning BRI sentiments, the exploration of perceptions in this study promises to elucidate whether this ambivalence<sup>669</sup> is a matter of time, policy fields or internal contestation.

### **3.4. Conclusions from the BRI-Research Landscape**

This section systematically reviewed the existing research landscape that informs our study. It demonstrated that there are diverse approaches to investigate the BRI, but surveys and media analyses appeared to be the dominant method of choice to analyze country perceptions of the BRI. Conversely, there is insufficient research on the particular BRI-perceptions of political-decision makers. This accompanies the issue of shallow methodological and analytical depth regarding the concept of securitization, which has been noted concerning the securitization spectrum on the theoretical-conceptual front and few studies on the BRI's securitization on the empirical front. Although several reviewed country-case studies of the BRI mention security concerns, they do not elaborate

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<sup>665</sup> Gravelle et al. 2017: 760.

<sup>666</sup> Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 374; Le Corre 2018: 168.

<sup>667</sup> See: Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 104. Highlighting their powerful position in Europe, Ciesielska-Klikowska (2019: 148; 220: 446, fn. 2) calls Germany, the UK and France the 'Big Three'.

<sup>668</sup> E.g., Nicolas 2019; Van der Putten et al. 2016: 8-9.

<sup>669</sup> Harnisch 2018: 44.

on (de-)securitization. In turn, Rogelja and Tsimonis<sup>670</sup> thoroughly track the construction of China-related securitization but do neither distinguish national differences nor focus exclusively on BRI discourses. These limitations and research gaps confirm the novel and innovative character of the present study, which examines precisely this (de)securitization in the selected countries. This approach can thus serve as a nuanced model for conducting comprehensive studies in different countries, well beyond the scope of the BRI. The challenge is that while previous research suggests that the BRI is subject to securitization, this proposition has not yet been subjected to serious horizontal (across space) and vertical (across time) validation. Concomitantly, the antithesis that the BRI is desecuritized must not be neglected. To perform this balancing act, the proposed model of security dimensions is able to capture the thematic foci in discourses both in terms of their securitization and desecuritization.

Linking the previous findings of the literature review to the specifications of the security dimensions, we find that all issue dimensions can be traced in BRI studies. This is evident in the preceding chapters, where key terms of the literature linked to the AIIB, strategic acquisitions, military installations, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and 5G discussions emerged. In a global view of these issues, the classical dimension of economic security prevails in the studies, which may be related to the very infrastructure investment nature of the initiative. The issues of military, cyber, and human security – particularly in their geopolitical-normative reading – are also frequently found in the literature, whereas ecologic security seems to play a secondary role. A closer look reveals studies on this specific dimension of environmental security related to the BRI: Incomplete or missing risk assessments on the ecological impact of projects can contribute to serious environmental problems.<sup>671</sup> Particularly, the previously cited study by Liu and Bennett underscored that environmental impact studies are profoundly more optimistic when they are issued by Chinese than non-Chinese scholars.<sup>672</sup> Their study highlights grave differences in scientific approaches to impact assessment, but also concerning the practical dimension of eco-environmental governance across the BRI. In a report published by the influential US think tank CSIS, Carey and Ladislav recognize the positive potential

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<sup>670</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020.

<sup>671</sup> Lawrence et al. 2019: 26.

<sup>672</sup> Liu and Bennett 2022: 169.



of BRI for promoting environmental sensitivity. Despite the progress in establishing a so-called “Green BRI”, they state the current framework is too voluntary to have an impact beyond free-riding.<sup>673</sup> Chinese scholars have also been keen to research the environmental impacts and their corresponding security implications for the BRI. European voices are more critical of the potential negative climate change implications caused by BRI.<sup>674</sup> Despite the concerns, the environmental domain is presented as a promising field for collaboration, as stressed by Benintendi et al.<sup>675</sup> According to Saha, Western technical expertise is needed to limit potential environmental damage from BRI projects. The environmental sector thus offers opportunities to contribute international expertise in a mutually beneficial way and thus promote cooperation.<sup>676</sup>

With respect to the other security dimensions, we note that the reviewed literature in the spatial dimension is mostly concerned with the national level, corresponding with a focus on the state in the reference dimension. On a global level, there are prominent references to a shifting world order, particularly associated with threat and risk narratives within the danger dimension. Upon closer reading, these narratives typically refer to the CCP as the identified normative adversary that uses the BRI as a means to expand its power at home and abroad.<sup>677</sup> Such danger perceptions call for political attention to strengthen means of prevention and reaction in the form of investment screening or initiatives such as FOIP or the EU-Connectivity Strategy. These strategies are of medium range and can thus be located at the regional and international levels in the spatial dimension. With regard to these strategies, there remains scant research on their status in national-level political discourses, particularly in parliamentary settings – a gap that can be addressed by our analysis.

Moreover, sub-national entities involving certain cities and interest groups, particularly companies, are identified as driving forces of practical BRI cooperation.<sup>678</sup> Both at this low range of the spatial dimension and at higher levels, the research describes possible vulnerabilities for critical infrastructures. These diffuse vulnerabilities are associated

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<sup>673</sup> Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 1-2, 6.

<sup>674</sup> Chatzky and McBride 2020; Bej 2019; Geeraerts 2019: 3.

<sup>675</sup> Benintendi, et al. 2020.

<sup>676</sup> Saha 2020: 253-254.

<sup>677</sup> See e.g. Colley and Van Noort 2022: 121, 142; Shah 2021: 1;

<sup>678</sup> See e.g., Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020: 448; Nicolas 2019, Ekman et al. 2018: 48; Harnisch 2018: 31, 39; Seaman and Ekman 2016: 22; Gaspers and Lang 2016: 24.

with Chinese investments and in technical areas. They are consequently considered as triggers for protective policies such as stricter investment laws after the Kuka case in Germany. Already at this stage, the danger dimension turns out to be rather problematic because most assessments do not directly refer to the extent of damage, which demands further attention in the upcoming analysis.

Overall, the literature review uncovered major disparities in how BRI relates to security, which ultimately forms the setting for national parliamentary debates, political cooperation, or confrontation. Gaining a deeper understanding of this is critical to eradicating misunderstandings and identifying cooperation opportunities.<sup>679</sup> After analyzing the BRI perceptions presented in the reviewed studies, it is evident that there are diverse and even conflicting attitudes on the project both within and between the countries under review. In other words: There is no uniform story of the BRI – neither in the way the story is narrated nor in the way the story is heard and understood. Drawing from the literature, however, three prominent discourse lines on the BRI's diverse connections to security can be derived as a central result of this chapter:

- i. The BRI is challenged by security issues.
- ii. The BRI tackles security issues.
- iii. The BRI creates security issues.

The BRI, therefore, functions as a projection screen for multifaceted security understandings and interests.<sup>680</sup> The following chapters will address how these three security lines are reflected in the respective national BRI perspectives. In the last analytical chapter (Chapter 10), these three discourse lines will be reviewed from a trilateral perspective, rejoining the central results about BRI views in China, Germany, and the UK. To this end, however, it is first necessary to explain the methodological procedure.

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<sup>679</sup> Holzer 2020: 184.

<sup>680</sup> Taeuber 2020: 91.

#### **4. Analytical Framework for Researching Belt and Road Discourses**

This study aims to explore the extent of BRI security perceptions voiced in Germany and the UK as will be presented in Part III of this study. While prior investigations on the BRI focused on national media representations, this study shifts attention to the political elites on the national level, primarily in the parliamentary context. Accordingly, the subsequent section justifies central decisions regarding the research unit, including the advantages and limitations of the present study. The second section of the chapter addresses data processing questions and determines the levels of securitization in terms of variety and intensity. This involves the implementation of a mixed-method approach, which combines qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis.

Apart from facilitating a comparison of security perceptions of the BRI, the results enable an evaluation of the quality of securitization in Germany and the UK. The quality of securitization is based on interpreting the tone of statements as a measure of intensity and the security policy areas established on the issue dimension (Figure 1) as a measure of extensiveness. The research design facilitates a systematic analysis for comparative securitization studies beyond the BRI. By observing the themes and frequencies of BRI utterances, the model maps out prevalent and subtle perceptions. This dramatically distinguishes our model from other approaches as it encompasses the whole securitization spectrum. Accordingly, the following chapter aims to address Baele and Sterck's criticism that empirical securitization studies very often lack comprehensible methodological choices and instruments.<sup>681</sup> This way, the study contributes to the existing securitization literature by employing a novel approach premised on a multidimensional model of security.

The Chinese documents are not analyzed using the same coding scheme as German and British perceptions due to two main reasons. Firstly, Chinese perspectives supplement the research puzzle, while the following analytical framework focuses on evaluating the securitization of 'alter' perceptions corresponding to the central research question. Secondly, the communication style is fundamentally different and lacks securitized language, requiring a distinct qualitative assessment. As a result, the upcoming chapters contain limited information on the evaluation and interpretation of the Chinese perspec-

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<sup>681</sup> Baele and Sterck 2015: 1122.

tive, which will be covered in more detail in Part II. Still, the confrontation of ‘ego’ and ‘alter’ perceptions is ensured by processing the primary data for all three countries using the MAXQDA software and qualitatively aggregating the results along the major security categories.

#### **4.1. Selecting National-Level Political Elites to Analyze BRI Perceptions**

This section is dedicated to outlining the analytical steps to derive an analytical framework to effectively capture BRI perceptions in Germany and the UK. The first step involves probing whose perceptions and utterances are relevant to provide an access point for securitization studies. The original securitization concept by Wæver favored state representatives pointing to national-level political elites. He stated that: “By uttering ‘security’, a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means necessary to block it”<sup>682</sup>. The focus on political elites as agents of securitization is broadly recognized and applied in research. Although Holger Stritzel warns that this could lead to an overly static and exclusive perspective on securitization<sup>683</sup>, the preselection of agents is inevitable to provide a viable comparative framework. While this justifies the focus on political elites due to their powerful position, defining who is considered a state representative is another intricate issue. Rychnovská, as discussed before, identified parliaments as crucial arenas for securitization by state representatives, as they bring together both speaking securitizing actors and a listening audience in a dynamic process.<sup>684</sup> Parliaments are vital for core political processes and societal representations in democracies like Germany or the UK.<sup>685</sup> With the aim of creating a comparable set of data for Germany and the UK, this section elaborates on this securitization arena and its wider circles.

Upon initial examination, it is evident that definitions for both parliamentary elites and what may be identified as visible traces of discourses vary greatly. Parliaments comprise a broad spectrum of actors that influence what is called a parliamentary discourse. Even by focusing on the national-level parliaments only, an abundance of actors is in-

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<sup>682</sup> Wæver 1995: 55.

<sup>683</sup> Stritzel 2012: 556.

<sup>684</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 12-13.

<sup>685</sup> Researchers Kronenberg and Hornheber (2019: 3-5) demonstrate that these representation processes are subject to fluctuations and constant social negotiation, which demands attention to these dynamics while investigating securitization (Kronenberg & Horneber, 2019) within these institutions.

volved, including elected stakeholders, government representatives, scientific services, lobby groups, and invited experts. This raises the question of how extensively parliamentary discourses shall be defined without losing focus on the most critical political debates and still being able to manage the volume of material. In light of these varying definitions, the analysis employs a flexible approach capturing the whole range of utterances of national-level political elites, thus parliamentarians and government officials, as well as published expert opinion or scientific publications involved in parliamentary processes like hearings. This approach raises questions about determining which actors to include or exclude, which will be detailed in the following. Moreover, the process of collecting and analyzing a set of comparable documents will be explained. This ensures the identification of the (de)securitization of BRI perceptions of political elites at the national level, both within and influencing parliamentary discourses.

Reviewing the analytical frameworks of other studies shows that securitization and discourse studies have expanded over the years, becoming more adaptable by incorporating non-governmental actors such as think tanks<sup>686</sup> or the media<sup>687</sup>. Neither of these actors is endowed with legislative decision-making rights in the first place. Nevertheless, they are key influencers in a democratic decision-making process that involves public deliberation. Unless these entities are included in the legislature's policy deliberations, such as in public hearings, their influence remains largely untraceable. Taken further, this broader public securitization arena means that not only elected parliamentarians can be defined as parliamentary elites if persons or entities are involved in the documented political information process. This issue demands a pragmatic decision at this juncture: In this study, the parliamentary elite refers to all those who participate in the formation of opinion in the legislative process, where participation is documented in the form of publications on the website of the respective legislative. Such a comprehensive conception lives up to the above characterization of parliaments as key arenas of securitization, where both the listening and the securitizing actors can be found.<sup>688</sup> The study therewith includes all those actors who, by virtue of their position of social or institutional power, can exert publicly demonstrable influence on securitization in the legislature in the form

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<sup>686</sup> E.g., by Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020.

<sup>687</sup> E.g., by Vultee 2011.

<sup>688</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 12-13. See Chapter 2.2.

of textual bodies.<sup>689</sup> This target group is also of empirical relevance as Van der Putten et al. explain that the main target audiences of Chinese BRI diplomacy are political and economic stakeholders.<sup>690</sup>

Demirsu justifies the focus on parliaments and government officials arguing that these discourses “encompasses all the argumentation, justification, concerns and assurances”<sup>691</sup> in national security matters. Balzacq also declares that an issue is of sufficient operational salience for securitization studies when it “should be a target for parliamentary action”<sup>692</sup>. Despite the decision-making dominance of the executive branch, the legislature has become a non-negligible player in Western foreign policy.<sup>693</sup> Parliaments are crucial bodies to accept the securitization move by providing formal support for the use of countermeasures. The actors involved are vested with the legitimacy to speak security due to the liberal democratic state model. This model yet implies that any security talk can be contested and deliberated in the parliamentary arena.<sup>694</sup> Building securitization studies on parliamentary debates and associated documents hence acknowledges the legislatures’ special role in the functioning of states. Parliaments are a central democratic repository that encompasses the policy-relevant lines of argumentation, justification, and security concerns of a country’s major parties, including government representatives.<sup>695</sup> In democratically organized states, these bodies are directly and indirectly legitimized by the electorate, but they also involve non-elected persons or entities for crucial information purposes. On the one hand, this expands the circle of studied policy-forming elites and relevant documents. The larger circle of elites reflects a more comprehensive range of security perceptions required for a foreign policy decision. This can be evidenced, for example, by the research of Olga Malinova, who also uses a broad concept of elites.<sup>696</sup> On the other hand, the picture of elites remains incomplete at best

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<sup>689</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 39.

<sup>690</sup> Van der Putten et al. 2016: 8.

<sup>691</sup> Demirsu 2017: 664.

<sup>692</sup> Balzacq 2010: 67. Note that Balzacq does not specify the qualification for whether an issue should be targeted by the parliament. His remark, nonetheless, highlights the importance of the body and its members for securitization.

<sup>693</sup> Ihalainen and Matikainen 2016: 3, 8.

<sup>694</sup> Roe 2008: 615, 619-620, 632; Balzacq 2005: 185.

<sup>695</sup> Demirsu 2017: 664.

<sup>696</sup> Malinova 2018. Her analysis of the construction of the “Other” in Russian political elite discourses examines the rhetoric of the president, members of parliament (MPs), and political experts.

because some participants remain analytically invisible due to secrecy issues or due to second-tier positions in parliamentary offices.<sup>697</sup>

Despite the importance of parliaments as a public podium and oversight body, elected power holders also perform on other stages to present and negotiate security positions, which bears the question of expanding the dataset beyond parliamentary publications. Although Demirsu acknowledges the dominant role of the executive in security policy, she concentrates only on parliamentary discussions.<sup>698</sup> Kefferpütz, Pongratz, and Brussee confirm the dominant role of the German government in managing China relations while demonstrating that the parliament has decisively narrowed the German 5G policy due to reservations towards China. Despite rarely visible effects on government policy regarding China, the authors emphasize the importance of the parliamentary control and scrutiny function. This function is elevated by growing public interest, reflected in more frequent debates on China in the German Bundestag.<sup>699</sup>

The approach employed in this study considers this power distribution by incorporating the documents of the executive beyond the parliamentary debate while maintaining the legislative branch as the primary focus for selection and analysis. The main dataset comprises documents pertaining to the BRI published on the websites of the respective national parliaments, which involves documents from both chambers of parliament in the countries under examination.<sup>700</sup> This decision follows the recommendation of Ihalainen and Matikainen: Parliamentary databases are the central starting point for the analysis but are supplemented by other parliamentary documents, such as committee reports and studies published on parliamentary websites.<sup>701</sup> These documents already include executive statements in the form of written answers by the government, but these

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<sup>697</sup> In his analysis of how the BRI provides China with influence in the Netherlands, Steven Langendonk (2020: 246-247) analyzed an even broader set of actors: the media, business elites, and foreign policy actors. This very broad conception of the basis of the study is rejected on the one hand because of the comparability between countries, and on the other hand because of the abundance of data which results from the comparatively long period of investigation.

<sup>698</sup> Demirsu 2017: 664.

<sup>699</sup> Kefferpütz et al. 2022: 8, 17.

<sup>700</sup> For Germany, the official websites of the Bundestag (Bundestag.de) and Bundesrat (bundesrat.de) were consulted. In the UK, the official Website of the UK Parliament (hansard.parliament.uk) was consulted, which collects documents from both the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Appendix 3 contains the complete list of collected documents for Germany, while Appendix 4 pertains to the UK.

<sup>701</sup> Ihalainen and Matikainen 2016: 5.

would be incomplete without taking into consideration their pre-designed positions on the executive websites, as these are signals to domestic and international audiences. Accordingly, the document collection needs to be expanded yet balanced to avoid overstretching, which is further reasoned below. Therefore, the collection of documents remains limited to the primary parliamentary and government websites.<sup>702</sup>

Public parliamentary debates are thus analyzed side by side with archival documents, parliamentary records, hearings, reports by research services<sup>703</sup>, government releases, and publications officially circulated within the parliaments<sup>704</sup> to capture the complexity of political discourse.<sup>705</sup> As written residuals of elite perceptions of the BRI, these documents reflect and shape the interpretation of the BRI as a threat or an opportunity by translating, reinterpreting, or rejecting the Chinese security considerations signaled. This approach captures the major national-level ‘alter’ perceptions of Germany and the UK as liberal democratic ‘receivers’ of the BRI originating from China. The data corpus for the Chinese ‘ego’ view draws from the official English website, the Belt and Road

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<sup>702</sup> The primary websites of the respective governments have been consulted on BRI-related documents. These were gov.uk for the UK and bundesregierung.de for Germany. However, as the German website did not provide any assessments by the Federal government or speeches on the BRI, the search was expanded to the key ministries dealing with BRI-related matters at the national level. These are the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, and the Federal Foreign Office. While the initial search yielded some results, only four documents from the Federal Foreign Office contained substantial content relevant to the BRI. The majority of documents lacked any reference to the BRI in their headlines and contained mere mentions that did not offer any political assessment. Additionally, while some documents were tagged with the BRI keyword, they failed to include even a single sentence discussing the initiative, underscoring the significant challenge of obtaining relevant materials on this topic. While this may suggest a bias towards the government’s perceptions in the UK data, this apparent bias is partially counterbalanced by a greater quantity, and therefore visibility, of responses from the German government to parliamentary inquiries. Appendix 3 contains the complete list of collected documents for Germany, while Appendix 4 pertains to the UK.

<sup>703</sup> The Parliamentary Research Service (Wissenschaftlicher Dienst) of the Bundestag is a parliamentary support facility primarily dedicated to offering policy advice to members of parliament. The services provided by the Research Service range from telephone inquiries and the compilation of materials from publications to the creation of written documents of varying scope, which are commissioned by the members of the Bundestag. These documents are required to be directly applicable by members of the parliament within the political decision-making process. The information compiled by the Research Service adheres to the principles of political neutrality, objectivity, and impartiality. Therefore, it refrains from taking a political stance and typically does not draft legislative texts or provide political consulting on political-strategic matters. However, especially on contentious issues, there is a risk that the Research Service's opinions might be interpreted as one-sided. In addition, implicit and explicit value judgments might still be present in the information and should be clearly marked as such (Schöler and von Winter 2019: 163-165, 172, 175-178).

<sup>704</sup> These are testimonies, reports or studies for public hearings that were officially circulated among the elected members in the Parliament, which can be verified by the parliamentary archive number.

<sup>705</sup> Ihalainen and Matikainen 2016: 5.



Portal. The website provides the most comprehensive collection of official BRI documents. These documents, therefore, most closely reflect the image that the Chinese government intends to create.<sup>706</sup> In terms of case selection, the comparative design based on two recipient Western countries and Chinese signals is certainly ambitious. As outlined in the previous chapter, these Western countries are of major importance to the international security landscape.<sup>707</sup> How these documents were processed for analysis is explained in the next section. The subsequent lines further expand on debates around the research object and case selection for conducting a BRI securitization study.

Taking a closer look at the research object, these countries' foreign policy perceptions are rarely compared in detail, particularly in the field of securitization studies. In their landmark study, Gravelle et al. demonstrated that comparing the foreign policy views of the UK and Germany (along with the United States and France) is a doable and insightful task, although they conducted quantitative public surveys rather than elite research. They justify the selection by arguing that the United Kingdom and Germany are among those Western democracies with the highest military expenditures. Both are NATO members who engage in frequent diplomatic exchanges on international security issues.<sup>708</sup> Their NATO membership implies that the domestic securitization of international projects like the BRI may be elevated to an international level. Conversely, Washington's political elites view the BRI as highly securitized, as shown in multiple studies, so these perceptions could influence its European partner's cooperation dynamics.<sup>709</sup> It could become a matter of alliance in both countries under review how security policy attitudes toward the BRI converge.<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> For the analysis of Chinese signals see Chapter 5. Appendix 1 contains the complete list of all Chinese official BRI documents collected.

<sup>707</sup> See e.g., Montesano 2019: 152.

<sup>708</sup> Gravelle et al. 2017: 757; 760-761.

<sup>709</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 318-319; Malik 2020: 18-19.

<sup>710</sup> For example, Chinese military expansion, such as the Djibouti base opened in 2017, is a common factor in the strategic interests of all four countries. However, it is not widely discussed outside expert circles. China's first foreign naval base in Djibouti is located near the Héron naval base, one of the largest French bases abroad, and the US base Camp Lemonnier, where British forces are also stationed. In addition, Germany is participating in Djibouti as part of Operation Atalanta. While Chinese representatives deny that the naval base is part of the BRI, foreign publications suggest a connection between these projects due to their interconnected nature (Styan 2021: 120; Ploch Blanchard and Collins 2019; Andresen 2019: 126; Ekman et al. 2018: 57; Seaman and Ekman 2016: 22-23; Montesano 2019: 143).

In both countries, the executive has prerogative powers relating to foreign affairs. Accordingly, the executive in both countries defines the primary modus operandi of involvement in the BRI on the national political level, which is discussed and scrutinized within the national parliaments.<sup>711</sup> Notwithstanding these apparent similarities between the selected countries, there exist noteworthy divergences in the institutional frameworks and strategic cultures. While the UK and Germany are classified as parliamentary democracies, the latter is most reluctant to use military means because of its historical legacy.<sup>712</sup> Furthermore, the UK parliament is estimated to be a primarily reactive body, wherein the executive controls the Commons agenda and puts forward measures to which Westminster responds. In Berlin, all factions have a more significant say in shaping the parliamentary agenda and allocating time. The agenda is not controlled by the government but is determined by an Elders' Council composed of the President of the Bundestag, his deputies, and representatives from different factions. In recent times, the UK's institutional system saw an increase in the role of the House of Commons (HC), which became more assertive in its relationship with the government.<sup>713</sup> Similarly, the Bundestag is gaining more importance in terms of foreign policy vis-à-vis the Government.<sup>714</sup>

In both countries, constitutional research stresses that the dualism of government and parliament is exaggerated. They are not independent units, with the executive branch being created from parliamentary majorities and acting within the parliament. The German parliamentary system is operating in a more consensual mode, with the government aiming to achieve broad-based legitimacy. The UK parliament is seen as more competitive. While the government is part of the legislative body, its distinct composition, led by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, contrasts with a weaker opposition, which operates as a separate entity with its own leader and agenda. Due to its first-past-the-post voting systems, the UK has developed a persistent (yet not absolute) two-party system dominated by the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Germany's intricate mixed-member proportional representation system has cultivated a multi-party system. This explains the more consensual parliamentary mode, as governments are formed on a coa-

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<sup>711</sup> Cladi 2022: 178; Oppermann and Höse 2011: 55-56.

<sup>712</sup> Gravelle et al. 2017: 757; 760-761.

<sup>713</sup> Russell 2021: 453; Koß and Tan 2019: 371; Norton 2019: 999-1001.

<sup>714</sup> Link 2009: 544.

litional basis between two or more parties that usually represent the parliamentary majority.<sup>715</sup>

These insights into the political systems corroborate the necessity and challenges of understanding the executive as an integral component of parliamentary discourses, but not necessarily vice versa. These lines underscore the nature of the research approach: The comparison between German and British parliamentary discourses on the BRI can be characterized as the method of agreement. This method involves identifying cases with similar outcomes but potentially different causal factors. By contrast, the method of difference focuses on cases with similar conditions but varying outcomes. In the present research theater, both Germany and the UK are being targeted by the BRI, even though they have not signed an MoU and show no inclination to do so. This shared outcome of being BRI partners and targets while not signing MoUs suggests a shared characteristic that rising securitized perceptions among the national-level political stakeholders might explain. The noted similarities reinforce the approach, as both advanced industrialized democracies share some commonalities in their institutional system. This provides a basis for comparison that can be dismissed as a decisive factor according to the extent of their similarities. On the other hand, the described differences in national legacies, security roles, EU membership, institutional modi, and historical relations with the PRC suggest some country-specific factors. Factors such as these could impact securitization and, consequently, the decisions of these democracies regarding the BRI. The method of agreement aims to uncover underlying factors or patterns that might be driving the observed common outcome.<sup>716</sup> With this case selection method, it is not assumed that the states exhibit the same pattern of securitization; instead, it is examined in more detail how and why these patterns resemble or differ.

In this context, the chosen approach allows not only the comparison of national perceptions but even that of policy preferences. It is these dominant preferences that define negotiating situations within the alliance and beyond, such as with China. The extent to

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<sup>715</sup> Lehner and Widmaier 2005: 85-88, 102.

<sup>716</sup> Note that the federal structure solidifies a distinct disparity in the legislative systems of the UK and Germany, as the federal states in Germany establish their legislative chambers. Furthermore, Germany's legal framework is overseen by the 'Bundesverfassungsgericht' (Federal Constitutional Court), an institution, that does not exist in the UK (Lehner and Widmaier 2005: 83-85, 102). Due to operational constraints, the nuanced variations in the political system's modus operandi are not extensively explored in our analysis of BRI perceptions.

which consensus or dissonance develops regarding the BRI is of political relevance for China and the countries under review. Accordingly, Malik emphasizes the need to juxtapose the Chinese and Western rhetoric to grasp the persuasiveness of Chinese narratives, the logic of the rhetor, and the legitimacy of the BRI from the audience's point of view.<sup>717</sup> This again points to the significance of analyzing the signaling, interpreting and responding circle of the social act across different national settings.

Previous analyses of parliamentary and political elite texts underscore both the feasibility and limitations of this approach. Wei et al. found that parliamentary debates are essential sources for analyzing a state's foreign policy. These debates and related documents contain information about diplomatic activities and national attitudes. According to our literature review and Wei et al., the analysis of the evolution of issues over time has not been adequately researched.<sup>718</sup> In addition, Abercrombie and Batista-Navarro note that comparative parliamentary analyses are rare. Most studies do not analyze more than one legislature or conduct a cross-lingual comparison of documents. While they acknowledge the higher methodological requirements and hurdles, Abercrombie and Batista Navarro call for closing the research gap of comparative studies that the present study aims to address.<sup>719</sup> This research gap starkly contrasts the benefits of exploring political perceptions through this type of material. According to Urdinez et al., such an analysis allows for comparing the lines of argumentation for and against BRI in the political process. It facilitates understanding national and cross-national discursive alliances expressing opportunities and fears.<sup>720</sup>

The observed research gap suggests severe challenges and limitations to any approach to studying (cross-)national security perceptions, which needs further exploration. Van Noort and Colley put forward that it is infeasible to map the entire national discourse, so elite statements provide a framework to tease out prominent policy positions.<sup>721</sup> Our approach has the advantage of offering a more comprehensive account of elites' views on the BRI, but no approach can claim to involve an exhaustive record. To avoid the suspi-

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<sup>717</sup> Malik 2020: 3.

<sup>718</sup> Wei et al. 2020: 1, 3.

<sup>719</sup> Abercrombie and Batista-Navarro 2020: 250.

<sup>720</sup> Urdinez et al. 2018: 246-247; 249-250.

<sup>721</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 48.

cion of cherry-picking, the appendix to this study contains a complete list of the documents examined.

Reviewing the parliamentary elite's discourses by national-level political stakeholders captures whether and how threat perceptions are discussed in the public decision-making arena. It does not answer whether these elites truly consider the issue relevant to security policy, as it is impossible to look inside their heads. This practical limitation becomes less significant when considering that a security question needs to be expressed as such to be placed on the political agenda – regardless of the intentions of the actor expressing it. Accordingly, the focus is not on the intractable issue of political stakeholders' intentions but on the content of the speech act about the BRI in different contexts. Van Noort and Colley similarly echo this idea.<sup>722</sup> It is not the intention, but the political choice to use the security label is of interest.<sup>723</sup>

Beyond this, the communication styles of the selected countries need to be taken into consideration while analyzing their respective perspectives. According to Erin Meyer's "The Culture Map," Chinese is among the higher end of the communicating scale, ranking cultures from low context to high context. In high-context cultures, it is expected that a counterpart in a conversation will read between the lines to decipher a message, whereas, in low-context cultures, messages are expressed as explicit and usually have to be taken at face value. Meyer ranked countries on a communicating scale, forming communication clusters. According to this, the US ranks the lowest-context culture. It forms a cluster with Germany and the UK, both ranking a little higher than the US.<sup>724</sup> The political choice to use the security label is, therefore, dependent on the cultural context. Concerning the Chinese context, more interpretation is necessary to comprehend security implications and the mere meaning of words – even in English translations. Low-context cultures like the German or the British appear similar at first sight, but this is relativized when considering their propensity for direct or indirect negative feedback. Germans demonstrate a high tendency for direct negative feedback, which is considered inappropriately offensive by cultures tending towards indirect negative criticism, such

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<sup>722</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 45-46.

<sup>723</sup> Langenohl 2019: 65.

<sup>724</sup> Meyer 2014: 35-36, 39-40, 47.

as the British or Chinese.<sup>725</sup> As this study aims to reveal uttered threat perceptions, it is to be expected that those are to be spotted by frank criticism and negative tone in Germany. In the UK, security threats are expected to be communicated in a balanced style involving softeners. In contrast, the Chinese way of describing potential challenges is framed through understanding what their priorities in cooperation are (as that implies challenges) and sensing what issues are avoided.<sup>726</sup> These differences in communication already require per se a qualitative approach aimed at understanding as a methodological direction, which can be supported by word count statistics requiring further in-depth deciphering of messages. Moreover, sensitivity to these modes of communication might call into question any comparability of securitization measures, as these could overlook signs of insecurity. This can be yet considered a merit of the applied approach, which has the potential to identify communicative techniques employed to construct security discourses.<sup>727</sup> Since the Copenhagen School places direct messages about security at the center of an investigation, our study of BRI perceptions may, indeed, run the risk of missing non-verbal nuances of insecurity by fixating on what is being said.

Related to this challenge is a form of insecurity labeled the “Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma”, according to Lene Hansen. It applies to large parts of securitization studies due to their overwhelming focus on speech acts. The Copenhagen School takes into consideration how actors speak about security. Consequently, it neglects that speech might not be possible or even aggravate the threat being faced.<sup>728</sup> Particularly, elite-centered approaches are criticized because power-holders, themselves, might marginalize the voices of the powerless.<sup>729</sup> Security debates may thus not fully represent security concerns because those who are silent can, by definition, not be heard.<sup>730</sup> As a result, silent desecuritizations can lead to the disadvantage of those not securitized, as it might exclude them from political programs.<sup>731</sup> Any discourse sample represents only a

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<sup>725</sup> Meyer 2014: 71-72

<sup>726</sup> Meyer 2014: 77, 80-85.

<sup>727</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 45.

<sup>728</sup> Hansen 2000: 287.

<sup>729</sup> Nyman 2018: 110; McDonald 2008: 574.

<sup>730</sup> Fierke 2016: 74.

<sup>731</sup> Hansen 2012: 544.

small fraction of attitudes, and even privileged discourse participants may not express a particular position because it is considered socially unacceptable.<sup>732</sup>

Admittedly, the study of Belt and Road discourses can be subject to the biases described. Bartsch argues that the public debate about China and the BRI is distorted because there is an inherent fear among company managers, diplomats, and journalists alike to face retaliatory measures such as declined visa applications.<sup>733</sup> Constructivists claim to observe the unobservable, such as perceptions, by interpreting corresponding residues in policy papers or public debates.<sup>734</sup> Conversely, leaving aside the absence of residuals risks hiding patterns of power that affect security policies.<sup>735</sup> Political discourses are generally an expression of constant power struggles. The construction meaning is always shaped by the institutional privileges of particular actors, groups, values, or interests vying for interpretive dominance.<sup>736</sup> With regard to this fallacy, our research framework, based on Daase's genealogy, has the potential to trace which security categories are less used or even avoided. This gives room to Hansen's accounts on desecuritization without overstressing the empirical framework.<sup>737</sup> The reasons for securitization and desecuritization need further interpretation beyond the material collected, which exceeds the scope of the research question of assessing the current state of perceptions. That requires a detailed process tracing method, which might build on the present study's results as some potential influencing factors for securitization and desecuritization are identified by our analysis. Consequently, future studies that build upon our findings are invited to test these factors using other country cases, political stakeholders, and methods. Because our research design is able to identify the frequency or absence of codes, the later discussion of the results includes more specifics on these conceivable research directions. With these advantages and limitations of the research object in mind, the next section turns to the methodological choices of this study, embarking on a combination of discourse and qualitative content analysis.

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<sup>732</sup> Heindl 2015b: 308, fn. 7.

<sup>733</sup> Bartsch 2019: 7-8.

<sup>734</sup> Farrell 2002: 60.

<sup>735</sup> Similar to the critical constructivist criticism of conventional constructivism according to Hopf (1998: 183).

<sup>736</sup> Wojczewski 2016: 24.

<sup>737</sup> Cohen 1978: 95.

## 4.2. Analyzing BRI Statements and Security Perceptions with MAXQDA

The previous chapter explained how a study of BRI security perceptions can be implemented by focusing on the utterances of political stakeholders performing in national-level parliamentary and governmental arenas. The decision to approach these signals published on the respective parliamentary and key government websites is, however, only one piece of the whole research design puzzle. Accordingly, this section addresses how and why the combination of discourse and qualitative content analysis methods is used to analyze these statements and how the collected documents are coded and interpreted. Imperative to the research design is to determine whether the BRI discourse is securitized and which issues the elites focus on. This logically involves the possibility that it is desecuritized, i.e., politicized if it is, or even non-politicized in the sense that neither the state nor the public copes with the issue.<sup>738</sup> As an innovative contribution to the existing research landscape, this section develops a framework to capture these nuances and compare them on aggregated scales of securitization.

We have already established the view that discourse analysis is the most prominent approach to conducting securitization studies.<sup>739</sup> In political science, discourse analysis has become the label for a profusion of methodological variants. What these variations largely share is that language is at the center of analysis, shaping the intersubjective constructions of reality.<sup>740</sup> Accordingly, discourse analysis is concerned with meta-structures. These meta-structures represent collective interpretative frameworks and determine the bargaining space of political actors. When researchers aim to unravel discourses, they ultimately aim to capture how social worlds are ordered, described and explained. This places the overarching approach of discourse analysis in the tradition of hermeneutic techniques in the social sciences.<sup>741</sup> Although the very term “discourse” is interpreted in multifarious ways, discourse analyses usually aim to determine how and what kind of structures of meaning are produced beyond situations or individuals.<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>738</sup> Emmers 2019: 175.

<sup>739</sup> Karyotis and Patrikios 2010: 45; Balzacq 2011a: 31.

<sup>740</sup> Wojczewski 2016: 24.

<sup>741</sup> Wojczewski 2016: 24; Heindl 2015a: 264, 273.

<sup>742</sup> Traue et al. 2019: 565-566.



This, in turn, links the research approach to the aforementioned linguistic turn in security studies to comprehend how security politics is conducted through language.<sup>743</sup>

In this study, the analysis is performed through a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative content and discourse analysis, focusing on rhetoric characteristics and framing strategies for identifying national BRI perceptions. This approach draws on the criticism that both hermeneutics and discourse analysis are often too unsystematic<sup>744</sup>, which is not the case by applying the formal coding procedures of content analysis. From a favorable perspective, discourse analysis provides more interpretative space to adequately classify and reconstruct the social puzzle of BRI perceptions. It should not go unmentioned here that content analysis is often regarded as a method of discourse analysis, but content analysts frequently resist this broad interpretation and classification.<sup>745</sup> Margrit Schreier highlights the key distinctions between discourse analysis and content analysis. The former approach is more focused on the process and is constructivist, while the latter is more descriptive and involves realist assumptions about language. Schreier stressed that this conflict can be settled by subordinating qualitative content analysis (QCA) to the constructivist paradigm to systematically support the conduct of discourse analysis.<sup>746</sup> In this way, it is recognized that discourse analyses go well beyond classical content analysis in their interpretation of knowledge construction.<sup>747</sup> In this case, QCA is treated as a technique of discourse analysis, which is recommended for example by Andreas Heindl.<sup>748</sup> Especially in political science, content analysis is used to facilitate, systematize, and limit the usually much broader discourse analysis.<sup>749</sup> This pragmatic approach is applied in this study, as it does not aim to settle the underlying methodological dispute but to trace the evolution of BRI securitization with a theory-based, feasible, and innovative research design.

Discourse analytical studies regularly combine content analysis and frame analysis.<sup>750</sup> Robert Entman even classifies content analyses of a strategic communication without

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<sup>743</sup> Daase 2010a: 1.

<sup>744</sup> Mayring 2015: 10.

<sup>745</sup> Mayring 2015: 12; Schreier 2012: 14.

<sup>746</sup> Schreier 2012: 44-50.

<sup>747</sup> Traue et al. 2019: 577.

<sup>748</sup> Heindl 2015a: 262, 272.

<sup>749</sup> Herschinger and Renner 2017: 321, 327-328.

<sup>750</sup> Herschinger and Renner 2017: 321; Boräng, et al. 2014: 190, 193-194.

the framing paradigm as errors in data collection.<sup>751</sup> Securitization studies use both content and frame analyses, demonstrating the feasibility of this choice of methods and even their combinability.<sup>752</sup> In some studies such as the seminal BRI securitization study of US discourses by Shah, frequent connections to frame analysis can be found implicitly without systematizing them.<sup>753</sup> The only securitization study that examines the BRI using this combination of methods is the analysis by Heidbrink and Becker, but their analysis is limited to US positions and the Digital Belt and Road within the BRI.<sup>754</sup> This indicates both an opportunity and a research gap for the application of this combination of methods across different countries with respect to the BRI, which is addressed in this study.

Under the umbrella term discourse analysis, frame analysis is described as a broad, rich, epistemologically and methodologically diverse research tradition.<sup>755</sup> The idea of framing is virtually ubiquitous in the social sciences and is commonly used outside of academia, which contributes to its multifaceted conception.<sup>756</sup> Frames can be defined as schemata of interpretation that organize perceptions into a coherent cognitive unit. This explanatory unit – the frame – bundles and sorts utterances, beliefs, and experiences about a certain object of inquiry, such as the BRI.<sup>757</sup> According to Robert M. Entman, studying frames means studying the power of communicating information. Attention is paid to how aspects of an issue are selected and highlighted into salience, whereas other facets are omitted or silenced. In this way, the communicator of a frame pushes for a certain definition, interpretation, or action.<sup>758</sup> The evolution of frames can be traced, distinguishing how they are rhetorically constructed by which actors. This allows for understanding shared assumptions, discourse coalitions, and underlying power relations that influence the formation of collective meaning.<sup>759</sup> The analysis of frames can be

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<sup>751</sup> Entman 1993: 57; Oswald 2019: 170.

<sup>752</sup> As demonstrated by Heidbrink and Becker 2023, Yang and Van Gorp 2021; Demirsu 2017, Grauvogel and Diez 2014, Rychnovská 2014; or Vultee 2010.

<sup>753</sup> Shah 2021: 2, 5, 6, 16.

<sup>754</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023.

<sup>755</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 14; Watson 2012: 284. For a comprehensive insight into framing, please refer to the work of Michael Oswald. In his 2019 book on strategic framing, he impressively describes the evolution of analysis, the impact of framing, and the techniques, methods, and applicability, which cannot be covered in the scope of this study.

<sup>756</sup> Entman 1993: 51-52, 56.

<sup>757</sup> Demirsu 2017: 662-663; Boräng, et al. 2014: 190; Goffman 1986 [1974]: 21.

<sup>758</sup> Entman 1993: 51-53.

<sup>759</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 15-16.

very detailed, as Heidbrink and Becker demonstrate by proposing a typology of framing functions.<sup>760</sup> While the present analysis does not remodel their approach, it is based on its core idea to organizing perceptions into a coherent cognitive unit of security policy areas, which allows to trace and compare utterances across time and space.

Due to the close logic of securitization and framing concerning the role of discursive practices, they can be understood as similar research programs. Both explore linguistic-grammatical compositions in the broader context of communicators, audiences, and political decisions, with securitization is particularly concerned with threat framing. Concentrating on threat framing unravels the micro-processes of specific discursive struggles over the interpretation of the threat and adequate countermeasures.<sup>761</sup> Frames create clusters of information, so-called storylines about actors being protagonists or antagonists, the nature of a problem, and the available toolbox.<sup>762</sup> Already Buzan et al. stressed that securitization relies on constructing a plot based on the contextual combination of language and society.<sup>763</sup> Complex phenomena such as the BRI are simplified with the help of these plots or frames to give meaning to events and guide actions.<sup>764</sup>

Applying this research program to the security dimensions presented earlier, it becomes possible to assess the urgency or insignificance of hazard perceptions. Actors may deliberately activate certain frames for the benefit of their position by discursively manipulating the impression of the scope of a conflict.<sup>765</sup> National as well as transnational frames can be identified, which can potentially lie in the entire securitization spectrum. From this, the dominant understanding of the BRI can be derived in order to compare collective, intersubjectively shared meanings that have been constructed and vary across the selected countries. Accordingly, the respective political relevance of BRI is determined, whether there is an agreement on the nature of BRI as a threat and what policy solutions are being considered.<sup>766</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 314-317.

<sup>761</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 14-16; Watson 2012: 282-284.

<sup>762</sup> Vultee 2011: 79; Entman 1993: 52.

<sup>763</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 32-33.

<sup>764</sup> Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 207.

<sup>765</sup> Boräng et al 2014: 191.

<sup>766</sup> Boräng, et al. 2014: 191; Rychnovská 2014: 16, 25-26.

Beyond that, the discourse lines can be examined in terms of their broader embeddedness in a linguistic historical reservoir that resonates with prior threat frames or with macrosecuritizations, so-called master frames, such as the broader “China threat”-narrative. Master frames are powerful reference points for linking the individual frame, the micro level, to macro levels of commonly perceived threats to interests, social values, or goods.<sup>767</sup> These are instances of intertextuality that help to capture the development of security discourses. They reveal what meanings of security are contested or remain unchallenged so that these constructions provide legitimacy to constructing novel danger scenarios or calling for distinct emergency measures.<sup>768</sup> Through these empirically evidenced prevalent discourse lines, contextual components of securitization are captured.<sup>769</sup> By being able to detect the differences between threat representations in public discourses, the combined methods solve the key problem of securitization studies to explain distinct policy measures stemming from similar threat perceptions.<sup>770</sup> When multiple, simultaneous frames are being considered, specific policy recommendations for different reference objects can be scrutinized. Viewing securitization from this perspective enables us to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced depiction of the (de)securitization landscape. This is based on the assumption that there is not only one singular securitization of an issue such as the BRI, but diverse, complementary, or even contesting (de)securitizations. More generally, this perspective conforms to the extended, fluid meaning of security as a concept.<sup>771</sup>

To examine these dynamics, qualitative discourse analysis focusing on framing techniques highlights specific ways how the construction of meaning is achieved<sup>772</sup>: Frame transformation refers to the alteration of old understandings or the creation of new meanings to present lines of argumentation in a more familiar and more accessible way to a particular audience. Accordingly, attempts to securitize an issue may take different forms to suit particular institutional contexts. The choice of language, use of examples, or even the use of already established terms can be examined more closely in this con-

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<sup>767</sup> Oswald 2019: 108-109.

<sup>768</sup> Rychnovská 2014: 16, 25; Stritzel 2007: 369.

<sup>769</sup> Entman 1993: 53.

<sup>770</sup> Watson 2012: 289.

<sup>771</sup> Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 204-207.

<sup>772</sup> For a comprehensive overview of more than a dozen framing techniques, see Michael Oswald (2019: 37-132).

text. Actors use already established terminology - such as the sub-areas of BRI or more fundamental concepts, such as multilateralism - but (partially) redefine their meaning. On the other hand, frames can also be extended. In cases of frame extension, existing frames are enriched with content or values that they previously did not touch at all or only insufficiently. In contrast to so-called frame-bridging, frame extension is not about connecting already existing frames but expanding the boundaries and thus the reach of the existing frame. These processes may well meet resistance. Here, a distinction can be made between external counter-strategies and internal disputes. On the side of external counter-strategies, counter-framing offers an alternative view of an issue, while frame contestation even aims at targeted confrontation and discrediting. On the internal side, the concept of frame disputes can be used to grasp how different readings of a threat influence each other. Frame disputes refer to situations in which internal conflicts arise over the interpretation of a phenomenon. Within the same frame, desecuritized and securitized interpretations interact and compete for discursive dominance. Even when there is agreement on the nature of a problem as a security threat, that security threat can be described so differently that a dispute arises over how security implications are most likely to be presented and evaluated.<sup>773</sup> These concepts provide a basic understanding of discursive strategies unfolding around BRI statements, which might help to juxtapose and interpret the elite statements. Combining the qualitative content analysis with elements of discourse analysis such as frames and other linguistic strategies enables us to examine the latent and contextual meanings, in contrast to simply manifest meanings and frequencies of pure quantitative approaches of content analysis. Although manifest figures of word or topic frequencies offer a starting point for interpretation, the qualitative approach is tailored to capture the construction of meaning in different languages, facilitating the evolution of central issues and a comparison of security categories across countries.<sup>774</sup>

Analogous to the framing logic, content analysis is based on a complex communication model in which a sender encodes a message and sends it to a receiver. The receiver must then decode this message. Content analyses attempt to draw conclusions about the sender, the receiver, the context of a message, or even the message itself from any kind

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<sup>773</sup> Oswald 2019: 76, 82, 84, 89, 93; Grauvogel and Diez 2014: 210, 222.

<sup>774</sup> Boräng, et al. 2014: 193.

of communication.<sup>775</sup> Such a qualitative approach does not simply detect whether the same vocabulary about the BRI is used but how it is used to construct a certain image. It reveals if Chinese signals are received by the selected foreign audiences and how these audiences, in turn, interpret them. The approach verifies whether Chinese BRI frames resonate in the existing schemata in belief systems of the target countries or are transformed and disputed. These belief systems are linked to actors' ontological assumptions, shaping their self-perception and perspectives on the state and the world. This resonates with the concept of ontological security, reflecting a stakeholder's pursuit to maintain a coherent and consistent self-image. This self-image is not only reflected on an individual level, but also by human collectives such as states. They produce and reproduce it through norms, routines, and discourses, which shape their security policies, roles, and strategies.<sup>776</sup> Ontological security is viewed as rather stable but not fixed, shaped by constant narrative cycles about national biographies and behavioral routines in national and international institutions.<sup>777</sup> These ontological negotiation processes might also be observed in statements regarding the BRI in the collected documents.

These observations cover BRI discourses from January 2015 to December 2020, starting from the official launch year of the BRI. Prior to 2015, the BRI had not yet entered its implementation phase, which is marked by the publication of the Joint Action Plan by the NDRC.<sup>778</sup> Originally, an observation period of five years was planned. Since potential shifts in discourse due to the historical caesura of the COVID-19 pandemic should still be included, the study was extended to include the first pandemic year, 2020. This additional observation year could consequently provide a more comprehensive understanding of trends and anomalies.

In the first step, all relevant BRI documents published by the pre-defined legislative and executive websites are to be collected and preprocessed for further coding.<sup>779</sup> In accordance with the above-described time frame, we searched for all textual publications on the issue using a variety of BRI-related keywords and abbreviations in English and

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<sup>775</sup> Heindl 2015b: 304, Früh 2011, 41-43; Mayring 2015: 58-59.

<sup>776</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 24-25; Van Noort and Colley 2021: 43-44.

<sup>777</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 28, 59.

<sup>778</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 103; Harnisch 2018: 38.

<sup>779</sup> As described in the previous chapter.

German, including ‘Belt and Road’, BRI, OBOR, and Seidenstraße.<sup>780</sup> All search results have been individually evaluated concerning their relation to the Chinese BRI. For example, Silkroad or Silk Road may also refer to the closed-down darknet marketplace, which disqualifies a document. Query terms are tested in inverted commas to enhance precision and disqualify word fragments without BRI-relation. Duplicates originating from the query terms have been removed from the corpus. The data corpus consists of parliamentary debates of the first and second chambers, inquiries of the government, public protocols, position papers, legislative texts, committee documents, hearings, official reports, public statements, speech protocols, serviced research papers, expert hearings, and other documents published on these websites written for the targeted constituencies.<sup>781</sup> A central selection criterion is that the publications need to be text-based to provide a comparable text corpus. The main document collection period was started in May and finalized by the end of August 2021. For the purpose of testing the collection of documents, the document collection procedure was repeated from January to March 2024, which led to the inclusion of 20 more documents. This underlines the general challenge of this kind of research that documents are added or deleted retrospectively, which is why two separate data selection phases are deemed necessary for ensuring a certain degree of comprehensiveness. Documents published for previous years after this date could not be considered.

After the formal selection of material by the pre-defined BRI-signal words, the document type, and the originator, a second round of material selection is needed to effectively perform the analysis. This second round is devoted to deciding whether the material is relevant or irrelevant. Relevant material includes, broadly speaking, all documents that contain an assessment of the BRI. Irrelevant material does not contain any evaluative link to the BRI, in that it merely mentions it as an example without further explication or informative value. Irrelevant is also material that meets the formal

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<sup>780</sup> The query words used involved: belt and road, BRI, Belt and Road Initiative, OBOR, One Belt, DBAR, B&R, DSR, Silk Road, Seidenstraße, Seidenstrasse, Seidenstraßenprojekt. While these query words naturally result in a selection bias, they are assumed to cover the most relevant political debates on the BRI. They are alternated in caption and quotation marks to check for potential indexing variations. Appendix 3 contains the complete list of collected documents for Germany, while Appendix 4 pertains to the UK.

<sup>781</sup> Appendix 5 provides an overview of the composition of German and British documents organized into four categories: parliamentary procedure, executive positioning, scientific report, and expert consultation. These are reflected in the overview of the collected documents in Appendix 3 and 4 and ensure the transparency of the collected data.

criteria but has no connection to the BRI. This can occur, for example, due to incorrect keywording in the search databases. By employing such a broad definition for relevant material and a narrow definition for irrelevant material, we follow Margrit Schreier's suggestion from her comprehensive book on qualitative content analysis.<sup>782</sup> This strategy aims to increase the reliability of the coding and ensure to minimize a possible selection error.<sup>783</sup> In order to implement this strategy, the entire corpus is examined for the pre-defined BRI-signal words. This selection process was only applied to the selected Western countries. The Chinese website already serves as the primary point of contact for official information related to the BRI, simplifying the process.

The final document set for the two Western countries comprises 304 publications, with an equal and unintentionally derived distribution of 152 publications from both Germany and the UK.<sup>784</sup> This parity in publication count enhances the comparability of security perceptions in terms of quality and scope. The data corpus for official Chinese information is rather small, at 65 BRI documents, as these documents have been pre-selected by the governing agency for the official website. This deliberate selection by the official Chinese BRI website provides the best indication of the narratives that the government specifically seeks to disseminate. Keeping in mind Balzacq's warning that it is impossible to exhaustively read everything on a subject, the focus on scrutinizing documents is deemed most suitable for analyzing national-level political debates that are closely aligned with public parliamentary discourses.<sup>785</sup> This approach prioritizes systematic examination of decisions within the formal context of primary parliamentary and government websites rather than attempting to encompass the entirety of BRI discourse among representatives in other mediums like television or newspapers. This ensures a targeted and rigorous analysis of the most authoritative public sources directly shaping policy and legislation and the evolution of securitization.

This description and list-keeping of the data corpus are important for the quality of the research results in terms of transparency, reproducibility, and consistency. This also concerns the critical appraisal of the role of the discourse researcher per se. The dis-

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<sup>782</sup> Schreier: 2012: 82-83.

<sup>783</sup> Latent allusions to the BRI that might have led to keywording in the database need to be individually reviewed in "irrelevant" material to ensure that this material is not erroneously classified.

<sup>784</sup> See Appendix 6 for the document figures and the coding results.

<sup>785</sup> Balzacq 2011a: 42.



course researcher is the central decision-making authority on what is described as discourse in the research process in the first place and produced as knowledge about social reality.<sup>786</sup> Since this is a qualitative study, it is intended to satisfy the criterion of reflexivity, which, in contrast to objectivity in quantitative research, recognizes the ways in which the researchers co-produce data and results.<sup>787</sup> For this study, we have to acknowledge that the security concept is strongly informed by European ideas and research traditions in the discipline of international relations in political science. This aligns with Baele and Jalea's observation that the majority of securitization research originates from Europe, emphasizing qualitative methodologies over quantitative approaches, diverging from American research traditions. Their review of securitization literature further indicates a tendency among scholars to overlook methodological considerations, failing to delineate research designs or employ identifiable methods in their studies—a contrast to the transparent approach adopted in this study.<sup>788</sup> This critical reflection on the nature of the research design points to inherent imbalances in this field and underlines the risks of selection and evaluation bias inherent in this study. The underlying reflections provide a basis for groundbreaking ideas for future research across different disciplines, including securitization research in economics and more quantitative American designs. These ideas necessitate a basic study, like the one we are undertaking here, as an essential preliminary step.

The study focuses on the perceptions of parliamentary elites with public documents forming the basis of the analysis. Such documents, by definition, are intended to be public messages heard or read in response to an actor's signal interpretation. Information from behind closed doors provided by third parties does not serve this function. Such information is thus not included in the QCA dataset to provide a clear framework for coding the linguistic corpus. While this provides a solid database, it is important to recognize that strategic policymaking - particularly in the area of security policy - takes place in back rooms, where discussions are confidential. This adds to the limitation of most constructivist studies that perceptions and signal interpretation processes are hidden inside the people's minds and can only be deduced from their statements. Even if the

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<sup>786</sup> Traue et al. 2019: 573.

<sup>787</sup> Schreier 2012: 23.

<sup>788</sup> Baele and Jalea 2023: 379-384.

rhetoric changes, this does not automatically have to be related to a change in the mindset of the actors involved but may be due to strategic communication or other reasons. As mentioned before, the study does not focus on the intentions of the actors. Nevertheless, these limitations are outlined to clarify the influence of the researcher's interpretation according to reflexivity. Consequently, a bias may arise from both selection and interpretation techniques. However, this risk is mitigated by collecting a wide range of publicly available documents and triangulating the results with related studies on countries' perceptions of the BRI.<sup>789</sup>

In addition to that, the approach entails the potential for distorting results as a consequence of political elites employing diplomatic language. Previous research on parliamentary language has shown that negative language is more difficult to recognize than positive language. This can be referred to as polite parliamentary jargon, which has to be considered as a possible confounding factor.<sup>790</sup> In the world of international politics, it is common practice to hide criticism of other states or actions by mere allusion. Implicit rhetoric means cannot be proven unequivocally as a reference to a subject of analysis as these statements are, from the outset, intended to avoid political backlash. Take the United States 2017 National Security Strategy as an example: Although there is no explicit mention of the BRI, the document criticizes that "China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor."<sup>791</sup> While we cannot relate this statement directly to the BRI, the connection is usually drawn in qualitative analysis, for instance, by Wuthnow<sup>792</sup>. The issue of diplomatic language is unavoidable, so it necessitates the application of scientific attention and interpretation. Although the role of language was reviled by some scholars "due to the relative absence of 'truth' in diplomatic language"<sup>793</sup>, critical studies embrace it as an occasion for research. Post-structuralist views equate the 'truth' or 'reality' of social conceptions to the dominant or hegemonic discourse, whereas rationalist approaches (such as neo-realist or liberal institutionalist)

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<sup>789</sup> Among them, particularly the studies of García-Herrero and Schindowski (2023), Garcia Herrero and Xu (2019) should be highlighted here because they provide two of the few cross-country perception analyses of the BRI. These are not related to securitization and provide only an overview of changing perceptions over time.

<sup>790</sup> Abercrombie and Batista-Navarro 2020: 263.

<sup>791</sup> The White House 2017: 25.

<sup>792</sup> Wuthnow 2018.

<sup>793</sup> Fierke 2016: 70.

do not doubt that something like objective or ‘real’ threats exist.<sup>794</sup> This poststructuralist epistemology is inherently linked to the previously described ontological perspective about security that is constituted by discourses. Accordingly, this study strives for balance along the tightrope of epistemological disciplinary disputes, which again underlines the importance of reflexivity for the entire research process of sampling, coding, and interpreting. As Heindl points out, no study is capable of providing a full survey of all national discourses on topics such as the BRI.<sup>795</sup> Reflecting on the limitations of the approach and being conceptually guided by the analysis of a corpus of texts produced by parliamentary elites is a viable solution to conduct the analysis in the most comprehensive, transparent, and robust way possible in terms of the research question.

The documents in the final collection are further prepared for coding by assigning each document a systematic identifier, which is a common practice in QCA. These identifiers contain information about the date of publication (including the month, day, and year), the country of origin, the issuing institution, and an abbreviated title for the individual document.<sup>796</sup> These identifiers serve several purposes: They enable smooth processing with the coding software and immediate identification for both the researcher and the reader of this study. In this way, the documents in the corpus data can be easily distinguished from other literary sources, even though their identifier might seem unusual at first glance.

After assigning the identifiers, the documents are transferred to the coding software MAXQDA, sorted by country and year. In the next step, the documents are coded along the codebook using the MAXQDA software. The computer-assisted approach has the advantage that a larger number of documents can be systematically evaluated.<sup>797</sup> The software facilitates the coding process and the interpretation of data. It does not replace the researcher, neither in terms of encrypting the data, nor in terms of translating the results and presenting it to the reader. Consequently, each step requires diligent planning,

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<sup>794</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 15-16.

<sup>795</sup> Heindl 2015a: 274-275.

<sup>796</sup> For example, the document under the identifier 12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651 is the House of Commons (HC) parliamentary debate Volume 651 about the Rohingya Refugee Crisis held on 20 December 2018. Appendices 2-4 explain the identifiers at the end of each document list.

<sup>797</sup> Boräng, et al. 2014: 193.

explication and the consideration of quality criteria.<sup>798</sup> Such a research method puts the individual codebook at the heart of the research process. The coding scheme can be understood as a device to ‘translate’ the meaning in the communication sample into categories.<sup>799</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the codebook is primarily based the two main categories of sentiment and security policy area derived from the security taxonomy, which are listed in the appendix of this study.<sup>800</sup> Accordingly, the codebook presents a largely deductive approach towards the concept of security. Using the codebook as the central tool for the analysis, the number of meanings inherent in collected documents is reduced, which facilitates the analysis. The existing security literature was specifically reviewed to gauge the current state of BRI views and identify the key concepts of the security. Their operational definitions were likewise extracted from prior research. Nevertheless, to account for the fluidity of the concept, each dimension incorporates a residual coding category (labeled “other”). This is a residual category for miscellaneous statements that cannot be subsumed into the predefined categories.<sup>801</sup> After identifying BRI statements on an auto-coding basis, further statements are identified through careful reading of the whole data collection.

In the following step, the identified BRI statements are coded according to their expressed sentiment along the categories of a positive, neutral, and negative tone, as described in the codebook.<sup>802</sup> This enables the subsequent coding of negative statements along the security dimensions.<sup>803</sup> After the coding phase, the assigned codes are examined to juxtapose securitizing or desecuritizing patterns and the degrees of securitization. These degrees are represented on two scales based on the primary coding dimensions of tone and security policy area. The first securitization degree measures intensity based on the ratio of negative statements to the total number of statements, including

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<sup>798</sup> Heindl 2015a: 281, 286

<sup>799</sup> Schreier 2012: 5; Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1285.

<sup>800</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>801</sup> Boräng, et al. 2014: 193; Schreier 2012: 76-77, 93; Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1281.

<sup>802</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>803</sup> After coding along the pre-defined dimension, the residual category is re-evaluated to reassess the need for more refined or additional categories. Thereby, the risk of overemphasizing theory, which obscures the analysis of the contextual aspects of a phenomenon such as BRI, is mitigated. As all but four statements were assigned to the pre-defined categories, no additional category is deemed necessary. This observation underlines the quality of the drafted category system as fairly exhaustive for this research issue.

positive and negative utterances. The more negative statements are made compared to other evaluations on an issue, the more intense the securitization becomes. The level of securitization variety is determined by the number of security policy areas mentioned in the negative-securitized statements, with more areas indicating a more comprehensive securitization. As five security policy areas were identified as security categories pertaining to the issue dimension of the security taxonomy, five degrees are indicated on the variety scale. The intensity scale is similarly based on five degrees, but combining the two scales would create conceptual confusion. This way, the two scales provide a reflection of the securitization spectrum that illustrates comparable ranges across countries and research issues. This acknowledges both securitized and non-securitized perceptions in political discourses. By refraining from a binary notion of securitization, these scales enable us to answer the research question about the extent of securitized perceptions in terms of intensity and thematic coverage. These novel securitization degrees are generalized heuristics of the discourse. Still, their manifestations rely on the material chosen, the coding scheme, the coders' judgments, and the qualitative interpretation of certain patterns.

<b>Securitization Degrees</b>			
<b>Securitization Intensity</b>		<b>Securitization Variety</b>	
Percentage of Negative Statements per Year		Total Number of Security Policy Areas per Year	
<b>0</b>	<b>Absent</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Absent</b>
<b>1-20</b>	<b>Marginal</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Minimal</b>
<b>21-40</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Limited</b>
<b>41-60</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>61-80</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Substantial</b>
<b>81-100</b>	<b>Extreme</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Comprehensive</b>

*Table 2: Securitization Degrees. Source: Own Illustration.*

The interpretation of these degrees represents a rather inductive approach that builds on the predefined security dimensions but bundles them for interpretation according to the salient BRI patterns in the utterances. By tying the mass of individual codes together like the loose ends of different threads, the clusters of BRI perceptions become analyzable and comparable. This way, the respective sets of beliefs can transcend different categories so that the argumentation structures of perception clusters can be discerned. The deductive categories are then thoroughly reviewed by qualitative reading across time,

space and afterwards across the three identified security discourse lines from the literature review. The deductive categories are then re-aggregated across time and space, followed by an analysis of the three identified security discourse lines from the literature review. This approach aims to inductively identify novel ideas about securitization and its facilitating contextual factors. In the literature, this approach is referred to as a combination of directed or concept-driven and data-driven analysis. Such a hybrid model or combination is indeed used in most instances of content analysis.<sup>804</sup>

Accordingly, some attitudes, policy areas, and narratives can appear much more extensive than others, which only becomes apparent after coding. For example, Heidbrink and Becker found that positive and neutral frames of the BRI are only marginally developed in the United States compared to negative ones, leading to an all-encompassing securitization.<sup>805</sup> Such assessments can only be made by applying a content analysis coding scheme that uncovers the frequency of sentiments and themes. Content analysis addresses the difficulty of identifying frames, mapping latent meaning structures, and strengthening the robustness of interpretation.<sup>806</sup> Employing a rules-guided coding framework, the study can engage and satisfy, to a certain extent, the requirements of reliability, reproducibility, and validity. Since these quality criteria of the quantitative methods are applied in the context of the qualitative analysis, it is necessary to take a closer look at the criteria as well as transfer to the present study design.<sup>807</sup>

First, in the case of reliability, it must be pointed out that qualitative research understands this criterion as stability and intersubjectivity of the results. Some qualitative researchers completely dismiss the notion of reliability as a meaningful criterion for their research. If reliability is used in terms of consistency between observers, QCA yet provides useful guidance as it makes all steps of the research transparent. Particularly the systematic description of the coding scheme increases the reproducibility of the study and the intersubjectivity of the results. Further quality characteristics were specifically

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<sup>804</sup> Mayring and Fenzl 2019: 638; Schreier 2012: 89; Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1281, 1283, 1286.

<sup>805</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 316-317.

<sup>806</sup> Heindl 2015b: 311-312.

<sup>807</sup> Mayring and Fenzl 2019: 635; Oswald 2019: 170; Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1277. Being guided by the categories or codes is the distinctive feature of content analysis. Other text analysis methods, such as hermeneutic reading, do not require the application and evaluation of codes.

developed for coding schemes and coding rules to establish the exclusiveness and precision of categories.<sup>808</sup>

First, we defined the semantic unit as the coding unit, i.e., the smallest component of the material, which can fall within one category. Conversely, the largest text component, the context unit, can comprise an entire document. These units have been determined to ensure that coding units can only be assigned to one subcategory. To elaborate on the coding rules, the semantic unit is coded according to the threat estimation. If the threat estimation is unspecific, the context of the utterance, its embedding in the broader textual context, is considered for coding. For example, warnings about the dual use of BRI infrastructure must be matched with the context of the warning to assign a subcode from the issue dimension, such as “military” or “economic”. By defining the semantic unit as the smallest coding unit, a sentence can logically contain more than one subcode of a dimension, but it is not allowed to assign more than one code of the same dimension to a semantic unit. Multiple assignments of material components to different dimensions are allowed so that their co-occurrences can be checked and the degree of securitization obtained.<sup>809</sup> Several mentions of categories in a document were not counted for the degree of securitization, but whether the category occurs at least once in the document.

To ensure a higher quality of the coding, the criteria of inter-coder reliability and intra-coder reliability were considered in this study. First, the complete dataset was coded by the author of this study and tested against the coding of two more research assistants.<sup>810</sup> Afterwards, the code assignment was peer-reviewed and discussed for further enhancing the coding rules. These peer reviews contributed to the validity of the study by critically assessing the concept under study and the exhaustiveness of the coding scheme, i.e., construct and content validity. The iterative coding of the author of this study was conducted to ensure intra-coder reliability. The consistency of the coding was evaluated by recoding 10 percent of the dataset after the first round of coding. Throughout this pro-

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<sup>808</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>809</sup> Mayring and Fenzl 2019: 636, 643; Schreier 2012: 72-76.

<sup>810</sup> I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Jakob Tackenberg and Levi Rayka for their invaluable assistance with coding and revising the coding rules.

cess, the existing coding rules underwent re-evaluation, further refinement, and subsequent verification of the code assignments.<sup>811</sup>

By considering the factors for reliability, the course for ensuring the quality of the coding categories has been set. The coding frame can be viewed as an identification and classification strategy that defines which content features are included in the analysis and according to which criteria the coding units are recorded. For QCA it is critical that the coding categories are disjunctive, exhaustive, and precise. ‘Disjunctive’ means that the individual categories within a dimension may not overlap and that a unit of analysis may only be assigned to one indicator. Exhaustive means that categories are complete if they are designed to fully capture the content relevant to the study, so that no utterances belonging to a category are omitted. Precision requires the exact definition of coding criteria in order to be able to assign a unit of analysis to a category clearly, unambiguously, and comprehensibly. Since the category system functions as a search heuristic in voluminous data corpora, the mainly deductively created categories define what is to be investigated.<sup>812</sup>

To ensure reliability and validity, the combination of frequency counts and qualitative interpretations improves the triangulation of results. Although triangulation has been criticized as naïve realism from a constructivist perspective, it is generally recognized that bringing together different perspectives and checking the results against other data strengthens scientific research.<sup>813</sup> In general, triangulation aims to examine commonalities and inconsistencies in the results. Sociologist Uwe Flick cautions that triangulation should not be misunderstood as simply checking data but as a more comprehensive justification strategy to do justice to the complexity of the object of study. In this study, we follow Flick’s notion by cross-checking the tone of a speech act in the sense of between-method triangulation. The results of this study are confronted with existing evidence from the literature in terms of data triangulation.<sup>814</sup>

To conclude, the systematic security framework created for this study represents the first in-depth cross-national assessment of parliamentary elite discourses among major

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<sup>811</sup> Schreier 2012: 6, 26-27, 167, 185.

<sup>812</sup> Heindl 2015b: 312, 314-332; Früh 2011, 88-97, 153-156.

<sup>813</sup> Oswald 2019: 172; Heindl 2015a: 282.

<sup>814</sup> Flick 2019: 480-483.



Western powers interpreting Chinese BRI signals. By systematically coding the tone of BRI utterances and security categories, the gradual shift of discursive framings of the subject is revealed. Competing and aligning views, as well as rhetoric strategies, can be identified. Combining discourse and qualitative content analysis fosters methodological synergies to trace and interpret BRI perceptions within and across security categories as well as gradual shifts over time. This, in turn, allows us to reveal different causal attributions between perceptions, issues, objects of reference, and political demands. In this way, it provides unique and structured insights into the multilayered discourses, that are reduced, compared, and critically juxtaposed. By upgrading the current approach to securitization studies with a novel approach towards securitization degrees, the study is able to draw inferences about the dynamics of international relations and expand our knowledge about security and power politics.

## **Part II: Beijing's Making of the Belt and Road Initiative**

Although the main research question pertains to the extent of BRI security perceptions in Germany and the UK, it is deemed imperative, according to the constructivist social act framework, to access BRI perceptions from both the senders' and the receivers' views. Accordingly, this part examines the Chinese visions and actions related to the Belt and Road Initiative. The upcoming Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the development of the BRI and its progress. Here, domestic and international drivers, organizational cornerstones, decision-making procedures, and hopes attached to the project are presented. These decision-making structures are significant because they influence how the BRI is understood and how people think about China in general.<sup>815</sup> Until now, the study has only superficially addressed the evolution and organizing pillars of the BRI, which will be further explored in this chapter.

While the literature consulted for this chapter includes observations by both Chinese and foreign scholars, particular attention is devoted to the Chinese statements and official documents released by the Chinese government. Chinese authors' publications of the BRI also convey valuable traces of the 'ego' perspective for the following analyses of the Chinese signals sent by the official BRI documents in Chapter 6.<sup>816</sup> As a key pivot, security interests and perceptions of the PRC associated with the BRI are identified to facilitate the following analysis of the recipient countries' BRI-security perceptions in Part III. To effectively analyze important themes and security signals in the Chinese documents collected in Chapter 6, we combine qualitative content analysis techniques, such as word frequency counts, with literature-based assessments and correspondence to the security taxonomy from the preceding chapters. In this way, we can assess how BRI security interests of the signaling 'ego' and the interpreting 'alter' relate to each other.

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<sup>815</sup> Brakman et al. 2019: 10.

<sup>816</sup> Appendix 2 contains a complete list of the collected Chinese documents.

## 5. Voices from China: The Belt and Road is not related to Security?

The BRI is said to be the “crown jewel in China’s grand strategy”<sup>817</sup>. For understanding the role of this crown jewel in China’s foreign policy and why it is deemed so precious, this chapter elaborates the historical benchmarks of the BRI, its historical milestones and organizational priorities. Subsequently, a closer look is taken at BRI principles and driving forces. It shows why branding the BRI as a grand strategy is highly contentious and often rejected. This paves the way for Chapter 6, which applies QCA to BRI documents published by Chinese authorities and maps out the security frames that the PRC associates with the BRI.

This stocktaking chapter comprises a synthesis of Chinese and non-Chinese literature about China’s vision of the Belt and Road Initiative. The voices of Chinese scholars are of major interest for this chapter. According to Yuan Hang, Chinese perspectives and terminologies are not adequately addressed in existing English-language IR literature on the BRI. To avoid the impression that insufficient attention is paid to the Chinese discourse on the BRI by international academics, China-based or ethnically Chinese scholars were deliberately reviewed for this chapter.<sup>818</sup> Some words on the complicated role of Chinese academia need to be spend before delving into the chapter. According to Denghua Zhang, Chinese research is constrained by strict censorship, although there appears to be some room for critical evaluation of the BRI. Academia acts as a source of intellectual support and recommendations for the Chinese government, from agenda setting to policy evaluation.<sup>819</sup> In this respect, Chinese scholars are used in the present study to understand Chinese motifs, while keeping in mind the limitations and special role of academia. This necessitates the use of non-Chinese research and interpretation to complete the picture and ensure a thorough interpretation of the reviewed literature.

The literature base is complemented with primary sources about the Belt and Road. Primary sources provide first-hand insights about organizational benchmarks and signals Chinese officials and authorities send to the world.<sup>820</sup> As the research question fo-

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<sup>817</sup> Pincus 2020: 45.

<sup>818</sup> Yuan 2020: 36.

<sup>819</sup> Zhang 2023: 35-37; 56. More on the role of science is elaborated in this chapter when discussing various stakeholder groups in the BRI.

<sup>820</sup> Such as „Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice and China’s Contribution“ published by Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative (2017) to underscore China’s vision of the

cuses on the nexus of signaling and interpretation, the study focuses on the evaluation of English-language publications, since these publications, unlike Chinese ones, are aimed at global audiences. In addition, translated key speeches, such as the 2013 speech by President Xi<sup>821</sup>, have to be taken into account. In BRI-related literature, official translations of such speeches serve as a key reference point for analyzes. Public speeches are the literal reading of the speech act as described in securitization theory, which is why they should not be neglected. Given the extensive literature on the fundamentals of the BRI, the chapter goes beyond simply describing the project to analyze perceptions of China, the BRI, and the international environment in which the BRI operates. Accordingly, the descriptive-historical part focuses on the central milestones instead of a small-step listing, which is hardly possible due to the abundance of BRI projects.

### **5.1. Historical and Organizational Benchmarks**

It was on 7 September 2013, when President Xi Jinping, delivered the speech “Promote Friendship between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future” at Nazarbayev University. The Astana speech, which is a simplified name for Xi’s address given according to the place of delivery in Kazakhstan, can be considered as the kickoff of the BRI. In the speech, President Xi referred to the value of the ancient Silk Road and proposed to jointly build an economic belt. This belt was envisioned to improve five areas of connectivity: policy communication, road connectivity, unimpeded trade, monetary circulation, and understanding between people.<sup>822</sup> These areas were later transformed to what is now known as the five areas of connectivity (五通, wutong).<sup>823</sup> It underlines not only the character of the Astana speech as a starting point in time, but also intellectual predecessor with Xi Jinping as its figurehead.

In the following month, the maritime dimension was presented by Xi Jinping in Jakarta, Indonesia. In his speech delivered to the People’s Representative Council of Indonesia on 2 October, President Xi proposed the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century with a special focus on ASEAN-countries. He underscored the five areas of trust-building,

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BRI in the run up to the International Cooperation Summit Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017. The document is available in seven languages including English and German, underscoring its global orientation, as well as the importance of the selected cases of this study.

<sup>821</sup> See Xi 2017.

<sup>822</sup> Wang 2019a: 89; Xi 2013a.

<sup>823</sup> See 5.2 for more details on the BRI’s principles.

win-win cooperation, shared responsibility, mutual understanding, and openness and inclusiveness.<sup>824</sup> These newly proposed five areas complement and reaffirm the prior ones in a more normative way. In combination, these two speeches form the backbone of the BRI thought grid. Nevertheless, the Belt and the Road have not been proposed together.<sup>825</sup> The fact that they are separate proposals points to the initially different geographical and practical but shared ideational trajectories. Their subsequent merging and expansion demonstrate the adaptive nature of the BRI as a whole from the very beginning. It was at the neighborhood diplomacy work conference later in October 2013, when Xi Jinping mentioned both the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) in one breath calling for speeding up infrastructure cooperation.<sup>826</sup>

Corresponding to the acceleration Xi called for, the combination of Belt and Road prevailed institutionally. On 12 November 2013, the “Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform” presented a collective consensus by the central government to officially connect and pursue the SREB and the MSR. At the 3rd Plenary Session, the 18th CPC Central Committee decided to create financial institutions for development and to speed up infrastructure construction across borders. This aims at a new pattern of all-round opening, which can be conceived as an implicit linkage of domestic and international development. The prime examples of the creation of these BRI financial institutions were the signing ceremony of the AIIB in October 2014 and the establishment of the Silk Road Fund (SRF) in November of the same year.<sup>827</sup> The official foundation of the AIIB was in June 2015, when 57 founding members signed up for the bank, including the UK, France, and Germany. The number of members states rose to 105 countries as of January 2022. Due to concerns about funding standards, the US has not joined but opposed the AIIB. In brief, their history highlights the character of the AIIB and the SRF as core supporting mechanisms for the BRI, as well as existing dividing lines between the study states.<sup>828</sup>

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<sup>824</sup> Xi 2013b.

<sup>825</sup> Wang 2019a: 90.

<sup>826</sup> Liu 2019: 137.

<sup>827</sup> Liu 2019: 140; Wang 2019a: 90.

<sup>828</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 133; Xu and Wang 2019b: 122, Wang 2016: 461-462, Wuthnow 2018.

In a retrospective, the year 2015 can be considered the launch year of the BRI, marking the institutionalization of the initiative in several organizations and guiding documents. This year, the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative was founded. As the top-level authority for the BRI, the name of the Leading Group can be taken literally. Major tasks of the Leading Group involve guiding the government at the macro scale, overseeing the BRI's overall planning and coordination, supervising its implementation, and reviewing criticism. In this way, the orderly construction of the BRI is to be ensured.<sup>829</sup> In short, the “Leading small group on advancing the construction of the Belt and Road”, also called the “Belt and Road Construction Leadership Group” and its affiliated offices are responsible for the central monitoring. Situated in the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Leading Group coordinates with all ministries. Subsidiaries of the BRI Leading Group were subsequently established in virtually all ministries to carry out strategic planning and evaluation tasks.<sup>830</sup> How these tasks should be accomplished was discussed at the first Leading Group's work conference for advancing the BRI on 1 February 2015. Led by Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli, the BRI work conference contemplated, on how to implement the BRI guided by Xi Jinping's speeches. BRI core activities, its nature, and arrangement were determined.<sup>831</sup> Two observations about the organizational benchmarks can be noted: The BRI is largely determined by interpretations of Xi Jinping's speeches, which is why the project is regarded as Xi's personal signature program. He himself sets the course, provides the central messages, instructions and adjustments to the BRI. Entrusted with the interpretation and practical implementation of his words are the BRI bodies such as the Leading Group.<sup>832</sup> As a second observation, it can be stated that the February 2015 work conference may be seen as a central preparatory meeting for the upcoming Visions and Actions document.

Published in March 2015, the “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” is the milestone document of the initiative. Issued by the NDRC, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China (MOFCOM) the 2015 Vision and Actions provides a comprehensive overview of the entire initiative. Principles including the five

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<sup>829</sup> Liu 2019: 136-138; Wang and Li 2019: 104; Wang 2017: 211, Wang 2019a: 91; Zhao 2019: 3.

<sup>830</sup> Rolland 2019c: 226.

<sup>831</sup> Liu 2019: 138; Wang 2019a: 91.

<sup>832</sup> Müller and Polfuß 2021: 151; Zhang 2023: 41; Rolland 2019c: 217, 227; Foot 2019: 155.

connectivity areas, cooperation priorities, and mechanisms are explained, underscoring the importance of this document as the written bedrock of the BRI.<sup>833</sup> The political wording leaves sufficient room for interpretation and maneuvering. For instance, the document names six economic corridors as priority land routes in the Framework-section: The New Eurasian Land Bridge (connecting China and Europe through Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus), China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, the China-Indochina Peninsula, China-Pakistan, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor.<sup>834</sup> Although these overland routes have subsequently been altered, expanded and amended, they demonstrate focus on opening up a common Eurasian economic space.<sup>835</sup> Based on the six corridors, a geographical space is set out that is both precise and vague: although the corridors can be drawn on maps, the exact routes, individual projects, various dimensions and objectives are not formulated.

Similar observations can be made with regard to the MSR and other BRI subsidiaries such as the “Information Silk Road”, also known later as the Digital Belt and Road (DBAR). The former is planned to more closely connect China through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, with Europe and the South Pacific. Especially through the construction of ports, waterways and sea transportation, the maritime connections between the continents of Asia, Europa, and Africa are to be expanded.<sup>836</sup> The 2013 presentation of the MSR at an ASEAN Summit explains the emphasis on association in the 2015 Vision and Actions as the primary orientation of maritime efforts.<sup>837</sup> On account of the geographical setting of these “two wings”, the MSR and the SREB, Wang Yiwei describes the BRI to be primarily a Eurasian transport network.<sup>838</sup> The scale of these transport networks is immense, already linking a circumference of 4.4 billion people and more than 60 percent of the world’s population.<sup>839</sup> As the BRI cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean demonstrates, the geographical definitions of the MSR and the SREB should not be seen as strict limitations but as areas of focus. The Information Silk Road

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<sup>833</sup> NDRC 2015. The document is also included in the corpus of primary Chinese publications. Due to its centrality for the BRI, the 2015 Vision and Action document receives special attention already at this stage of the study. Section 5.2 studies the principles more closely.

<sup>834</sup> NDRC 2015: III. Framework.

<sup>835</sup> Fu 2019: 128-129; Wang and Li 2019: 102.

<sup>836</sup> Fu 2019: 129; NDRC 2015: III. Framework.

<sup>837</sup> Xu and Wang 2019a: 107.

<sup>838</sup> Wang 2017: 40, 42.

<sup>839</sup> Müller and Polfuß 2021: 155. These figures vary depending on the scale applied to the vaguely held perimeters of the BRI.

is more theme-based. It concentrates on communications technology, including building optical cable networks, satellites, and information exchange.<sup>840</sup> Thus, the DBAR includes space as a dimension, which is also coined separately as the Space Silk Road or Space Information Corridor.<sup>841</sup> By and large, the digital dimension can be viewed both as a facilitator of the maritime and overland routes and as an independent “Road” with separate technology projects.

The previous outline does not encompass all the “Silk Roads” by a long shot. In June 2016, Xi Jinping spoke of four Silk Roads in a speech in Uzbekistan: one for green development, one for health cooperation, one for intelligence, and one for peace. The Silk Road of Intelligence aims to strengthen security cooperation and promote political and regime security. It sets out to design a sustainable Asian security concept, thereby subsuming the security relevance of the BRI under a separate offshoot.<sup>842</sup> In January 2018, Beijing launched the Polar Silk Road to extend the BRI to the Arctic.<sup>843</sup> The BRI is subject to constant change. It consists of several subsidiaries that transform in terminology, overlap in content and expand ever further. One of the most accurate descriptions would consequently be to understand the BRI as an organizing concept of Chinese diplomacy.<sup>844</sup> Although this appears to be “ill-defined”<sup>845</sup> from the outside, it actually has its own logic. According to Hang Yuan, Chinese policy-making is based on the rationale that a series of trials and errors must be carried out before chartering new territories. The saying “摸着石头过河” (mozheshitouguohe), which may be translated with “crossing the river by feeling for stones” reflects the Chinese attitude of experimentation and step-by-step reforming from the Deng Xiaoping era.<sup>846</sup> Transferred to the BRI, this saying explains the continuous adaption, recalibration and enlargement process. No standard definition is needed before trials are launched. Trials then provide experience and responses, hence details to flesh out a concept like the BRI. On this basis, Yuan counters Western criticism that despite numerous government publications, there is still no

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<sup>840</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>841</sup> Rolland 2019b: 4.

<sup>842</sup> Wang and Li 2019: 100; Xi 2016.

<sup>843</sup> Zhao 2019: 2.

<sup>844</sup> Zhao 2019: 2; Wang 2017: 42.

<sup>845</sup> Rolland 2019c: 217.

<sup>846</sup> Yuan 2020: 40.



basic BRI definition of the exact actors, actions, scope, schedule and reasons.<sup>847</sup> Additionally, Holzer explains that the ambiguity and experimentation are also main advantages. While the central government is involved in setting a policy framework, it grants some leeway for innovative ways of implementation.<sup>848</sup>

Linked to this adjustment process are further “misunderstandings,” a diplomatic term for criticism of the political West, which are addressed by Chinese scholars. This refers to the perception of the BRI as a grand strategy and the change of the English name. First, the notion of the BRI as a grand strategy is rejected on the basis of causing external fears or doubts. These arise out of the use of the term for global agendas by hegemonic powers – a connotation that Wang Yiwei argues must be avoided.<sup>849</sup> In Chinese, this understanding is reflected in the use of the term for “proposal” or “initiative”, “倡议” (changyi) in the context of the BRI instead of “strategy”, “战略” (zhanlüe).<sup>850</sup> In contrast to a perceived exclusivity or even militaristic component of a strategy, the inclusive nature of an initiative should be emphasized. These explanations are primarily related to the rejection of the dominance-centered character and Western-origin of grand strategy. While rejecting the grand strategy connotation, Wang Yiwei does, indeed, refer to the BRI as a development strategy.<sup>851</sup> The use of the word ‘strategy’ is usually directed to the internal dimension of the BRI and its intellectual predecessors. Among them, the open-door policy of Deng Xiaoping starting in 1978 is a frequent point of reference. As such, the BRI is a key for achieving the “Two Centenary Goals” for China’s development. The first goal is to complete a moderately prosperous society by 2021, the 100th anniversary of the CPC. Great national rejuvenation in all aspects of prosperity, political stability and global status is to be accomplished by 2049, one hundred years after the foundation of the PRC.<sup>852</sup> The year 2049 is thus considered the end date of the BRI, although its specific end goal remains hard to define.<sup>853</sup>

Without fully resolving this conundrum, the connection between the BRI and the Two Centenary Goals sheds some light on further historical benchmarks. By understanding

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<sup>847</sup> Yuan 2020: 35-38; Liu et al. 2018: 1211.

<sup>848</sup> Holzer 2020: 191.

<sup>849</sup> Wang 2017: 155, 158.

<sup>850</sup> Zhao 2019: 4.

<sup>851</sup> Wang 2017: 155.

<sup>852</sup> Hart et al. 2021: 9-10; Wang 2019a: 93; Wang 2019b: 94; Wang 2017: 66.

<sup>853</sup> Kuchins 2021: 207.

their interdependence, the connection to prior development strategies such as the “Go Global” and the “Go West” strategy launched in the late 1990s is revealed. While the former aimed at encouraging foreign investments by Chinese enterprises, the second was designed to foster Chinese internal development in Western parts of the country.<sup>854</sup> By combining their intellectual and geographic trajectory, the BRI is even referred to as the culmination of the former “Go West” and “Go Global” policies.<sup>855</sup> As such a synergistic arc, it would be the first-ranked major development strategy.<sup>856</sup> The rhetoric allows positive connotations to offer synergies with the development plans of other states and, at the global level, with the UN SDGs.<sup>857</sup> By linking the BRI storytelling to existing Chinese and international policies, legitimacy is created for domestic and foreign audiences regarding development needs. To express the significance of these linkages in the words of Wang Yiwei: “This will make the storytelling sound legitimate.”<sup>858</sup>

The legitimacy of storytelling further involves the second “misunderstanding” that evolved around the name of the BRI itself and its English translation. The Chinese name “一带一路” (yidai yilu) is composed of the two wings MSR and SREB. Besides this pragmatic abbreviation, the name can be associated with Daoist philosophy: “One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things.” In this philosophical view, the BRI brings together the heaven, human and earth. The original “one” can be associated with an inclusive or even holistic invitation to produce greater good. The “road” or “way” may be directly connected to the “dao”. This connection represents both the rationale that each state can follow its own development path within the BRI and a philosophical expression of the elusiveness of the BRI.<sup>859</sup>

Owing to the centrality of symbolism in Chinese everyday interaction, Chinese philosophical elements are abundant in BRI communication. Without referring to such “elements of non-western wisdom, in particular Chinese philosophy”<sup>860</sup>, these signals can hardly be decrypted. As a consequence, the direct English translation “One Belt One

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<sup>854</sup> Müller and Polfuß 2021: 151, 155; Zhao 2019: 6; Wang 2017: 49. Where these historical roots are relevant today is reflected in section 5.2, which focuses on the driving forces of the BRI.

<sup>855</sup> Chen et al. 2020: 26.

<sup>856</sup> Liu 2019: 137.

<sup>857</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 132; Wang and Li 2019: 101:

<sup>858</sup> Wang 2017: 17.

<sup>859</sup> Wang 2017: 187, 205.

<sup>860</sup> Yuan 2020: 38

Road” (OBOR) provoked much criticism. To illustrate this, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis argued in October 2017, “there are many belts and many roads, and no one nation should put itself in a position of dictating ‘one belt, one road’”<sup>861</sup>. Without going into the criticism of BRI practices at this point, the quote underscores a diametric view of the word “one”. What is the starting point for holistic inclusivity in Chinese philosophy is singled out in Mattis’ quote as the starting point for an apparent abuse of power. Similar patterns of argumentation are evident in both the criticism and the Chinese rejection of the ‘grand strategy’ narrative. Both reactions underline a desire to avoid negative connotations of the BRI. As this contradicts the positive storytelling and complexity of the BRI by name, the state translation unit changed the English term to “Belt and Road Initiative” already in 2016.<sup>862</sup> This was underscored in the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the PRC, in which the BRI was prominently highlighted with its own chapter. Titled “Move Forward with the Belt and Road Initiative”, Chapter 51 underscores the inclusive character of the BRI.<sup>863</sup> Despite the modified name, the document’s content largely represents a continuation of the 2015 Visions and Actions and Xi’s landmark speeches. Changing the name can be viewed as a historical benchmark in response to international criticism, although it did not signify a fundamental change in the direction of the BRI.<sup>864</sup>

When referring to the storytelling of the BRI, there is also a debate surrounding the use of the term “Silk Road”. In the discourse around the BRI, the term occupies an influential position, although it is a matter of discussion.<sup>865</sup> On a project level, the Silk Road refers to the maritime dimension in the form of the MSR. There is much more historical and symbolic meaning to the term than a simple project designation. The historical legacy of the Silk Road term is both partly rejected and welcomed in Chinese literature. The former concerns the Western origin of the term itself by the German Geographer Ferdinand Paul Wilhelm von Richthofen in 1877. Von Richthofen’s maps of the ancient trade routes between China across Eurasia to Europe are in some ways reminiscent of the current BRI maps. As argued above, cartographic simplifications are insufficient to

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<sup>861</sup> Mattis, cited in Brakman et al. 2019: 8.

<sup>862</sup> Shenin 2018: 60-61.

<sup>863</sup> Central Compilation & Translation Press 2016: Chapter 51.

<sup>864</sup> Rolland 2019c: 229; Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 96.

<sup>865</sup> Wang 2017: 155.

capture the global scope, complexity and metaphoric nature of the BRI. Looking at history, the Silk Road term implies a link to European imperialism, which provokes geopolitical assumptions.<sup>866</sup> The Silk Road term is therefore partially rejected as it transmits a singular and distorted meaning of the BRI.<sup>867</sup> It is yet welcomed in its historical symbolism of civilizational prosperity and exchange. Prosperity particularly concerns the memory of China as the center of the Asian world during the Han and Tang dynasties. Cultural heyday, economic prosperity and social prime are at the heart of this memory, which neatly fits into current notions of national rejuvenation. Historical romanticism is evoked through the “Silk Road spirit”, when it comes to promoting the idea of friendly cooperation, while the wars and conflicts of the epoch are left aside.<sup>868</sup> Accordingly, a positive story of the BRI is pursued by priming positive historical references while simultaneously silencing objections and negative features.

The positive priming was particularly evident in 2017, when the next stage of the BRI institutionalization took place with two pivotal events: the First Belt and Road Forum in May and the amendment of the BRI party constitution by the CPC in October 2017. Nevertheless, there was a growing backlash to the project around these crucial junctures and in their aftermath. To start, the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) was held in Beijing. Titled “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road”, the forum aimed to bringing together representatives from all over the world. Among the 1.500 participants from more than 130 countries, 29 foreign heads of state and government participated reinforcing the high-profile of the event.<sup>869</sup> In the organizational framework of the BRI, the BRF was envisioned as “the highest-profile event”<sup>870</sup> that will become the “top-level cooperation mechanism”<sup>871</sup>. However, after the 2nd BRF in April 2019 in Beijing, the COVID-19-pandemic did not allow a third version of the forum. Instead, a scaled-down virtual summit “Asia and Pacific High-Level Conference on Belt and Road Cooperation” was held in June 2021. Its title and regional focus suggest that the online conference

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<sup>866</sup> Sidaway and Woon 2017: 596-599.

<sup>867</sup> Wang 2017: 138; 155.

<sup>868</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 31-32; Lin et al. 2019: 514; Fung 2019: 127-128; Wang and Li: 2019: 101; Xu and Wang 2019a: 106, 110; Zhao 2019: 4.

<sup>869</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 132.

<sup>870</sup> Liu 2019: 137.

<sup>871</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 131.

was not intended to be a successor to the earlier top-level BRFs. An additional indication for that is the fact that President Xi himself only sent a written address; Foreign Minister Wang Yi chaired the conference.<sup>872</sup>

Indeed, the first two BRFs were attended by government leaders and officials from around the world. High-ranking representatives such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, Czech Republic's President Milos Zeman, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, or the Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni attended the forum. The United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom also sent delegations to the first BRF, but they did not send their respective heads of state. Matt Pottinger, the National Security Council senior director for Asia attended the Forum for the United States. Germany was represented by Brigitte Zypries, Minister of Economic Affairs. The UK was present in person of Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond.<sup>873</sup> On the occasion of the second BRI summit in 2019, Philipp Hammond participated a second time. Germany was represented by its then-Minister for Economic Affairs Peter Altmaier.<sup>874</sup> None of these countries sent a high-level representative to the Leaders' Roundtable, either in 2017 or in 2019. In the run-up to the 2nd BRF, the United States even officially declined to send high-level officials. The media reported increased skepticism voiced by European countries, leading to the decision to decline the participation of the heads of state.<sup>875</sup> Although the practice of Germany, and the United Kingdom had not changed, it was interpreted more negatively during the 2nd BRF. This points to the negative turn already noted in Chapter 3, whilst backlash already occurred on earlier stages. For example, Zhao notes that the first BRF made negative international headlines for its overly enthusiastic and irritatingly bizarre propaganda.<sup>876</sup> Furthermore, there was no agreement among EU member states to sign a trade statement drafted by Beijing for the first BRF. The reasons given for the rejection were that the document provided insufficient guarantees in terms of transparency, sustainability, and

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<sup>872</sup> Tiezzi 2021.

<sup>873</sup> The Diplomat 2017.

<sup>874</sup> OBOReuropa 2019; Meyer 2019.

<sup>875</sup> Tiezzi 2019; Zhao 2019: 15.

<sup>876</sup> Zhao 2019: 3.

tendering procedures.<sup>877</sup> Similarly, Matt Pottinger stressed the importance of transparency.<sup>878</sup>

Taking a closer look at the second major event in 2017, the CPC adopted an amendment to its constitution, in which the BRI was officially enshrined by name. In the section of the CPC's general program, the 19th National Congress adopted with regard to developing good neighborly relations "[i]t shall follow the principle of achieving shared growth and through discussion and collaboration, and pursue the Belt and Road Initiative."<sup>879</sup> The section is framed with references to the five principles of peaceful coexistence and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. In this way, the importance of the BRI is contextualized in domestic and foreign dimensions. Connecting to the intellectual tradition of Chinese policy, the Two Centenary Goals are immediately invoked, which subliminally links internal development to the international context.

The linkage was further underscored by the central issue of the 2nd BRF in 2019, which was much dedicated to launching a more environmentally friendly "Green" BRI. A new debt sustainability framework was issued in advance to the forum. Both moves underscore that the 2019 BRF responded to domestic and foreign development risks and criticisms. President Xi addressed in his keynote speech points of criticism, which underscores a shift to his 2017 speech emphasizing the BRI's global vision.<sup>880</sup> He focused on three areas: The BRI operates under the aegis of bi-, tri-, and multilateral cooperation, contrary to criticism that Chinese actors are too dominant and focused on their own profits. The promotion of green and clean development is to be pursued under the BRI, which involves environmental as well as political such as anti-corruption measures. Thirdly, linking to the UN SDGs, Xi Jinping underscored the sustainable development in respect of the target countries laws and regulations. This area confronts complaints that the BRI neglects local livelihoods, does not pursue sustainable financing and debt policies, and again favors Chinese benefits.<sup>881</sup> In this respect, the year 2019 may be seen as the beginning of a BRI 2.0.<sup>882</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> Rolland 2019c: 221; Phillips 2017.

<sup>878</sup> Zhao 2019: 15.

<sup>879</sup> 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

<sup>880</sup> Zhao 2019: 16.

<sup>881</sup> Xi 2019.

<sup>882</sup> Carey and Ladislav 2019: 2.

This BRI 2.0 is more of an incremental adjustment rather than a fundamental revolution. All three areas were already covered by the 2015 Vision and Actions in some way or the other. For example, the section Unimpeded Trade calls for promoting environmental protection industries. It envisions projects in advancing clean, renewable energy sources and conserving the eco-environment. From the very beginning, it was intended “to make the Silk Road an environment-friendly one”<sup>883</sup>. Beyond that, some instruments such, such as the greening of investments, back to a 2007 green credit policy by Chinese banks, followed by Green Credit Guidelines in 2012. In the context of BRI, the Green Silk Road Fund was already introduced in 2015. Nevertheless, the 2nd BRF made significant progress in the environmental dimension by announcing several measures such as the BRI International Green Development Coalition, Green Investment Principles, or the Silk Road Environment Program.<sup>884</sup>

These adjusted focus points were highlighted in the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) concerning the BRI as well. Now, the high-quality promotion of the BRI is explicitly and more clearly targeted than before. High quality has evolved as a new watchword, sending a positive message to partners and a reminder to executing actors. In order to ensure the BRI’s high quality, the three areas of Xi Jinping’s 2nd BRF keynote are reflected by recalling sustainability not only in the ecological but also in social, political, and economic dimensions. In contrast to the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, the 14<sup>th</sup> is more responsive to the raised concerns, for example, concerning debt sustainability principles and regulations. It is also more explicit with regard to the BRI’s subsidiaries. By mentioning several subsidiaries like the Digital Silk Road, the Green Silk Road or the Health Silk Road by name, the progress in institutionalization and thematic expansion is revealed.<sup>885</sup> The virtual BRI conference 2021 reflects these priorities, with the launch of an “Initiative for Belt and Road Partnership on Green Development” and a “Belt and Road Partnership on COVID-19 Vaccines Cooperation” on this occasion.<sup>886</sup> In this respect, the Corona pandemic has an impact on prioritizing and institutionalizing the health sectors of the BRI. These, too, were already laid out in the original 2015 Visions

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<sup>883</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>884</sup> Tiezzi 2021; Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 6-8.

<sup>885</sup> Murphy 2021: 101-102.

<sup>886</sup> Tiezzi 2021.

and Actions document, but were refined according to the circumstances in international events.<sup>887</sup>

From an organizational perspective, it emerges that the BRI represents a whole-of-government, multi-purpose approach.<sup>888</sup> Although the PRC is often simplified as a unitary actor, the diversity of stakeholders involved and conflicting interests should not be forgotten. Neither the PRC nor the CPC are unitary actors; neither is the BRI a unified project.<sup>889</sup> It is precisely this diversity in a state of billions that gives rise to concerns about instability. Rogelja and Tsimonis note this very bias, that the BRI is assumed to be a “centrally executed conspiracy”<sup>890</sup> rather than considering decentralized approach involving diverse actors. Indeed, the BRI is executed by various governmental, semi-governmental and private actors from the local to the global level.<sup>891</sup> The chairman of the Leading Group Zhang Gaoli himself encouraged all localities to mobilize and synergize their efforts for the BRI.<sup>892</sup> As a result, each Chinese province has established local offshoots of the Leading Group and include the BRI as a priority in their government work reports. Owing to these intermediary BRI offices, information is circulated upward and downward in the political system. Nevertheless, efforts remain rather uncoordinated, not finely orchestrated. This is attributed to three main causes: First, at the outset, management levels did not define qualification criteria for BRI projects or participants. This is in line with the experimental policy approach explained above. As a consequence, almost every measure, every project was claimed for BRI. Thus, second, a kind of *carte blanche* was issued for BRI projects, resulting in a near skyrocketing of the number of projects and investments. Third, coordination and progress are difficult to assess from the outside, as meetings of local BRI planning offices are often not open to the public.<sup>893</sup> These complications are aptly illustrated by the saying “the mountain is high and the emperor is far away” (山高皇帝远, shangao huangdi yuan), which de-

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<sup>887</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>888</sup> Ji 2020: 1; Russel and Berger 2020: 7, 42.

<sup>889</sup> Zhang 2023: 39.

<sup>890</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 113.

<sup>891</sup> Yuan 2020: 39.

<sup>892</sup> Liu 2019: 138.

<sup>893</sup> Liu 2019: 138; Rolland 2019c: 227; Zhao 2019: 9.



scribes that in remote areas regulations of the central authorities are not strictly enforced.<sup>894</sup>

In order to cope with this multitude of projects and actors, the higher-level ministries were involved, new funding mechanisms were set up, and supporting organizations were founded. The MFA, the MOFCOM, and the Ministry of Finance are major supporting agencies for the NDRC and its Leading Group. As the NDRC is commissioned by the State Council with economic and social development policies, it is a major player for infrastructure projects. Funding is located in the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank, which overlook foreign exchange reserves, the internationalization of the RMB as a BRI goal and other financial bodies. For instance, the AIIB and the SRF were established with the assistance of this ministry and the Central Bank.<sup>895</sup> Closely linked to these are other banks, of which the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export and Import Bank of China (EximBank) are the main sources of BRI financing. Chinese state-owned banks such as the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China or the Bank of China also finance BRI-projects, but mostly domestically.<sup>896</sup> The financial institutions also cooperate with international financial bodies such as the World Bank, private and governmental actors.<sup>897</sup> To this end, the MFA's diplomatic network plays a crucial role in bringing foreign governments and stakeholders on board. The MFA also holds a central seat in the BRI when it comes to hosting summits or representing the PRC's interests in the UN. Commercial interests, in turn, are predominantly negotiated in the MOFCOM. In the BRI, this concerns the negotiation of free trade agreements (FTAs) and other types of economic cooperation.<sup>898</sup> Although the ministries are the close representatives of the central government, there are also conflicts of interest and competition among them. In this vein, Zhao observed that the MFA and the MOFCOM "are often in a tug of war, with MFA's long-term political agenda clashing with [MOFCOM]'s emphasis on short-term commercial interests."<sup>899</sup>

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<sup>894</sup> Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 5.

<sup>895</sup> Liu 2019: 140; Zhao 2019: 3, 9.

<sup>896</sup> Chen et al. 2020: 22; Zhao 2019: 3.

<sup>897</sup> Wang 2017: 212.

<sup>898</sup> Liu 2019: 140; Zhao 2019: 3, 9.

<sup>899</sup> Zhao 2019: 9.

In order to alleviate internal disagreements, the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) was founded in 2018. This is the former Foreign Aid department, which was subordinate to MOFCOM. In its founding year, CIDCA was spun off as an independent agency and subordinated directly to the State Council. In this way, CIDCA aims to ensure vertical coordination between foreign aid projects of ministries and other bodies in development cooperation and to bridge discord.<sup>900</sup> Despite being called a milestone for more proactive Chinese foreign aid policies, CIDCA remains largely unknown abroad.<sup>901</sup> This became especially apparent in the literature review for Chapter 3, as the agency is rarely considered despite its seemingly central role of coordinating aid within the BRI.

In addition, academia and businesses play a crucial part in the BRI both in China and abroad. Neither can be completely disentangled from the PRC government, although they certainly reflect the most civilian part of the BRI. The main role of Chinese academics is to produce knowledge about the functioning of the BRI aimed at enhancing policies and guidelines. This does not automatically lead to a stance that conforms to the central government. Scientists are nonetheless dependent on addressing the needs of policymakers in order to obtain funding and build a career.<sup>902</sup> Their influence on the actual policymaking is difficult to assess, yet Chinese scholars are indeed involved in many stages of the political process, be it agenda setting, policy planning, or impact evaluation.<sup>903</sup> Especially in the area of people-to-people exchanges, academic interaction along the BRI is promoted. By strengthening the ties between universities and think tanks, intellectual support for the BRI should be fostered.<sup>904</sup> This has already been listed in the 2015 Vision and Actions, with the document also calling on companies to advance knowledge sharing, employment, training, and building business networks.<sup>905</sup>

In this respect, the companies are considered “Belt and Road ambassadors”. This includes a role model function with high demands on the part of the government.<sup>906</sup> The BRI itself is designed to brand a positive vision for Chinese companies to expand

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<sup>900</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 133; Rolland 2019c: 229; Zhao 2019: 3.

<sup>901</sup> Zhang and Ji 2020.

<sup>902</sup> Zhang 2023: 37, 42, 55.

<sup>903</sup> Zhang 2023: 34.

<sup>904</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 133; Xu and Wang 2019b: 118.

<sup>905</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>906</sup> Rolland 2019c: 228.

abroad.<sup>907</sup> Especially in the field of implementation, Chinese companies like Zijin Mining, Alibaba, PowerChina or Sinopec are key BRI players. According to Nedopil Wang, these were the main investors of the BRI in 2021, which channel the funds of the previously described financial bodies. Both private and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are involved, with the latter clearly leading construction projects.<sup>908</sup> Some Chinese scholars criticize the fact that certain companies only make use of the BRI for the benefit of funding or government support.<sup>909</sup> This again points to the control difficulties mentioned above and illustrates the need to recognize the diverse interests of Chinese actors.

Ultimately, a closer look at the multiple actors involved helps to understand the coordination difficulties within the BRI. It enables a sophisticated and critical apprehension of domestic and international concerns and whether these reflect the complexity of the project. This complexity explains why the historical and organizational evaluation of the BRI is described as a broad conceptual framework that is fuzzy and ambiguous.<sup>910</sup> This intricate character of the BRI is embedded in some continuation in the intellectual foundations and institutions outlined in this section. Similar observations can be made with regard to the principles and driving forces, as will be shown in the next section.

## **5.2. Belt and Road Principles and Driving Forces**

The principles and driving forces of the BRI are so extensive that the issue requires selection and systematization. To this end, BRI's five connectivity from the 2015 Vision and Actions constitute a useful framework to shed light on this complex. They help to identify central formulations, so-called tifa (提法). Tifa guide the discourse and are often decisively shaped by the paramount leader, so currently by Xi Jinping. For Chinese policymaking, tifa act as strategic narratives channeling political action and signaling ideas to both internal and external audiences. Accordingly, they require knowledge on their actual substance by interpretation.<sup>911</sup> This interpretation demands more than a translation but a “decoding” of contents, prescriptions, prohibitions, and ways of acting. The changes in Chinese political vocabulary are not accidental or meaningless. They are

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<sup>907</sup> Zhao 2019: 6.

<sup>908</sup> Nedopil Wang 2022: 18.

<sup>909</sup> Zhang 2023: 41-42, 52.

<sup>910</sup> Nicolas 2019; Kozłowski 2018: 318; Xin and Matheson 2018: 5247; Van der Putten et al. 2016: 3.

<sup>911</sup> Rudyak 2021: 17; Zhang and Orbie 2019: 7; Vuori 2011: 242.

expressions of power struggles that take place behind closed doors.<sup>912</sup> The resulting tifa represent less imperatives for specific actions than dynamic and adaptive ascriptions of meaning. These embed the utilitarian pragmatism of Chinese actors in a narrative. In this way, power is exercised and constructed as tifa foster a collective identity, build a shared frame of reference, and consolidate the cohesion of the political system.<sup>913</sup> Promoting tifa internationally is linked to the recognition the introducing new terminology with a compelling normative vision elevates China's international influence.<sup>914</sup>

Accordingly, the five connectivity, which Xi already presented in his 2013 Astana speech are emblematic of such political meaning-making, which finds expression in the 2015 Vision and Actions and BRI-publications ever since.<sup>915</sup> Before jumping into the five areas of connectivity (wutong) of the document, the word "connectivity" already expresses underlying content. Connectivity has not only become a keyword on the macro-level but touches the core of BRI. It is a code that combines the physical and meta-physical dimensions of the BRI.<sup>916</sup> These hard and soft elements include both tangible infrastructure and intangible relations between people, policies, and rules.<sup>917</sup> Xi Jinping himself spelled out connectivity in late 2014 as a tripartite synergy of infrastructure, institutions, and people.<sup>918</sup> Connectivity is becoming a driving force in a new phase of globalization spurred by the BRI. According to Wang Yiwei, this Globalization 3.0 represents a departure from the second and Western-centric phase of globalization. Instead, it is a historical reminiscence of Globalization 1.0 shaped by the ancient Silk Road.<sup>919</sup> Foreign researchers view this reading of new globalization with concern, as it is geared to China's interest and contains a revisionist element.<sup>920</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich, for example, call the BRI a Chinese concept and vision of globalization as a counter-version of the US-led globalization.<sup>921</sup> This counter-version of globalization is employed to justify a reorganization of global governance and Chinese readings of international norms. From a Chinese perspective, such a new model of global governance is explained to be

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<sup>912</sup> Rudyak 2021: 17. As mentioned in Section 3.2, see also: Bandurski, et al. 2021.

<sup>913</sup> Noesselt 2018a: 45-46.

<sup>914</sup> Foot 2019: 156-157.

<sup>915</sup> Y. Wang 2019a: 89.

<sup>916</sup> Wang 2017: 42; 206.

<sup>917</sup> Liu 2019: 139; Fung et al. 2018: 331.

<sup>918</sup> Xu and Wang 2019: 109.

<sup>919</sup> Wang 2017: 83.

<sup>920</sup> Rolland 2019c: 221. See in contrast Liu et al. 2018: 1207.

<sup>921</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 34.

an improvement of the current system, not an abandonment. The current, seemingly inadequate mechanisms demonstrated a global governance failure with the 2007-2008 financial crisis. As a consequence of the crisis, an improvement of the currently Western-dominated and imbalanced system is called for.<sup>922</sup> A new form of international relations, a vision of global governance is to be created by China's proactive encouragement and international collaboration. This vision was further stimulated by Xi Jinping in October 2015 at the 27th Group Study Meeting of the Members of the Politburo of the CPC Central Committee and continued in October 2017 in the report to the 19th National Congress.<sup>923</sup> The overall shift towards a more proactive role of China in international relations follows Xi Jinping's dictum "fenfa you wei" (奋发有为), which can be translated as "striving for achievement" or "be enthusiastic and press on". It is often debated as a replacement of Deng Xiaoping's former "keep a low profile"-strategy (韬光养晦, taoguangyanghui).<sup>924</sup>

Xi's dictum is closely connected to the Chinese Dream (中国梦, zhongguo meng) and the Two Centenary Goals. In this context, it signals the transformative vision of "a transition from 'globalization in China' to 'China in globalization'"<sup>925</sup>. It involves the components of the resurgence of a Chinese nation and regaining political strength, which glorifies the heyday of China before the 'century of humiliation' and the collapse of the Chinese empire. Although the 'century of humiliation' is a centerpiece of China's historical memory, the Chinese Dream concentrates much more on the positive aspects of national vigor. It is not so much directed at the past as it is forward-looking. A future based on China in globalization promises internal development for the domestic audience as well as a peaceful and responsible outlook for the international audience, according to Sørensen.<sup>926</sup> Consequently, one should refrain from simply equating the Chinese Dream with the American Dream. Although they share some similarities, the former combines a national with an international vision for development based on a collectivist culture, while the American dream is a national ethos of an individualistic culture and, therefore, about a different set of ideals and self-expression. Accordingly,

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<sup>922</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 111, 113; Xu and Wang 2019a: 109; Zhang 2018: 199.

<sup>923</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 111-112, 124.

<sup>924</sup> Rudyak 2021: 14; Sørensen 2015: 53.

<sup>925</sup> Wang 2017: 106.

<sup>926</sup> Sørensen 2015: 56, fn. 6; 59, 64.

these entail different ideas of globalization: A Chinese state-driven, top-down versus a US company-driven, bottom-up version. Ultimately, these dreams symbolize different models of society and world order, triggering and revealing points of friction between China and the United States.<sup>927</sup> Consequently, Wu argues, from the US perspective, realizing China's dream of national rejuvenation would automatically mount a challenge to its global hegemony.<sup>928</sup>

The role of the BRI in achieving the Chinese Dream unveils the indispensable connection to China's core interests (核心利益, hexin liyi). The stability of the political system under the leadership of the CCP, safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, and economic development are the three cornerstones of the core interests. All of them connect to the interest of national security providing an ideological bedrock for domestic and foreign policy.<sup>929</sup> With regard to the core interests, Xi Jinping is emphatic about China's uncompromising stance in his speeches. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese Dream arouses suspicion in the West and among neighboring countries. In a negative view, it is described as a nationalist doctrine whose goals a more assertive China would enforce by military means if necessary.<sup>930</sup> This signals a link between fundamental Chinese security ideas, the Chinese Dream, and the BRI, which will be central in Chapter 6.

At this point, core interests not only serve us as important principles for the BRI, but point to driving forces in the domestic and foreign environments. Like the core interests themselves, these environments are closely intertwined. In the national context, the BRI's goal is to spur Chinese economic growth by creating favorable national and international conditions.<sup>931</sup> This is related to the underdevelopment of central and western regions. The development gap between the eastern and western regions of Mainland China is traced on different maps across the so-called Heihe-Tengchong Line, also known as the Hu Line. The Hu Line divides China into an eastern part that accounts for about 40 percent of the territory but more than 90 percent of the population, while west of the Hu Line, more than 60 percent of the territory is home to less than 10 percent of the population. Apart from population density, similar discrepancies can be seen on

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<sup>927</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 323; Noesselt 2018a: 46-48.

<sup>928</sup> Wu 2020: 67.

<sup>929</sup> Müller and Polfuß 2021: 149-150; Zeng et al. 2015: 245.

<sup>930</sup> Sørensen 2015: 57, 62, 65

<sup>931</sup> Zhang 2023: 41.

maps in terms of income, infrastructure networks, or universities. The ‘Go West’ strategy previously targeted these imbalances and the overdependence on the coastal areas, as they are considered a weak spot. These disparities are feared to cause discontent, hence political instability, particularly in Xinjiang.<sup>932</sup> From these concerns, it can be seen why Xinjiang is highlighted as a core area of the BRI in both the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plans.<sup>933</sup> By providing a new impetus for infrastructure projects, the BRI is hoped to bring the remedy for inland provinces. It should promote horizontal integration among China’s regions and vertical integration between coastal cities and foreign docking sites in a 3D-dimensional approach to bridging density, distance and division.<sup>934</sup>

By promoting inland integration, the PRC’s international competitiveness will be strengthened, which in turn should bring benefits to neighboring countries.<sup>935</sup> A secure international environment created by and for the BRI is deemed essential for achieving China’s development goals.<sup>936</sup> The main target region of the BRI, located between China and Europe, is described in dire need of horizontal integration.<sup>937</sup> This vast area is called a “collapse zone”<sup>938</sup>, which is land-locked due to inadequate infrastructure, causing backward markets and poverty. Again, the BRI is supposed to remedy this by quickly providing infrastructure and funding that is aligned with local development needs.<sup>939</sup> Consequently, these countries will transform from being “land-locked to land-crossed.”<sup>940</sup>

The transformation is to take place along the five connectivity areas, also known as the Five Links. Enlisted as cooperation priorities in the 2013 Vision and Actions are policy coordination, infrastructure building, trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds. First, policy coordination is planned in a multi-level intergovernmental approach to build trust and a joint regulatory framework for BRI projects.<sup>941</sup> Technical standards are to be harmonized with each other in order to reduce practical hurdles by means of

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<sup>932</sup> Zhao 2019: 6; Wang 2017: 106, 115-117

<sup>933</sup> Murphey 2021: 101; Central Compilation & Translation Press 2016: Chapter 51.

<sup>934</sup> Wang 2017: 118, 121.

<sup>935</sup> Wang 2017: 118.

<sup>936</sup> Sørensen 2015: 65-68.

<sup>937</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019b: 124.

<sup>938</sup> Xu and Wang 2019a: 106; similar: Wang 2017: 41.

<sup>939</sup> Zhang 2023: 42; Fu 2019: 128- 129; Wang 2019b: 95; Wang and Li 2019:103; Zhao 2019: 7; Wang 2017: 70; 104.

<sup>940</sup> Wang 2017: 99-100.

<sup>941</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

standardization.<sup>942</sup> On the bilateral level, coordination and harmonization are typically enshrined in a MoU. These declarations of intent are usually vague. They are nevertheless Beijing's preferred means of indicating membership in the BRI, as they are a public signal that the signatory countries support the project and cooperation with China.<sup>943</sup> According to official statistics, by December 2023, 151 countries have signed such an agreement.<sup>944</sup> With more than three-quarters of all countries around the globe participating, the BRI is already one of the world's most successful policy coordination schemes of our time. This does not include individual project agreements, cooperation agreements with international organizations<sup>945</sup>, and multilateral policy papers that include even more states and further expand the BRI regime. The sheer size of these agreements underlines that this area is fundamental to the political communication between China and BRI participants, which is usually done bilaterally. In contrast to the Western model of multilateralism, this multi-bilateralism evolves out of coordinating policies around Chinese leadership.<sup>946</sup>

Second, facilities connectivity centers on infrastructure construction. It involves the “softer” political coordination of planned projects, technical standards, and customs, thus a connection to the first link. “Hard” infrastructure projects are proposed in nearly every sector, including land, water, and air transportation, information technology from underground to outer space, and energy supply.<sup>947</sup> In subsequent documents, such as the 2019 BRI progress report, this area is renamed infrastructure connectivity, replacing the fuzzy facilities term for the broader yet more familiar term of infrastructure.<sup>948</sup> Connection is targeted in every conceivable dimension of “land, sea, sky and cyber”<sup>949</sup>, to ensure holistic integration according to the 14<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. While the 2015 Vision and Actions already presents a multi-dimensional approach, the growing attention for air,

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<sup>942</sup> Xu and Wang 2019a: 109.

<sup>943</sup> Mendez et al. 2022: 490.

<sup>944</sup> Nedopil 2023. However, there are some uncertainties concerning what countries and MoUs to count. For example, the official Chinese figure is reported to include Palestine, which is not considered an independent country under the UN.

<sup>945</sup> According to the 2019 progress report, China had already signed cooperation agreements with 29 international organizations by the end of March 2019 (Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 6).

<sup>946</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 38; G. Cheng 2019: 134; Foot 2019: 155.

<sup>947</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>948</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 8.

<sup>949</sup> Murphy 2021: 101.



space, and cyber marks an extension<sup>950</sup> of the dominant land and sea routes, which ultimately complement each other.<sup>951</sup>

Noteworthy is the assurance in the 2015 and 2019 BRI document that the “sovereignty and security concerns”<sup>952</sup> of the countries involved would be respected. The expression relates to the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” proposed by Zhou Enlai in 1954. As part of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, those principles are still guiding Chinese foreign and security policy today. For example, they are perpetuated in China’s 1997 New Security Concept (新安全观, *xin anquan guan*) and defense white papers. Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is the first of these principles.<sup>953</sup> Directly referring to the principles and security in this BRI area stresses its sensitive character as well as the Chinese government’s awareness of potential friction. Despite existing conflicts with BRI target states, infrastructure should be pursued on the basis of the common denominator, even if it is not easy. This relates to the vision of a community of shared destiny, as elaborated later in this chapter.

Third, the area of unimpeded trade can either be viewed as a result of the implementation of the first two Links, or as a separate field of action. With the goal of reducing cross-border trade barriers, this cooperation area aims to dismantle tariffs and, ideally, to establish free trade areas. Trade liberalization is being pursued for both physical goods and services and online commerce. Investments are to be encouraged. Considering the existing scholarship, a fresh interpretation of BRI investment promotion be boiled down to the slogan: “Come in – go out”. In this perspective, “come in” relates to welcoming inward investments in China itself, whereas “go out” refers to outward investments by Chinese actors in BRI target countries in allusion to the aforementioned “Go Global” policy.

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<sup>950</sup> Health infrastructure is not included in the area of facilities connectivity in the 2015 Vision and Actions, but under the area of „People-to-people bond“ - suggesting a close link to the concept of human security. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, health infrastructure was upgraded as a cooperation priority, although the documents prove that the issue was already covered in the early days of BRI. It is not a sea change in the BRI’s composition and principles.

<sup>951</sup> Xu and Wang 2019a: 108; Wang 207: 62.

<sup>952</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 8; NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>953</sup> Noesselt 2018a: 173.

Thematically, this multi-directional approach in the 2015 Vision and Actions highlights environmentally friendly investments and technologies. It can be considered a precursor of the Green BRI. Thus, in terms of security dimensions, the arena of unimpeded trade cannot only be understood in economic terms, as one might expect, but also closely relates to ecological security. Reducing trade costs, protecting investments, promoting international division of labor along the industrial chain, and avoiding double taxation are some mechanisms of this area designed to drive development.<sup>954</sup> By the end of the first BRI year in 2015, China already had 77 economic and trade cooperation zones in 23 BRI participating countries. Since then, the PRC has been continuously expanding its trade network.<sup>955</sup> As part of the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF in 2017, China issued the Initiative on Promoting Unimpeded Trade along the Belt and Road. This Initiative reiterates the environmental-friendly philosophy and commitments to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was signed by 83 countries and organizations, while it does not impose any strict requirements on the signing parties.<sup>956</sup> Once more, this illustrates the model of multi-bilateralism and principled voluntariness instead of rule-binding in BRI agreements.

Fourth, financial integration builds on institutionalization, harmonization, and internalization. Institutionalization refers to the creation of funding mechanisms and banks such as the AIIB or the Silk Road Fund. Existing institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or ASEAN are engaged in deepening financial relations. Relations with international financial institutions have expanded, as demonstrated by China's accession to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in 2016. Multilateral institutionalization is augmented with regional programs such as the China-CEEC Bank Consortium in 2017, the China-Arab States Bank Consortium, and the China-Africa Financial Cooperation Consortium in 2018. This broad-based approach is designed to encourage participating states to harmonize financial standards, credit information systems, and bond markets. A regional early warning and crisis management systems are proposed with special attention given to potential financial risks. Institu-

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<sup>954</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 18-21; Wang and Li 2019: 103; Xu and Wang 2019a: 110; NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>955</sup> Wang 2017: 128.

<sup>956</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 19; MOFCOM 2017.

tionalization and harmonization support the internationalization of the Chinese Renminbi as well as public and private cross-border financing.<sup>957</sup>

Financial integration is a key building block in achieving unimpeded trade and providing funds for infrastructure projects. Evidently, this area focuses on economic security, addressing risks and vulnerabilities according to the danger dimension and multiple levels (national, regional, and international) in the founding documents. On a global stage, the strengthening of the RMB challenges the hegemonic advantages of the US dollar. By establishing the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), the internationalization of the RMB is intended to be spurred. Initiated in 2012, CIPS has entered the global stage by signing a MoU with the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) linking their standards. In 2022, CIPS covers 103 countries. Back in 2019, only 40 countries were reported to participate, highlighting a vast expansion of the system. Without further capital flow liberalization by the Chinese government, CIPS is not yet effectively driving the RMB internationalization.<sup>958</sup> With more and more countries like Pakistan using the RMB, speculations have evolved over a future Belt and Road single currency area.<sup>959</sup>

Fifth, the area of people-to-people bond aims at human exchanges, which is the basic prerequisite for any kind of integration. Interpersonal relations are to be fostered in every conceivable way, be it tourism, youth exchanges, academic cooperation, sport events, cultural festivals, media broadcasting, city cooperation, or cooperation between non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A favorable international atmosphere, a “spirit of friendly cooperation” is to be fostered in this area, as stated in the 2015 Vision and Actions.<sup>960</sup> It is viewed as the most important area among the Five Links to outright mobilize public support and for the BRI and thereby boost legitimacy and soft power.<sup>961</sup> As Joseph S. Nye, Jr. already postulated, power shifts not only between states (power transition), but also from state to non-state actors (power diffusion), which is further accel-

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<sup>957</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 21-26; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 30-34; NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>958</sup> Kuo 2022; Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 25; Liu 2019: 140; Zhao 2019: 5; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 33-34.

<sup>959</sup> Müller and Polfuß 2021: 153; Zhao 2019: 5; Wang 2017: 126-127.

<sup>960</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>961</sup> Xu and Wang 2019a: 109 Zhao 2019: 7.

erated by modern technologies such as the Internet.<sup>962</sup> By writing that “power is moving not only eastward but also downward”<sup>963</sup>, Wang takes up Nyes understanding of power for demonstrating the importance of this area. The 2015 Vision and Actions highlight deliberate harnessing of the media and the Internet to garner public support.<sup>964</sup> With regard to the literature review in 3.2, an attempt to desecuritize the BRI with the help of soft power can be inferred from this.

If this area is understood as a goal of the BRI rather than a prerequisite, the importance of the other links for this one is revealed. An exchange between people or even the organization of large events is not possible if the infrastructure on site is missing. Tourists cannot arrive without the appropriate travel connections or visa regulations. Without financial integration, payment options for foreigners are lacking or connecting infrastructure cannot be financed. For this to happen, the political decision-makers must first agree on basic rules. This closes the circle to the ‘people-to-people’ prerequisite, because cross-cultural understanding, communication and vocational training must be established to tackle these challenges. Accordingly, not only an economic or political but civil community is cultivated with the BRI. This fits into the broader messaging of a community of shared destiny, which is explained later in this chapter.<sup>965</sup>

It can be deduced that this area comprises the highest degree of precision in the reference dimension by targeting individuals, groups and societies. Consistent with these targets, the 2015 Vision and Actions touch on problem areas of human security by addressing health cooperation and poverty reduction.<sup>966</sup> Disaster relief such emergency food assistance, housing projects, and civil society efforts to improve local living conditions in Cambodia, Nepal, and other developing countries were highlighted in this area in the later 2019 Progress Report.<sup>967</sup> The examples demonstrate a pragmatic approach towards human security, whose normative implications are circumvented by avoiding the term in the documents.

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<sup>962</sup> Nye 2011: 102, 113-115.

<sup>963</sup> Wang 2017: 54.

<sup>964</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>965</sup> Wang 2017: 25, 54; Zhao 2019: 7.

<sup>966</sup> NDRC 2015: IV. Cooperation Priorities.

<sup>967</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 30.

Overall, the Five Links are described as intended to drive strategic integration at the political, societal, and economic level. Therefore, they capture how the BRI is envisioned to steer transformation in multiple sectors and on all levels between individuals, states and international organizations.<sup>968</sup> Accordingly, they cover virtually all categories of the security dimensions. Emphasis is placed on economic security in the issue dimension and the state in the reference dimension. Cooperation on the regional, international and even global level is driven by state actors. In order to build a positive vision of the BRI, threats and military components are hard to find in the Five Links. They arise implicitly from their composition and consequences – especially with regard to core interests. Nevertheless, cyber, human, and ecologic security are not omitted. With this integral approach, the Five Links pursue a ‘five in one’-strategy for transforming the “economy, politics, culture, society and ecology”<sup>969</sup> in the framework of the BRI.

Unlocking the untapped potential for transformation, the BRI aims to address the failure of global governance at both the process level of policymaking and the outcome level of development disparities in the aftermath of the financial crisis.<sup>970</sup> As part of the narrative of global governance failure, the financial crisis serves as a recurring anchor legitimating the BRI and Chinese foreign policy in a broader sense. A positive narrative is created, in which China’s own development model is presented as a success story and even a potential role model. The success story incorporates China’s dual self-image as an emerging power and a developing country. As an emerging power, China presents itself as a responsible actor at the global level. This ties in with its own presentation as a developing country, which builds up the idea of partnership at eye level with other developing countries.<sup>971</sup> In this reading, the Chinese development model is attractive to the countries along the Silk Road because it promises to lift millions of people out of poverty. In an innovative interpretation of these elements, the formula utilized in these initiatives is to promote attraction through development. Adding to this formula, the idea of ‘no strings attached’ should increase the BRI’s attractiveness by contrasting its processes with ‘Western’ development offers. ‘No strings attached’ promises non-conditionality for lending, such as political reform efforts demanded by Western donors.

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<sup>968</sup> Yuan 2020: 35.

<sup>969</sup> Wang 2017: 137.

<sup>970</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 111, 113; Wang 2019b: 96; Xu and Wang 2019a: 109.

<sup>971</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 111; Wang 2017: 67.

Such demands are based on the conviction that good governance and human rights are prerequisites for development, which contrasts with the Chinese model of progress without democracy.<sup>972</sup> This model is based on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs according to the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”. Zhou’s principle of ‘mutual benefit’ is prevalent in the BRI-language of ‘win-win’. The high degree of consistency between BRI-rhetoric and the Five Principles, Gloria notes, reflects continuity in China’s understanding of its status in the global order.<sup>973</sup> In the tradition of the Five Principles, attraction through development is not only based on a pull effect of China’s positive characteristics but also a push effect away from Western actors. Similarly, the ‘win-win’ principle includes the push element as it contrasts with the zero-sum mentality that is recurrently connected to US-foreign policy. The contrast generates so-called negative soft power through push effects. These push effects increase China’s attractiveness and complement the usual positive connotation of soft power as a pull term.<sup>974</sup> This approach to fostering attraction through development is viewed with concern, especially from Western countries. It is associated with authoritarian political values. Scholars criticize that ‘no strings attached’ only holds on the surface of agreements as Beijing is deliberately building leverage in the form of codependency.<sup>975</sup> To tie this back to the above, critics question the BRI both in terms of processes considered unequal and outcomes distributed asymmetrically in favor of China.<sup>976</sup>

It is not the symmetry of distributions that is emphasized, but mutual benefits in general, so that the BRI is considered a positive transformation driver of domestic and external economies.<sup>977</sup> Chinese documents and authors refer to this as an “all-round opening-up”<sup>978</sup>. All-round opening does not only refer to China’s geographic position in order to promote the development in areas between China and Europe through infrastructural connectivity. The term additionally denotes China’s position in the international industrial chains enabling the country to provide for both the needs of industrial-

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<sup>972</sup> Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 373, 388; Tudoroiu 2019: 1.

<sup>973</sup> Gloria 2021: 501.

<sup>974</sup> Gloria 2021: 501; Müller and Polfuß 2021: 155; Jakimów 2019: 374, 377; Wang and Jiang 2019a: 113; Wang and Li 2019: 99, 101; Zhao 2019: 4.

<sup>975</sup> Tudoroiu 2019: 1-2; Wang 2019b: 95; Zhao 2019: 7-8; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012. See Section 10.3.

<sup>976</sup> While these concerns should not be silenced at this point, more detail will be provided in the Alter analysis.

<sup>977</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019b: 123.

<sup>978</sup> Liu 2019:140; Xu and Wang 2019a: 109; Wang 2017: 40.

ized and developing countries. China is placed at the center of a ‘double-loop system’, in which it forges an exchange and balance between both developed and developing markets. It reaches both the low-end and the high-end of the industrial chain as a manufacturer and service provider. In a political view, the ‘double loop’ idea can be transferred to Beijing’s ambitions in terms of the dual self-image. China reaches out politically to the traditional powers on the world stage and to the developing countries. In an overarching sense, this connects to a narrative that an ostensible ‘clash of civilizations’ will be prevented by China’s global hub position as it claims to diminish political and economic imbalances.<sup>979</sup>

The principle of an ‘open’ BRI links the basis of ‘no strings attached’ to China’s self-understanding as a hub in a double-loop system. Although BRI members are commonly seen as countries that have signed a MoU, there is no official membership for the initiative.<sup>980</sup> This explains why there are BRI projects in countries that, like Germany or the UK, are not designated as “members” or “target states” of the BRI. Participation in the BRI is open to all countries around the globe, and to all international and regional organizations without formal threshold criteria.<sup>981</sup> Openness is accompanied with and sometimes synonymously used for the term inclusiveness, which is frequently accompanied by the term ‘harmony’. In a philosophical sense, all those terms link to Daoist idea of wholeness. In the foreign policy sense, inclusiveness and harmony correspond with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. In reality, they manifest themselves in the Chinese practice of bypassing differences and focusing on the common denominator. This type of policy is at odds with a favored primacy for resolving conflicts by reconciling differences, which is often attributed to the political West.<sup>982</sup> On this logic of action, the ‘win-win’ principle, that is ubiquitous in BRI documents, is based. These underlying foreign policy traditions and guidelines are articulated, for example, in the 2015 Vision and Actions under III Framework, which states:

“The Belt and Road Initiative is a way for win-win cooperation that promotes common development and prosperity and a road towards peace and friendship by enhancing mutual understanding and trust, and strengthening all-round exchanges. The Chinese government advocates peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and

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<sup>979</sup> Wang 2017: 122, 177, 207; Huntington 1996.

<sup>980</sup> Xu and Wang 2019b: 118.

<sup>981</sup> Wang and Li 2019: 101; Wang and Jiang 2019a: 114; Xu and Wang 2019b: 117.

<sup>982</sup> Wang and Li 2019: 99: 101; Xu and Wang 2019a: 108.

mutual benefit. It promotes practical cooperation in all fields, and works to build a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility featuring mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness.”<sup>983</sup>

The ‘win-win’ and other principles are recurrently related to the ‘community of shared destiny for all humankind’, which merges several foreign policy guidelines in positive narratives. Both of Xi’s 2013 BRI founding speeches in Kazakhstan and Indonesia feature this ideational connection.<sup>984</sup> For the BRI, the ‘community of common destiny’ functions as a general principle as well as a soft power vehicle.<sup>985</sup> A closer look at this general principle unveils various ‘communities of’ in the discourse. This is similarly apparent in the previous quote from the 2015 Visions and Actions that designates three kinds of communities: a community of shared interest, of destiny, and of responsibility. The community of shared destiny is regularly subsumed under the community of common future. These community-concepts are again directed at different audiences, while they are all designed to forge group-feelings, i.e., a sense of togetherness as underlined by Confucian and Daoist watchwords such as harmony and world unity.<sup>986</sup>

Tracing its origins, the ‘community of common destiny’ alludes to the territorial disputes revolving around the South China Sea. The phrase is commonly found in relation to the ASEAN or the maritime component of the BRI. As such, the ‘Asian community of shared destiny’ is regarded as a prerequisite for building second- and third-tier communities on the regional and global level. This concentric-circle thinking is mirrored in the BRI’s design, which promotes global openness but places emphasis on the immediate neighborhood.<sup>987</sup> Security cooperation with East Asian states under the ‘community of common destiny’ is interpreted by Sørensen to exclude the US from such a regional arrangement.<sup>988</sup> She cites Xi Jinping, according to whom security in Asia is best provided by Asians. This directs criticism at the involvement of Western states, particularly the US, whose influence on Asian security and regional cooperation is in question. The community of shared destiny develops a China-led cooperation model for regional security.<sup>989</sup> Vuori corroborates this interpretation designating the community of shared fu-

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<sup>983</sup> NDRC 2015: III. Framework.

<sup>984</sup> Xi 2013a; 2013b.

<sup>985</sup> Wang and Li 2019: 99.

<sup>986</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019b: 125; Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 25.

<sup>987</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 24, 26; Zhang 2018: 199, 203.

<sup>988</sup> Sørensen 2015: 63.

<sup>989</sup> Sørensen 2015: 63.



ture for humankind in the PRC's rhetoric "an aspirational institutionalized security governance signifier"<sup>990</sup> for actively guiding diverse international politics. Following the tradition of finding a common denominator, the idea of a shared community was not to resolve regional disputes but to foster cooperation and trust through a shared sense of belonging despite the disputes. The guiding theme of any of these communities remains that commonalities are to be built upon and differences left untouched.<sup>991</sup> In so doing, mutual gains (win-win) are generated that foster the community of common future by recognizing that the BRI is "Built for All" according to Wang.<sup>992</sup> Beyond that, the community of common responsibility is designed to foster a sense of joint contributions in issues that require multinational coordination. This community links China's self-image as a responsible stakeholder to each nation's need for development. Ultimately, all states are required to participate in tackling a global coordination failure resulting from the current imperfect governance architecture. This community echoes the more proactive foreign policy under Xi Jinping and bears the heading "Built by All".<sup>993</sup>

Thirdly, a community of shared interests is proposed. As Zhang points out, this expression has a strong economic proclivity that is geared towards China's industrialized partner states. Therefore, the term is used to address Germany and the UK.<sup>994</sup> Similarly, Wang argues that the community of common interests involves diplomatic relations with extra-regional partners. His explanations of this community of "Built of All" affirm that participating states should be treated with equal respect regardless of economic strength and size. Respect is achieved by granting BRI states a voice and acknowledging each state's unique development path.<sup>995</sup> This area re-connects to challenges of global governance that criticize a sense of Western paternalism. First, the demand for respect stresses China's self-image as a great power that aims to be treated on equal footing by the US and other traditional powers.<sup>996</sup> Second, the demand for respect ties in with China's self-image as a developing country. Chinese actors employ this identity as a developing country, for example, in international climate negotiations. They argue

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<sup>990</sup> Vuori 2024: 180.

<sup>991</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 28.

<sup>992</sup> Wang 2017: 149-150.

<sup>993</sup> Wang 2017: 147-148; Zhang 2018: 202.

<sup>994</sup> Zhang 2018: 199.

<sup>995</sup> Wang 2017: 143-145; 249.

<sup>996</sup> Sørensen 2015: 60, 65.

against binding emission reductions as they would slow down the PRC's modernization process and catch up with developed countries.<sup>997</sup> The argumentation appeals to the developing countries in Africa and Latin America, where the shared identity as developing countries is meant to emphasize China's peaceful intentions and relations of equals despite asymmetries in size and economic strength.<sup>998</sup> Against this backdrop, while all states are encouraged to participate in the BRI<sup>999</sup>, the mode of participation is different. The focus of the BRI is on the immediate neighborhood, followed more generally by developing countries. Developed countries are invited as third parties.<sup>1000</sup> This reveals different constructions of in-group and out-group, different kinds of "communities".<sup>1001</sup> When interpreting these elements within the context of BRI rhetoric, the 'double-loop system' appears to materialize through concentric circles within the community discourses. They contain tailor-made messages for developing and developed countries while being linked by China as a hub in an overarching 'community for mankind' vision.<sup>1002</sup>

Correspondingly, the concept of "tianxia" (天下), translated as "all under heaven", is premised on Confucian principles of mutual respect, harmony and tolerance, in which China is placed as a central hub. Tianxia involves a China-centered world order proposing an alternative to the (Post-)Westphalian system. While the concept has become popular and widely debated among Chinese scholars, it is critically discussed as providing legitimization for global expansion and Chinese hegemony. Despite its popularity and competing interpretations in China, the concept is rarely discussed overseas except within expert circles that caution against a tributary notion.<sup>1003</sup> Such underlying principles and voiced concerns are important with regard to the adoption of the 'community of shared future for mankind' at the international level, for instance in the documents of the United Nations. Their meaning-laden nature in Chinese eyes is considered a sign of China's – particularly the CCP's – growing discursive power. According to Zeng, adopting the Chinese rhetoric by international institutions such as the UN Security Council in its Resolution 2344 of March 2017 provides legitimacy to the CCP to tighten

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<sup>997</sup> Noesselt 2018a: 112, 154, 183

<sup>998</sup> Noesselt 2018a: 161.

<sup>999</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 2.

<sup>1000</sup> Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 57.

<sup>1001</sup> Gloria 2021: 499.

<sup>1002</sup> Zhang 2018: 199.

<sup>1003</sup> Garlick 2020: 67, 72; Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 25; Godehardt 2016: 11-12.

domestic control. The author consequently demands greater sensitivity on the part of foreign actors for the extensive meaning of tifa.<sup>1004</sup>

All those community concepts reflect the discourse strand that the BRI addresses security issues – be it on the regional or global level. Security issues are implicitly presented to be addressed by countering coordination failure and by building trust through fostering a sense of belonging. Still, the “community of”-concepts remains overall ambiguous and undefined, similar to the BRI as a whole. Zhang argues that these imponderables give rise to anxiety and mistrust abroad, which is diametrically opposed to the purpose of the community discourses.<sup>1005</sup> This points to a challenging trade-off for the Chinese government between maintaining flexible adaptability and international demands for clarity.

In a game of narrative ping-pong, both the win-win principle and community pledges are met with counter-narratives elicited from the challenges of the BRI. Instead of pursuing mutual benefit, the counter-narrative claims that China wins more than once by capitalizing on its assertive predominance in the BRI.<sup>1006</sup> The notion that the PRC pursues a debt trap diplomacy instead of a win-win relationship was particularly coined by Brahma Chellaney.<sup>1007</sup> According to his widely disseminated 2017 article, China offers infrastructure loans that are purposefully designed to create inevitable payment default. This would lure stakeholders from other countries into a trap, targeting those with a reputation for being financially unstable, too poor, or irresponsible to obtain a large credit loan. By not being able to reimburse their loans, the lenders, mostly from developing countries, would then be forced into unequal repayment conditions involving the relinquishment of land or natural resources. Consequently, China positions itself on the basis of infrastructure debt to seize the strategic assets of vulnerable countries.<sup>1008</sup> This invokes the impression of predatory or neo-colonial practices, which have been investigated by numerous researchers worldwide subsequent to Chellaney’s work.<sup>1009</sup> Owing

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<sup>1004</sup> Zeng 2020: 127; Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 5 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1005</sup> Zhang 2018: 203.

<sup>1006</sup> Zhao 2019: 12; Zhang 2018: 202.

<sup>1007</sup> Singh 2020: 240; Chellaney 2017.

<sup>1008</sup> Chellaney 2017.

<sup>1009</sup> Such as Himmer and Rod 2022; Brautigam and Rithmire 2021; Singh 2020.

to the delicacy of the matter, a closer look at certain research findings is necessary to provide a balanced analysis of BRI perceptions.

Drawing on data from the CSIS Reconnecting Asia Project, James Kynge's article for the Financial Times shows that between 2006 and 2018, nearly 90 percent of contractors in 178 Chinese-financed projects in 34 Asian and European countries were Chinese. It is argued that these loans do not benefit the respective local population, but flow back to China.<sup>1010</sup> Chinese scholars also participated in the debate. According to Zhang's poll, the majority of surveyed scholars expressed concerns about the lack of involvement with local communities' needs and workforce for BRI projects. Reasons given for this phenomenon are language barriers, an untrained local workforce, lacking experience in foreign socio-political environments, and low-cost Chinese materials.<sup>1011</sup> This adds to the issue of loss-making projects, over-lending, over-indebting target countries and creating 'white elephant' projects that do not pass the planning phase. Especially in the early days of BRI, the magnitude of projects posed great financial risks for Chinese Banks as they were unable to track and vet lending.<sup>1012</sup> Zhao suggests that many projects were born out of political and money motives, so that in the end there was a lack of oversight for effective control: "No one, not even the Chinese government, had a comprehensive picture of the lending."<sup>1013</sup>

These challenges did not only trigger the debt trap debate abroad. They sparked domestic criticism of flushing money down the drain that could better be spent for development projects at home.<sup>1014</sup> Most prominently, the failed loan repayments of Hambantota Port serve as a recurrent illustration for both sides of criticisms. Sri Lanka's then-president Mahinda Rajapaksa invited China to fund the port after other actors such as India, the United States or Canada declined to invest. By 2017, Sri Lanka faced severe financial stress due to external debt owed to Japan, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and other countries, including China – with China accounting for less than 10 percent of Sri Lanka's foreign debt in 2017. In order to increase its foreign exchange reserves, receive a bailout from the International Monetary Fund and raise the

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<sup>1010</sup> Kynge 2018; Zhao 2019: 12.

<sup>1011</sup> Zhang 2023: 47, 49; Rolland 2019c: 223.

<sup>1012</sup> Rolland 2019c: 218; Zhao 2019: 2

<sup>1013</sup> Zhao 2019: 10.

<sup>1014</sup> Rolland 2019c: 219; Zhao 2019: 9.

performance of the Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port, Colombo leased it to China Merchants Port Holdings for USD 1.12 billion for 99 years. There was no rescheduling of loan agreements and no default on Sri Lanka's debt to China that facilitated this decision. Nevertheless, the lease by China Merchants Port is widely perceived as a predatory move by Chinese actors enabled by a preset debt trap. The takeover of the port exacerbated foreign suspicions and severely tarnished the credibility of the win-win principle as well as the attractiveness of the BRI as a whole.<sup>1015</sup> Based on this, it is argued that soft power losses and long-term international headwinds refute the claim of China's targeted action in Sri Lanka, as these derail the BRI's goals and, thus, national development objectives.<sup>1016</sup> In order to safeguard the win-win principle in future projects, Chen et al. propose greater awareness of the political and economic motives of local actors. In their view, rather than leading other countries into an alleged debt trap, it is China that risks being trapped.<sup>1017</sup> In a similar direction, Deborah Brautigam and Meg Rithmire stress that upon empirical evaluation, the debt trap narrative is found to be an unsubstantiated "myth."<sup>1018</sup> The debate about the debt trap cannot be resolved in this paper, but the research suggests that caution is advised regarding this narrative. While debt to China is indeed increasing in BRI target countries, China has evinced a willingness to restructure loans, which requires further scrutiny of terms and ramifications.<sup>1019</sup>

The restructuring of debts and lending practices come into play to illustrate that China is not monopolizing the construction of BRI but opposing hegemonism.<sup>1020</sup> It is emphasized that the BRI is not supposed to be a "one-man show"<sup>1021</sup> by China. This points to the rhetorical battlefield that the BRI is creating a 'China club'.<sup>1022</sup> Notably, this statement counters the community-narrative and corresponding core principles. In order to distinguish itself from the assumed zero-sum mentality, a peaceful, inclusive character of the BRI, the Chinese Dream, and other Chinese concepts is couched in the phrase

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<sup>1015</sup> Brautigam and Rithmire 2021; Garlick 2020: 194-195; Singh 2020: 245-246.

<sup>1016</sup> Jiang 2022: 23, 25; Yang 2022: 824.

<sup>1017</sup> Chen et al. 2020: 76-77.

<sup>1018</sup> Brautigam and Rithmire 2021.

<sup>1019</sup> Gu et al. 2022: 2-3, 15-17; Chen et al. 2020: 77.

<sup>1020</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 113.

<sup>1021</sup> Xu and Wang 2019b: 117.

<sup>1022</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 2. See also: Rolland 2019c: 228.

that it “originated in China, but it belongs to the world”.<sup>1023</sup> The idealistic universalism conveyed by this expression underscores the new vision of globalization. Although this new vision of globalization embraces the principle of inclusivity, international critics view this vision primarily defined by China itself. This claim is rejected in the 2019 progress report by Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>1024</sup>

The crux remains the contradiction between China’s positive self-construction, which is based on its demarcation from the traditional powers.<sup>1025</sup> Although ideational tensions persist, an attempt is made to defuse the potential for conflict by assigning specific tasks to traditional powers within the BRI. This integration endeavor does not completely resolve the ideational roots of contradictions, as indicated by recurrent rhetorical battlefields. To illustrate, Wang Yiwei reiterates the invitation to Europe to participate in the BRI especially for the joint development of third-party markets. The contribution of European countries holds the potential to compensate China’s weaknesses in external cooperation experience and language barriers. Win-win will be upgraded to triple win or even multiple wins in the context of tri- or multilateral BRI projects.<sup>1026</sup> By inviting the members of the Paris Club to participate constructively, the principles of openness, inclusiveness and mutual benefit are accentuated. Concerns about an exclusive ‘China Club’ and strategic debt traps are to be dispelled. To this, Rolland objects that it is state propaganda to trivialize the geopolitical nature of the BRI and foreign criticism. Particularly the “softer” people-to-people cooperation area serves to enhance international goodwill and disguise the BRI’s strategic clout in her view.<sup>1027</sup> While Wang makes an attempt at integration, Rolland’s remarks suggest that this is seen as an attempt at obfuscation. Negative soft power and nation branding<sup>1028</sup> signaled to developing countries creates suspicion among traditional powers.

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<sup>1023</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 2. See also: Wang and Jiang 2019b: 117; Wang 2017: 17-19.

<sup>1024</sup> Brakman et al., 2019: 8; Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 2; 49.

<sup>1025</sup> Gloria 2021: 500.

<sup>1026</sup> Wang 2017: 181, 183-185.

<sup>1027</sup> Rolland 2019c: 228.

<sup>1028</sup> As part of a country's soft power strategy, nation branding is a deliberate endeavor to shape the perception of a state internally and externally by strategically inventing and employing history, people, symbols, colors and slogans. Internally, this effort is part of a nation-building process to strengthen na-

Taking a closer look at nation branding within and through the BRI, China presents itself as the hub that drives this platform of South-South and North-South integration for long-term, all-round and economic integration.<sup>1029</sup> Its decisive and even leading role is reflected in the slogan “with Chinese characteristics”<sup>1030</sup> – an umbrella term covering all the before presented principles. As with the expression of the Silk Road, Wang points out that the phrase “with Chinese characteristics” leads to puzzlement and misunderstandings abroad.<sup>1031</sup> This concerns the linguistic and ideational hurdles in the translation. Those hurdles then complicate communicating the historical and philosophical composition of the BRI. There are domestic voices warning against losing the Chinese characteristics if the government expresses itself too universally. It risks watering down its Chinese core, i.e., becoming “too Westernized”<sup>1032</sup>.

In addition, there are warnings against such an ambitious and open BRI because it could create too many playing fields for China. With this comes the risk of overstretching Chinese capacities, jeopardizing China’s long-term development and policy goals. The debate on “strategic overstretch” (战略透支, zhanlüe touzhi) channels domestic concerns. As a consequence of domestic and international headwinds, Xi Jinping demanded for enhanced ‘docking’ of projects to the needs of target countries and populations in order to find synergies and provide tangible benefits. Docking project plans was already envisaged in the 2017 progress report. The fact that the report mentions the EU-China Connectivity Platform as an opportunity for cooperation at this point underscores both the EU’s role as a partner in third countries and the PRC’s response to external concerns.<sup>1033</sup> The rhetoric recalibration towards high quality and sustainability around the time of the 2nd BRF, what is now referred to as the BRI 2.0, parallels Xi’s demand. In this regard, the adaption of the BRI is co-produced by both internal and external pressures. Although this example illustrates concerns within China, domestic degrees of skepticism toward the BRI can hardly be determined.<sup>1034</sup>

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tional identity; externally, nation branding is intended to ensure the assertion of national interests, as explained by Barr (2012: 83-84) in his study of China’s nation branding activities.

<sup>1029</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019b: 125, Xu and Wang 2019a: 107.

<sup>1030</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 112; Wang and Jiang 2019b: 124; Xu and Wang 2019a: 109.

<sup>1031</sup> Wang 2017: 155.

<sup>1032</sup> Wang 2017: 153.

<sup>1033</sup> Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 19.

<sup>1034</sup> Zhang 2023: 36, 47; Liu 2019: 136; Rolland 2019c: 217, 229; Zhao 2019: 2.

All in all, the organizational benchmarks, driving forces and principles of the BRI demonstrate a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. The complex bureaucracy of the BRI is paralleled with the high ambitions and multitude of project. As this impedes central control of the BRI, revealed in the operational challenges of the project, new control mechanisms were introduced and the bureaucracy further refined. Accompanying tifa serve the dual purpose of answering domestic and foreign questions. In both theaters, tifa act as social glue connecting an ethnically diverse indigenous population and politically diverse foreign entities. Existing projects were coined into the BRI and new narratives, and previously existing tifa were incorporated and adapted, which was designed to enhance the adhesiveness through familiarity and boost legitimacy. To dismiss this embedding as a “repackaging”<sup>1035</sup> does not do justice to the far-reaching strategic importance of constructing political communities.<sup>1036</sup> Following this constructivist reading, the BRI itself is understood as a strategic narrative that both conveys China’s view of the world, and, conversely, shapes the world’s view of China.<sup>1037</sup> Engaging with tifa helps to decode the positive vocabulary permeating the literature and official messaging.<sup>1038</sup> What is presented in official rhetoric as a set of values shared by virtually all states actually formulates a carefully conceived Chinese approach to major power politics. How the language is employed signals a positive distinction of China from other major powers by cultivating a peaceful (self-)image.<sup>1039</sup> It demonstrates that the “Belt and Road Initiative is not a product of altruism”<sup>1040</sup>, but a response to internal and external policy goals. In so doing, the BRI is blurring the fine line between Chinese domestic and foreign policy goals or as Michael Clarke puts it: “BRI reflects a convergence of Innenpolitik and Aussenpolitik”<sup>1041</sup>.

Due to the merging of domestic and foreign policy, understanding both dimensions gains relevance for foreign countries – be it as partner or target states. Precisely the examination of the ‘ego’ perspective helps to counter accusations that assessments of the

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<sup>1035</sup> Van der Putten et al. 2016: 5.

<sup>1036</sup> Fu 2019: 2019; Zhao 2019: 6.

<sup>1037</sup> Yuan 2020: 42; Zhao 2019: 6.

<sup>1038</sup> Wang 2019b: 96; Wang and Li 2019: 99.

<sup>1039</sup> Gloria 2021: 498.

<sup>1040</sup> Wang 2019: 96.

<sup>1041</sup> Clarke 2019: 2.



BRI are misunderstandings arising from a “lack of current knowledge”<sup>1042</sup>. By referring to concerns and criticism as misperceptions or misunderstandings, their contents are undermined and any basis for discussion lost. From the outset, such statements typically devalue any criticism from abroad; consequently, any praise would also lose its value. Chinese concepts are not “too Chinese”<sup>1043</sup> to be understood by foreigners. Nevertheless, these statements indicate a lack of exposure to Chinese philosophy and language in an international perspective, complicating the foundations of understanding between the cultures. It can be argued, that it is the PRC’s official foreign-language documents that should fill this gap in communication and provide a basis for understanding. This is the reason they are given more thorough consideration in the subsequent chapter, in relation to the emerging security indicators.

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<sup>1042</sup> Wang 2019b: 97.

<sup>1043</sup> Wang 2017: 153.

## 6. China's BRI Signals to the World

As Wendt's social act consists of three phases, this section corresponds with the first phase of signaling. By conducting an explorative study of Belt and Road official documents, this section provides an assessment of how China communicates the BRI to the world. This assessment is based on a selection of 65 documents as listed in Appendix 2, which were collected from the BRI's official website, the Belt and Road Portal<sup>1044</sup>. The Portal is supervised by the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, which is guided by the NDRC and the Xinhua News Agency. The combination of these bodies under the State Council reveals the centrally coordinated broadcasting effort of the documents on the website. The state's core media body Xinhua implies that the BRI publications on this website are tailored to disseminate professionally orchestrated signals, which justifies its examination for this study.

The documents have been selected based on two criteria: First, the document is provided with an English translation, which marks its outward-oriented signaling character. Second, the document is text-based, in order to code and examine its language with MAXQDA. The documents collected and analyzed in this study do not claim to provide an exhaustive list of BRI official documents. However, it provides a complete list of all English-based entries of official documents, bilateral documents, as well as policies and regulations provided on the BRI's major international broadcast platform within the period of observation from January 2015 to December 2020.<sup>1045</sup> 65 out of 96 entries in the database met the selection criteria (67.7 Percent). As illustrated in Figure 3, the highest number of entries was counted and selected in the category of bilateral documents (33 out of 40), followed by official documents (19 out of 31), and policies and regulations (13 out of 25), which can be explained by the intergovernmental nature of bilateral documents.

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<sup>1044</sup> The official English website of the Belt and Road Forum is available at [eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn](http://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn).

<sup>1045</sup> The document collection was completed in March 2021.

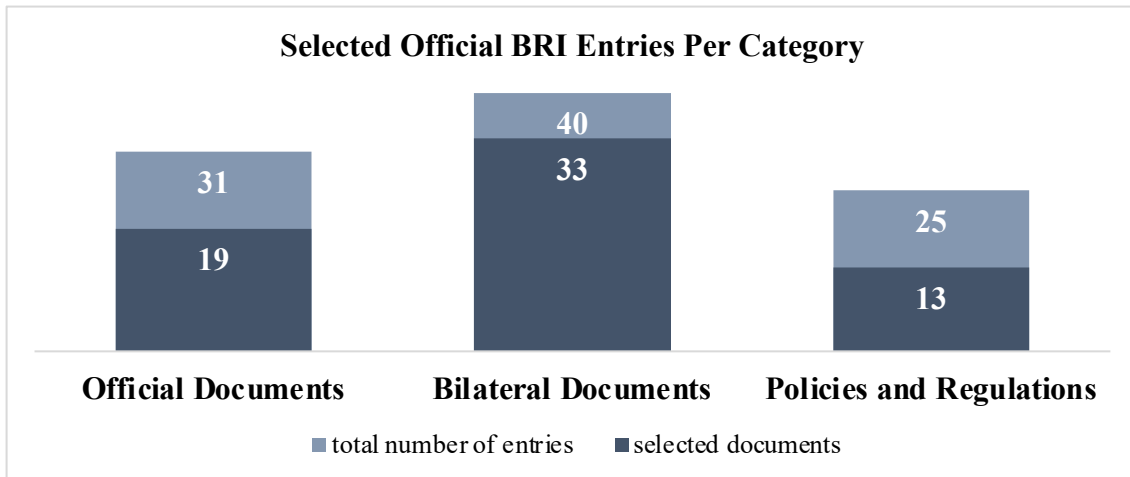


Figure 3: Number of Selected BRI Entries Per Category. Source: Own illustration; eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn.

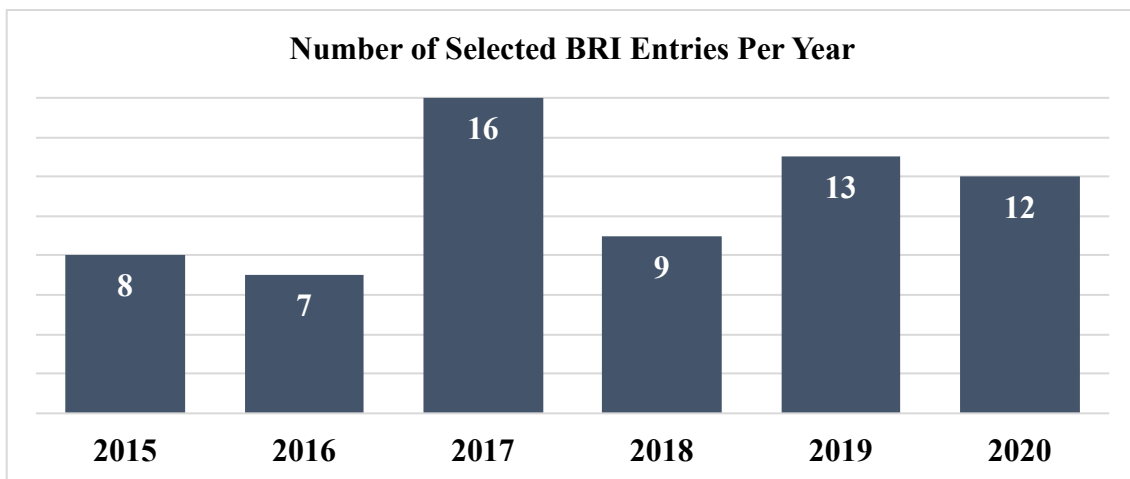


Figure 4: Number of Selected BRI Entries Per Year. Source: Own illustration; eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn.

Since the two international forums were held in the years 2017 and 2019, two publication peaks for English-language documents can be found on the website in those two years, as illustrated in Figure 4. As this page is run by the Chinese government, it provides a strategic selection based on official rhetoric and views. Consequently, this explains why the origin of the source was not incorporated as a selection criterion, as all sources included in this government-guided document collection become part of the Chinese public diplomacy as international broadcasting<sup>1046</sup>. These documents com-

<sup>1046</sup> Ohnesorge distinguishes public diplomacy and personal diplomacy as central soft power instruments. He explains in his taxonomy of soft power that these instruments consist of several engagement forms, including international broadcasting, cultural diplomacy, speeches, symbolic acts or elite networks. Those measures are designed to purposefully disseminate an actor's soft power to an international au-

municate the opportunities as well as perceived challenges or threats, the Chinese government decided to broadcast internationally. The purpose of signaling to an international audience is particularly important, as the sinologist Marina Rudyak warns that official English translations sometimes deliberately omit or alter the content of original Chinese documents.<sup>1047</sup> On the bright side, Gloria argues that English documents intended for foreign consumption resemble a carefully constructed self-image by Chinese elites.<sup>1048</sup> By focusing on this signal character, a virtue is made of necessity in this study. In accordance with these statements, it can be assumed that these Chinese documents are intended to frame a certain image abroad through decisive linguistic and content adaption. Accordingly, these texts allow conclusions to be drawn about China's security interests. It is precisely the character of deliberately designed perceptual signals that supports our investigative approach based on Wendt's social act. As described in Chapter 3, previous studies examined Chinese official discourses and strategic narratives of the BRI, which facilitates the forthcoming analysis.<sup>1049</sup> Due to its special focus on security and threat perceptions, our study adds another layer of analysis to this research landscape. In this respect, the layers of the forthcoming analysis can be structured according to two questions, which organize the following subchapters:

1. What are the key issues discussed in the Chinese official documents – particularly in relation to Germany and the UK?
2. What security issues related to the BRI are conveyed in these documents?

By conducting an original qualitative content analysis of these documents, the study is enriched by first-hand evidence, which helps to avoid hearsay or conjecture bias.<sup>1050</sup> This strengthens the link between the different phases of the social act under analysis, although the main focus of the research question is on the recipients and, thus, on the phases of interpretation and reaction.

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dience. According to Ohnesorge, both the sender and recipient have to be examined in tandem in order to assess the political measures and their respective soft power effect (Ohnesorge 2020: 45-46; 88-90). Although Ohnesorge does not directly attribute his approach to Wendt's social act, its resemblance to the social act of signaling, interpreting and responding accords to and supports our research approach.

<sup>1047</sup> Rudyak 2021: 17.

<sup>1048</sup> Gloria 2021: 496.

<sup>1049</sup> Such as Jiang 2022, Yang 2022, Gloria 2021, Yuan 2020, Arifon et al. 2019, Yu 2018, and Sørensen 2015.

<sup>1050</sup> Yuan 2020: 38.

## 6.1. Salience and Silence in Chinese BRI Documents

In order to identify dominant themes in the official documents, MAXQDA offers different tools. Its word cloud visualization as presented in Figure 5 allows to identify high-frequency words, remove meaningless stop words<sup>1051</sup> and use them as new codes – reflecting an inductive research logic. By conducting this frequency analysis, key issues from the Chinese perspective are revealed. Although the frequency of words has only limited explanatory power, it builds a bridge between the previous literature analysis and the in-depth study of security signaling. In a second step, each of the four Western powers is reviewed in order to map out respective signals to them.

As illustrated in Figure 5, “cooperation” appears as the most used word across all selected documents and more than 2800 times in 56 out of the 65 selected documents, whereas the term “China”<sup>1052</sup> is used around 2700 times yet across all the selected documents. As China is the country of origin of the BRI, this finding seems unsurprising. Related to this, Arifon et al. warned that China-centrism is one of the main fears concerning the initiative.<sup>1053</sup> The high frequency of the term cooperation can be interpreted



Figure 5: Word Cloud of the 100 most frequently used words in the 65 selected documents provided by the BRI official website. Source: Own Illustration using MAXQDA.

<sup>1051</sup> This list consists of frequently used words, which lack their own substantive meaning for the interpretation of the text, including definite and indefinite articles or conjunctions. To ensure transparency of the excluded words, the standard MAXQDA stop list was used here.

<sup>1052</sup> Which refers to the People’s Republic of China and also includes counts for the adjective “Chinese”.

<sup>1053</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 6.

to underpin the BRI's official presentation as the world's largest cooperation platform. According to Brakman et al. this underlines the idealistic universalism attached towards the project.<sup>1054</sup>

Regarding the findings of the previous chapter, the combination of both terms supports the dominance of multi-bilateralism. As previously explained, signing cooperation agreements with China is the main mechanism for leveraging the BRI.<sup>1055</sup> Bilateral cooperation is preferred over multilateral.<sup>1056</sup> Still, multilateralism is a frequent buzzword (rank 80, found in 49 documents). As mentioned, BRI multilateralism involves Chinese leadership, the creation of multinational institutions such as the AIIB, the involvement of existing multilateral bodies such as the UN or the EU, and joint declarations of intent instead of generally binding rules.<sup>1057</sup> Subregional cooperation forums such as the China-CEEC epitomize this interpretation of multilateralism.<sup>1058</sup> This mechanism features China's core role already by name. The Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries framework was established in 2012. It originally involved 16 Central and Eastern European Countries<sup>1059</sup> plus China, which explains its common abbreviation 16+1.<sup>1060</sup> In 2019, Greece gained membership in the group, so the format was enlarged to a 17+1 summit. However, following a series of diplomatic upheavals in 2021, Lithuania withdrew from the format, followed by Estonia and Latvia in 2022, which reduced the format to 14+1.<sup>1061</sup> In order to avoid confusion about the changing member numbers, this study mainly refers to the framework by its official abbreviation, China-CEEC, which underscores the bi-multilateral nature of this subregional forum with the PRC at its core.<sup>1062</sup>

Although more interests must be reconciled than in bilateral formats, these subregional forums involve a limited number of members, hence a faster path to consensus than su-

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<sup>1054</sup> Brakman et al. 2019:8.

<sup>1055</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 38; G. Cheng 2019: 134.

<sup>1056</sup> Wang 2017: 183.

<sup>1057</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 38-40; G. Cheng 2019: 134. The EU and the UN are both among the 100 most frequent terms in the data set. Already by counting only the abbreviated terms, the EU in its abbreviated form is mentioned 278 times in 13 documents, and the UN 167 times in 32 documents.

<sup>1058</sup> The China-CEEC is mentioned 257 times in 7 documents.

<sup>1059</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>1060</sup> Song and Pavličević 2019: 280-281.

<sup>1061</sup> Gurol and Rodríguez 2022: 447-448.

<sup>1062</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 38.

pra-regional platforms. Higher coordination costs are offset by the fact that these sub-regional BRI forums provide a broader basis for legitimacy. A similar calculation is followed by the incorporation into other multilateral bodies.<sup>1063</sup> Joint funding of the AIIB with established institutions such as the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank (ADB) creates bridges between new Chinese institutions along the BRI and existing (predominantly Western-dominated) institutions. These bridges are supposed to have attenuated the sense of competition between the new and established financiers – i.e., China and the political West. Opting for joint funding alleviates potential security concerns by inviting partners to the table and builds legitimacy for the BRI at home and abroad.<sup>1064</sup> The compatibility with multilateral organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the UN is strategically articulated, according to van Noort and Colley as well as Holzer, portraying China as a benevolent and cooperative partner.<sup>1065</sup>

Cooperation is not only pursued by signing agreements or setting up forums but also by implementing hands-on projects in all five areas of connectivity.<sup>1066</sup> “Projects”<sup>1067</sup> is a common key term that is often combined with variations in the term of cooperation, signaling the open nature of the BRI, mutual agreements, and dismissing concerns of unilateral dominance.<sup>1068</sup> Central tifa, such as win-win<sup>1069</sup>, and a positive, emotional tone reinforce this impression. These findings considerably correspond to the most frequent keywords found by Arifon et al. in Chinese media discourses. This indicates the centrality of tifa for setting the discursive direction in both media, as researched by Arifon et al., and public policy areas, as represented by the analyzed BRI document corpus. To illustrate, the authors likewise noted “world”, “cooperation”, “win-win”, “construction” and “investment” as common keywords.<sup>1070</sup> These references promote an image of equality, mutual benefit, and common prosperity.<sup>1071</sup> Conflict-laden language, concepts,

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<sup>1063</sup> G. Cheng 2019: 134; Xu and Wang 2019b: 121-122.

<sup>1064</sup> Foot 2019: 155.

<sup>1065</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 49-50; Holzer 2020: 192.

<sup>1066</sup> Xu and Wang 2019b: 118.

<sup>1067</sup> Mentioned 239 times in 42 documents.

<sup>1068</sup> See 08-31-2015-OD.

<sup>1069</sup> Mentioned 71 times in 31 documents.

<sup>1070</sup> To be precise, in our dataset of Chinese documents, “world” ranks 26th with 370 uses in 33 documents; “cooperation” ranks 1st with 2816 uses in 56 documents; “win-win” is not among the top-tier frequent terms, although it is used 71 times in 31 documents; “construction” ranks 129th with 134 uses in 27 documents; “investment” ranks 16th with 520 uses in 55 documents.

<sup>1071</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 10-12.

and issues are virtually non-existent in the reviewed BRI documents, paralleling the observations by Arifon et al. or Malik.<sup>1072</sup> In this way, according to Malik, Chinese officials seek to prime the economic benefits in the course of BRI, whereas they saw the American or European rhetoric pervaded by doubts.<sup>1073</sup>

Other high-frequency terms underline the BRI's outward-oriented, positive character. Among the 100 most frequent words are "international" (rank 8, found in 53 documents), the EU<sup>1074</sup> (rank 37, named in 13 documents), or "global" (rank 29, in 40).<sup>1075</sup> The documents underline the BRI's developmental nature.<sup>1076</sup> The key terms suggest that the developmental thrust of BRI includes multiple aspects. Economic cooperation is clearly the most frequently raised issue.<sup>1077</sup> Other frequent terms of BRI cooperation include the environment, infrastructure, technology, energy, and social issues.<sup>1078</sup> These terms are found directly on the list and are indirectly covered by related terms such as trade, connectivity, and transport. The enumeration reflects the importance of the topics when weighted in thematic clusters by rank and occurrence. In addition, the list of high-frequency terms features the infrastructural focus on railways, ports, and roads. This observation is consistent with Malik, who identifies the BRI's top-positioned narratives in technological innovation with a focus on internationalization and economic development.<sup>1079</sup> These domains reflect a multi-sectoral "five-in-one" BRI approach from local to global levels, encompassing the economy, politics, culture, society, and ecology, which corroborates the observations by Yuan and Wang.<sup>1080</sup>

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<sup>1072</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 12; Malik 2020: 9.

<sup>1073</sup> Malik 2020: 18-19.

<sup>1074</sup> Ranked 22 of the most frequent terms, "European" is mentioned in 26 documents 433 times.

<sup>1075</sup> That the EU is ranked higher than the term "global" is related to its higher number of word counts (509 vs. 490). It also reveals a disadvantage of this automated, explorative method, as focused documents may refer to a specific term more often, and more in-depth, qualitative assessment is needed.

<sup>1076</sup> "Development" is found on rank 5, named in 57 out of 65 documents. Adding up all terms of the word stem of development, the word group is used more than 4900 times in 58 documents, which elevates it to the top position of the most frequent terms.

<sup>1077</sup> The word "economic" is used 998 times in 56 out of 65 documents (86 percent), which is ranked seventh on the list of the most frequent terms.

<sup>1078</sup> "Environment" is used 460 times in 48 documents ("environmental" in addition 385 times in 48 documents). Infrastructure is found 189 in 45 documents. "Technology" is used 196 times in 36 out of 65 documents. "Energy" is found 230 times in 36 documents. Social issues include more aspects than the simple term "social", which itself is used 166 times in 42 documents.

<sup>1079</sup> Malik 2020: 9.

<sup>1080</sup> Yuan 2020: 39; Wang 2017: 137.



When analyzing the regions and countries mentioned in the data corpus with the frequency numbers, a clear asymmetry is noticeable.<sup>1081</sup> Asia is most frequently addressed directly in the documents, followed by Europe and Africa. To be precise, Asia was mentioned in 40 out of 65 documents (62 percent), Europe in 23 documents (35 percent), Africa in 21 documents (32 percent), the Americas in 8 documents (12 percent), and Oceania in 4 documents (6 percent).<sup>1082</sup> These numbers support the idea that the BRI is indeed global in scope but regional in focus. The data support Xu and Wang's assessment that the integration of Asia, Europe and Africa in particular is being pursued, with Asia forming the main region of the BRI.<sup>1083</sup>

Similarly, the two European countries central to this study are addressed in a rather symmetric fashion: direct references to the UK appear in seven documents, and Germany is mentioned in only four documents. To compare these numbers: the United States in eight publications, whereas France is mentioned in nineteen documents. At first glance, the asymmetry between Germany, the UK, the US versus France indicates different strategic weightings in the general orientation of the BRI. France's significantly stronger weighting is relativized by the fact that Germany and the UK are implied by their localization in Europe in corresponding sections of the BRI documents. France's signaling figures include several indirect references under the citation of the Paris Agreement, the international climate change treaty signed in 2015. Out of the nineteen documents, in which France is mentioned, sixteen contain references to the Paris Agreement, whereas seven out of the nineteen contain direct references to France. The frequent mention of this treaty does not define France's role in the BRI in a narrow sense, but indirectly points to a stronger commitment by China to climate change goals in line with the Green BRI. When we adjust the data for France (net of the Paris Agreement) and then compare the references for those four countries without BRI MoUs with direct BRI partners such as Russia or Pakistan, the latter are unsurprisingly more frequently addressed in the dataset. Russia is mentioned in 16 documents (25 percent) and

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<sup>1081</sup> Each document was scanned for a direct signaling towards the regions and countries under review. If a country was directly addressed, the respective sentence was marked. Indirect signals or standard abbreviations (e.g., US\$) were not included.

<sup>1082</sup> The search was conducted on the basis of regional names and regional BRI projects. Individual countries were not used for the search, as this analytical step is intended to highlight regional rather than country-specific priorities.

<sup>1083</sup> Xu and Wang 2019a: 107; 2019b: 117.

Pakistan in 13 documents (20 percent). This is broadly consistent with Malik's research, which finds asymmetric levels of attention for different countries and groups, with Pakistan, Europe, and Russia occupying central positions.<sup>1084</sup> The higher signal frequency forms an initial indicator of the secondary role of the two selected European countries in the BRI, especially in combination with the regional digits.

These numbers alone say nothing about the content of the respective text passages. In the following, the corresponding segments for each of the four powerhouses in focus are examined individually. Based on this, the role China assigns to the corresponding countries is inferred. The comparison of signals to Germany and Great Britain with those to France and the USA enables a deeper understanding of the respective role assignments. Although the focus of the analysis is laid on Germany and the UK, it seems beneficial to cross-check and interpret the signals more comprehensively due to the close security relationships among the four countries as previously explained. The signaled roles are subject to the limitation that the data does not depict the complexity of the respective bilateral relations.<sup>1085</sup> France is indeed the only country with two specific bilateral documents in the dataset, which valorizes its strategic importance for the BRI.<sup>1086</sup> Still, the two documents are only a fragment of the multifaceted relationship. All fragments of direct and indirect signals are subject to the assumption that they convey meaning in the official BRI document collection in just that abundance or brevity. In addition, the importance of a statement and the meaning conveyed by it are not necessarily equivalent to its length. Thus, each fragment contributes to the signaling-reaction cycle and determines the overall construction of meaning.

Starting with the USA in official BRI documents, there are few statements overall. Unlike the other case study countries, at least one reference can be found each year.<sup>1087</sup> The contrast between continuous referencing and few direct signals suggests the ambivalent

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<sup>1084</sup> Malik 2020: 9, 12. Our analysis identifies Asia as the central focus of Chinese attention, although this is also indirectly confirmed by Malik in view of the diverse Asian countries and group names such as ASEAN listed in his table (see Malik 2020: 12).

<sup>1085</sup> The approach does not assess the respective historical-social context. In addition, the role assignment could be analyzed in a more differentiated way based on a collection of bilateral BRI documents instead of pre-selected documents provided by only one Chinese website.

<sup>1086</sup> A report by Xinhua about a phone call between Chinese President Xi and French President Macron in December 2020 (12-10-2020-BD); the Joint Declaration between the People's Republic of China and the French Republic at the end of a China visit of President Macron in January 2018 (01-11-2018-BD).

<sup>1087</sup> 06-29-2015-OD; 05-18-2016-BD; 05-10-2017-OD; 01-29-2018-OD; 04-09-2019-BD; 09-27-2019-PR; 12-22-2020-OD; 03-17-2020-BD.

role of the USA. It is neither a target country nor a highly prioritized cooperation partner within the BRI. The documents at hand assign the USA three significant roles: a structural superpower, particularly in the financial sector; China's most important and, in some areas, only superior peer competitor; and a constructive dialogue partner in foreign conflicts affecting the BRI.

On the first identified role of the USA as a structural superpower, there are both indirect and direct references. Structural power is evident in the documents in the use of the US dollar as the AIIB's official currency of payments, despite US criticism of the bank itself and Germany, France, and the UK joining it.<sup>1088</sup> The predominance of the US dollar is also indirectly evident in BRI documents. The 2017 progress report highlights that China's strategy for internationalizing its currency and advancing RMB trading is progressing. Regarding financial integration, the report stresses that institutional development has enabled the Chinese interbank foreign exchange market to trade the RMB directly with 21 other currencies, not just the US dollar.<sup>1089</sup> In this way, the passage seems to suggest China's international ascent and the growing significance of the RMB compared to the US dollar, potentially indicating a sense of competition and ambition.

Structural advantages of the US with indirect references to China's rise are also addressed in other areas such as economic expansion<sup>1090</sup>, the transportation sector<sup>1091</sup>, or Arctic policy<sup>1092</sup>. The willingness to cooperate is underscored by joint regular meetings of the China-U.S. Transportation Forum or other dialogue mechanisms on polar issues.<sup>1093</sup> Frequently, in close proximity to those statements are references to Europe and the Big Three of Germany, France, and the UK, which highlights the assumed transatlantic axis. By citing bilateral formats with non-Arctic states such as the UK or France, China underscores its readiness for international consultations. In so doing, one could also view legitimacy granted to interests of non-Arctic states – particularly those of China itself and its self-definition as a “Near-Arctic-State”.<sup>1094</sup>

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<sup>1088</sup> 03-17-2020-BD; Wuthnow 2018; Summers 2016: 64, 66.

<sup>1089</sup> Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 33-34 (05-10-2017-OD).

<sup>1090</sup> 09-27-2019-PR.

<sup>1091</sup> 12-22-2020-OD.

<sup>1092</sup> 01-29-2018-OD.

<sup>1093</sup> 12-22-2020-OD; 01-29-2018-OD.

<sup>1094</sup> 01-29-2018-OD, see Section „II. China and the Arctic“.

In the fields of education, science, and technology, China demonstrates in the documents that its performance is close to or even surpassing that of high-income countries. Comparisons are drawn to the US, Germany, France, and the UK, highlighting China's positive development trajectory.<sup>1095</sup> The positive self-description and acknowledgement of the USA's powerful position reinforce the contrasts drawn in the documents between the two countries on the international stage. This is particularly evident in "China and the World in the New Era" published in September 2019 by the State Council Information Office of the PRC. Especially the passage on China-US relations reveals extensive Self and Other definitions. By being located in the chapter "IV. China Contributes to a Better World" in the fourth section of "Developing global partnerships", the benign self-definition is framed par excellence. China's self-assigned significance is highlighted here, echoed in the first sentence regarding its relationship with the US: "The China-U.S. relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world."<sup>1096</sup>

Despite being addressed in the section on China's partnerships in the world, the US is not referred to as such a partner in the entire passage of this key document. By contrast, with both Russia and the EU in the following sections, China is aspiring to deepen partnerships. Instead, the wording assigns the US a cooperative role on common ground as major countries. China warns against the US Cold War mentality, harnessing the Thucydides Trap as a self-fulfilling prophecy. By warning that "the U.S. is unable to force China's hand"<sup>1097</sup>, China is signaling its own staunchness and self-confidence from a revitalized position of strength. The US is assigned the attributes of confrontational, warmongering, irrational, and short-sighted in the document, whereas China is described with positive attributes, including a sense for common good, peace, and harmony. This parallels with the concept of 'Othering' described in Chapter 2 contributing to securitization, as it warns of war between two states. Offering cooperation to avoid confrontation reinforces the 'Othering' through displayed goodwill.<sup>1098</sup>

This belligerent image of the US is yet mitigated to a certain extent by the third strand of characterization in the documents, which describes it as a constructive dialogue part-

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<sup>1095</sup> 09-27-2019-PR.

<sup>1096</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: IV. China Contributes to a Better World.

<sup>1097</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: IV. China Contributes to a Better World.

<sup>1098</sup> 09-27-2019-PR; Gaufmann 2017: 5, 18.

ner in foreign conflicts affecting the BRI. This concerns trilateral cooperation and consultations between China, Afghanistan, and the US<sup>1099</sup>, and supporting dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea<sup>1100</sup>. These passages point to the challenging security environment along the BRI, in which the US is involved as a relevant external actor. Washington is yet not mentioned once as a part or partner of the BRI in the collected documents. By omitting US involvement in the BRI, the impression of great power rivalry and concerns about Washington's opposition is amplified. Due to its global power – as mirrored in the analyzed documents – the US could become an obstructionist instead of a contributor to the BRI. Scholars like Wang Yiwei therefore suggest that China should actively seek for US support.<sup>1101</sup> Nonetheless, the collected documents do not outline any concepts to include Washington in the BRI.

Unlike the US, all three European states under review are considered as partners for the BRI. China generally refers to Europe as a comprehensive strategic partner, underlining a positive approach.<sup>1102</sup> Taking a closer look at each of the three European powerhouses, the documents reveal slightly different role descriptions. While Germany is mentioned in only four documents out of 65 documents, it is specified in its role as a cooperation partner. It is seen as a cooperation partner for infrastructure projects with regard to the China-Europe Railway Express with its terminus in Duisburg.<sup>1103</sup> With the Commerzbank being the first German bank to sign a MoU with the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China for the BRI banking mechanism, Germany is also supporting the second connectivity link of financial integration.<sup>1104</sup> The fact that Germany – like France and the UK – is a non-regional member in the AIIB further strengthens its role in financial market cooperation.<sup>1105</sup> In addition, partnering third-party markets is highlighted by the example of a consensus cooperation consensus between Siemens and the China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation and Siemens.<sup>1106</sup>

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<sup>1099</sup> 05-18-2016-BD; 03-17-2020-BD.

<sup>1100</sup> 04-09-2019-BD.

<sup>1101</sup> Wang 2017: 111-112; 218.

<sup>1102</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: IV. China Contributes to a Better World.

<sup>1103</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 15 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1104</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 24 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1105</sup> 06-29-2015-OD.

<sup>1106</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 40 (04-22-2019-OD).

The 2019 “China and the World in the New Era” document, conversely, emphasizes China’s growing role as a partner for Germany. This partner role is seen on an equal footing with Germany, as China’s rise in innovation performance is presented on par with Germany, the UK, and the US.<sup>1107</sup> Especially with regard to Washington, it is emphasized that China can act as the more reliable partner for Germany.<sup>1108</sup> This claim was made during a period of uncertainty in transatlantic relations between Berlin and Washington under the presidency of Donald Trump. It can be interpreted to highlight Berlin’s strategic importance for Beijing as well as its systemic competition for partners with the United States. Neither critical voices about Chinese investments in Germany nor the negative shift in perceptions, as evidenced by Turcsányi et al. 2020 is not reported in the documents.<sup>1109</sup> In this way, the image of a harmonious bilateral relationship between Germany and China based on mutual partnership emerges, which is similarly drawn in the sections on France and Great Britain.

Similar to Germany, the data corpus contains only few direct references to the UK, in only seven documents. However, these passages describe quite clearly the assigned role to Great Britain for the BRI. Cooperation with the UK seems to be particularly important in the financial realm due to London’s position as a financial powerhouse. The UK is not only a founding member of AIIB<sup>1110</sup>, but also endorsed multilateral finance cooperation as with the “Guiding Principles on Financing the Development of the Belt and Road” during the first BRF in May 2017.<sup>1111</sup> In this respect, collaboration with the UK on the guiding principles is highlighted as growing multilateral support in the 2019 Progress report, which has a legitimizing effect on the BRI and related norm making.<sup>1112</sup> This legitimizing effect is buttressed, as mentioned above, by spotlighting bilateral dialogues with France and the UK on Arctic issues.<sup>1113</sup> In turn, the traditional structural power position of these Western states is indirectly recognized and perpetuated.

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<sup>1107</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: Box 5 International Organizations and Foreign Institutions Make Positive Comments on China’s Scientific and Technological Innovation.

<sup>1108</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: Box 4 Positive Opinion in and outside China on its Future Development.

<sup>1109</sup> Turcsányi et al. 2020: 2.

<sup>1110</sup> 06-29-2015-OD.

<sup>1111</sup> 05-16-2017-OD.

<sup>1112</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 22 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1113</sup> 01-29-2018-OD.

Although Germany is called the final destination of the BRI's New Eurasian Land Bridge, the UK is more clearly described as a BRI target country under the framework of a "1+1+1>3 all-win"<sup>1114</sup>. The 2019 Progress Report highlights in this way the cooperation with China, France and the UK for the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. The formula suggests an idealization of third-party market cooperation in which the gains of cooperation ultimately exceed the sum of the individual contributions. In relation to the BRI principles in chapter 5.2, the expression of "1+1+1>3 all win" reflects the practical implementation and adaption of the tifa of mutual benefit or win-win in European projects. By positioning the project in the section on joint contribution to a harmonious international community (which also includes the reference to the German company Siemens), inclusivity of the BRI is signaled to Western countries.<sup>1115</sup>

This impression is reinforced by the Joint Declaration between the PRC and France issued at the end of the visit of President Emmanuel Macron to China in January 2018. The declaration reiterates the commitment to advance energy projects, including the certification of Chinese nuclear technologies in the UK and the construction of Hinkley Point C in Somerset, Sizewell C in Suffolk, and the Bradwell B project in Essex.<sup>1116</sup> Neither the exact progress of these efforts is listed in the documents examined, nor are implementation problems. For example, although Hinkley Point C was already announced in 2010, it is expected to provide electricity by 2027 due to technical hitches, budget overruns, political headwinds, and pandemic-induced delays. The Bradwell B cooperation appears to be similarly difficult. By 2024, the status of the project remained unclear, although the British government has reportedly taken steps to remove Chinese involvement from Sizewell C and Bradwell B.<sup>1117</sup> Already in September 2019, David Blackburn, committee chair of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities campaign group comments on these challenges: "Clearly Chinese involvement, which includes the bulk of the equity investment and the employment of a reactor specifically designed for this project, is as dead as the Dodo!"<sup>1118</sup>

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<sup>1114</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 40 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1115</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 38, 40 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1116</sup> 01-11-2018-BD: Paragraph 13.

<sup>1117</sup> Pamilih 2022; Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 381-382; Thomas 2017: 688.

<sup>1118</sup> Blackburn as cited by Menteth 2022.

Finally, the documents yield that the UK is a global research hub from which the BRI can benefit. This overlaps with the previously identified catch-up narratives vis-à-vis the US and Germany in education and innovation performance, as these also make reference to the strong capacities of the UK.<sup>1119</sup> Moreover, the establishment of BRI research centers and the hosting of related forums and symposia in the UK and other countries such as Japan and Korea are acknowledged. By stating this research as a dialogue mechanism in the 2019 Progress Report in terms of the connectivity link of people-to-people contacts, the impression of international attention and support is created.<sup>1120</sup>

Foreign research may also legitimize the BRI. In “China and the World” a University of London study is cited that found “more than 90 percent of employees at construction sites and factories run by Chinese enterprises in Ethiopia are local residents.”<sup>1121</sup> Indeed, the cited research project found that the registered Chinese workforce declined over the years, whereas Chinese firms employ, on average, 85 percent of local residents – varying widely across studies, sectors, and countries.<sup>1122</sup> This corroborates the tifa of mutual benefit and indirectly challenges studies, such as the one by the CSIS, which found that Chinese contractors and workforce are preferred for BRI projects.<sup>1123</sup> Overall, the compiled Chinese documents refer to studies and scientific initiatives that provide a favorable view of the BRI or China.

The frequent allusions to the Paris Climate Accord strike a similar chord. In about one in four documents from the dataset (16 out of 65), reference is made to the treaty, underscoring China’s pioneering role in international climate change efforts. References to the Paris Agreement are made on every political level, i.e., in unilateral policy documents<sup>1124</sup>, bilateral statements with states such as Singapore<sup>1125</sup> and Tonga<sup>1126</sup>, and multilateral releases, e.g., on the occasion of the first BRF or vis-à-vis the European Un-

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<sup>1119</sup> 09-27-2019-PR.

<sup>1120</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 38 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1121</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: II. China’s Development Is an Opportunity for the World. These numbers are included in the synthesis report of the research project by Oya and Schaefer (2019: 5).

<sup>1122</sup> Oya and Schaefer 2019: 15, 34.

<sup>1123</sup> Kyngge 2018. According to Hillman and Tippet (2021), a lack of transparency makes accurate assessment across all BRI countries impossible.

<sup>1124</sup> 05-10-2017-OD; 05-16-2017-OD; 09-27-2019-PR; Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1125</sup> 11-14-2018-BD.

<sup>1126</sup> 03-01-2018-BD.



ion<sup>1127</sup>. According to Zhang and Orbie, these climate change commitments are following the idea of a community of shared future for mankind, in which all countries need to tackle climate challenges. This accentuates China's more proactive role in international climate change regimes, which dovetails with the image of the responsible stakeholder.<sup>1128</sup> Washington's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under the Trump administration is instrumentalized as a demarcation moment to enhance Beijing's reputation and discourse power.<sup>1129</sup> The frequent linking of climate protection to the framework of the United Nations and its Sustainable Development Agenda<sup>1130</sup>, underscore China's constructive cooperation. This way, China emerges as a multilateral facilitator in contrast to the US as a deviant for green cooperation.<sup>1131</sup>

Although the BRI documents underline the importance of the Paris Agreement and multilateralism under the Green BRI, the absence of binding commitments on environmental and climate protection is considered in the literature to emphasize the political sovereignty of the participating states in contrast to Western preferences.<sup>1132</sup> This can be illustrated by the wording of the BRICS<sup>1133</sup> Summit Moscow Declaration, which reiterates "the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances"<sup>1134</sup>. The wording can be interpreted as delegitimizing compulsory measures that do not appear to serve national needs and repudiating international interference in a country's development.<sup>1135</sup> The communication strategy creates an advantageous argumentation structure towards 'developing' countries serving Chinese soft power. In this context, Zhang and Orbie point out that the underlying linkage to domestic development concerns about economic transformation

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<sup>1127</sup> 05-16-2017-OD\_3: Joint communique of leaders roundtable of Belt and Road forum; 11-14-2019-BD: BRICS Summit Brasilia Declaration; 04-12-2019-BD: Dubrovnik Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries; 06-18-2020-OD: Joint Statement of the High-level Video Conference on Belt and Road International Cooperation

<sup>1128</sup> Zhang and Orbie 2019: 15-16.

<sup>1129</sup> Chan, Hu and He 2019: 623; Zhang and Orbie 2019: 18.

<sup>1130</sup> 05-16-2017-OD; 12-19-2018-PR; 01-29-2018-OD; Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019 (04-22-2019-OD); 09-27-2019-PR; 11-14-2019-BD; 11-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1131</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 44-45 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1132</sup> Carey and Ladislav 2019: 1-2, 6-7; Bo 2016: 108.

<sup>1133</sup> The forum of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) was founded in 2009.

<sup>1134</sup> 11-18-2020-OD: BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration, paragraph 82.

<sup>1135</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 22-24.

and energy security fuel the importance of this subject for the PRC.<sup>1136</sup> By classifying climate change challenges as development issues, they are shifted from security politics to development collaboration. This has a desecuritizing notion, which is reinforced by the positive framing in the documents of the BRI's actions on green development. Consequently, the collected statements support a desecuritized approach in the ecological area of the security taxonomy. As will be further investigated in the following, security occupies a subordinate, albeit recognizable, role in the construction of climate change addresses in the BRI.

Overall, the findings confirm Malik's observation that economic and infrastructural issues are salient in BRI documents, whereas issues of dissent, such as politics or competition, are comparatively rare.<sup>1137</sup> The examination of the text passages containing references to the United States shows that these themes are not completely absent, even if they are mostly omitted. The documents convey the impression that the USA is too powerful and competitive to be ignored since its structural omnipresence, directly and indirectly, affects the BRI. While Washington is not ignored, it is largely bypassed in the documents by not being described as a BRI cooperation partner. Wolfgang Röhr even contends that China aims "to exclude the United States"<sup>1138</sup> from the BRI.

By contrast, BRI partner roles are signaled to Germany, France, and the UK. All three are addressed as cooperation partners with key similarities in the third-party market and financial cooperation. In the EU, the G20, and the AIIB, the European countries occupy a structural position that directly and indirectly affects the BRI. According to Constantin Holzer, the decisions of these bodies determine the rules under which the BRI operates, which shapes China's positive signaling towards these organizations and key member states such as the three European powers.<sup>1139</sup> Differences in the signaled partner roles are evident in the highlighted prestige projects in and with these European countries. Germany is called a BRI destination with the China-Europe Railway Express. The UK is also a target country, albeit in the energy sector. The British energy projects follow on from France's partner role, which is further identified as a partner country in statements

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<sup>1136</sup> Zhang and Orbie 2019: 21-22.

<sup>1137</sup> Malik 2020: 9.

<sup>1138</sup> Röhr 2018: 229.

<sup>1139</sup> Holzer 2020: 192.

on the Green Silk Road or potential projects in Africa. The document analysis thus confirms van der Putten's observation that the BRI is signaled as an inclusive platform where EU member states are invited to engage in joint activities.<sup>1140</sup> This impression is reinforced by China emphasizing lobbying for the support of the European Union in the documents. For example, it is called for accelerating negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the European Union and China.<sup>1141</sup> CAI was agreed later in December 2020 but not ratified in 2021 due to diplomatic turmoil, which hints at deteriorating relations between China and some of its Western partners.<sup>1142</sup>

In the Chinese documents, however, the BRI's benefits and progress are emphasized, whereas criticism, challenges, and setbacks are largely absent. This observation is consistent with van Noort and Colley's analysis of the BRI's strategic communication, which points out an emphasis on promoting the material benefits while silencing the associated risks.<sup>1143</sup> Arifon et al. similarly found and corroborated that these signals are elevated on a rhetorical basis, avoiding negative tones and using positively connoted terms.<sup>1144</sup> With these elements, a depoliticized narrative of the BRI is framed, in which normative concerns are largely omitted or reframed.<sup>1145</sup> This reframing is evident in the proposed collaboration to use the BRI as a platform for addressing shared challenges, such as those in the environmental or climate sector. Nevertheless, these proposals imply some underlying security concerns, which require a closer look in a next step.

## **6.2. Security Issues Associated with the BRI**

Some experts argue that security plays a secondary role in BRI and that the BRI itself should not be understood as a security issue.<sup>1146</sup> In their view, it is less security than economic considerations that drive the BRI.<sup>1147</sup> China is reported to pursue a “non-coercive, non-military (non-security focused) approach”<sup>1148</sup>. Others argue that the BRI does not involve security cooperation, but carries critical security considerations about

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<sup>1140</sup> Van der Putten 2016: 5.

<sup>1141</sup> 12-10-2020-BD.

<sup>1142</sup> Li and He 2022: 446.

<sup>1143</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 51.

<sup>1144</sup> Arifon et al. 2019: 16.

<sup>1145</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 51.

<sup>1146</sup> Shah 2021: 16.

<sup>1147</sup> Li 2020: 173-174.

<sup>1148</sup> Dadabaev 2018: 16.

protecting investments, Chinese workers on foreign soil, or securing trade routes.<sup>1149</sup> A widely shared perspective in the literature challenges these desecuritized views by claiming that the BRI is very much subject and objects to complex security considerations.<sup>1150</sup> According to Brewster, Chinese officials acknowledge that the BRI features security components for neighboring states despite its primacy of economic goals.<sup>1151</sup> The reluctance to acknowledge the security implications of the BRI can be attributed to hesitancy in dealing with or rejecting a military-political component. Opposed to this unease, other scholarly voices contend that missing military support is an impediment to the BRI's implementation.<sup>1152</sup> The section delves into differing assessments of the security relevance of the BRI within the documents collected by the Belt and Road Portal. It aims to reveal how security issues are communicated by Chinese authorities and to draw conclusions about the BRI's security relations. These insights are key to studying the congruence or dissonance of security perceptions compared to Germany and the UK.

Starting the analysis with a quick search for security terms in the collected documents, manifest security references of the BRI are evidenced. The frequency analysis revealed that the term "security" is ranked among the 50 most commonly used words in Chinese official documents. It is used 312 times in 38 out of 65 documents.<sup>1153</sup> The Word Explorer function by MAXQDA finds that the term occurs most frequently in the 2020 BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration (38 times) and the 2019 "China and the World in the New Era"-document (31 times).<sup>1154</sup> These documents as well as the most frequent word combinations of security highlight that security is mostly, but not exclusively used in an outward-oriented and even multilateral setting. With 42 uses, the most common combination refers to the United Nations Security Council, corroborating this impression. The following most frequent security combinations substantiate the previously ex-

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<sup>1149</sup> Kuchins 2021: 191; Parepa 2020: 186; Arduino and Gong 2018: 13.

<sup>1150</sup> Brown 2018: 216.

<sup>1151</sup> Brewster 2017: 284.

<sup>1152</sup> Malik 2020: 18.

<sup>1153</sup> This number is counted by the 'Keywords in Context' function. The automated frequency analysis ranks the word security 47th, occurring 244 times in 34 out of 65 documents. These differences are the result of lexical recognition configurations that are prone to error due to blank spaces, hyphens, or other punctuation marks. This highlights a problem of automated language research, which requires thorough assessments by the researcher.

<sup>1154</sup> These documents contain the most security codes based on a security dictionary analysis explained later in this chapter. The "China and the World in the New Era" document (09-27-2019-PR), with 115 segments, contains about 10 percent more direct security references than the 2020 BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration (11-18-2020-OD), with 99 security segments.

plained convergence<sup>1155</sup> of domestic and foreign policy domains, as they are food security (16 uses), non-traditional security (11 uses), energy security (11 uses), maritime security (10 uses), national security (9 uses), data security (8 uses), security cooperation, security issues, sustainable security, and social security (7 uses each). Linking these terms to the issue dimension of the security taxonomy, basically all policy areas are covered. In this respect, the further dimensional linkage of these word combinations depends on the context in which they are used and which means for establishing security are addressed in the documents.

Although this already confirms the prevalence of security considerations in BRI documents, the impression is corroborated when searching for a broader range of security-related terms in the data.<sup>1156</sup> Indeed, all documents collected for the years 2015 and 2018 featured security codes. The density of security codes fluctuates over the years. The percentage of documents containing security codes was lowest in 2020, though still more than two-thirds (66.7 percent; 8 of 12) of the selected documents featured security codes. On the occasion of the first BRF in 2017, the share of direct security references was second lowest within the period covered, although 13 of 16 documents (81.3 percent) carried security codes. Overall, 1040 segments are found by using the security dictionary. The number of coded segments using the broader security dictionary shows a similar trend, with the number of coded segments in 2019 and 2020 (279 and 203 respectively) significantly above the level of the first two years 2015 and 2016 (86 and 67 segments). These figures demonstrate that the BRI is directly and indirectly linked to security, but how this link is shaped requires a closer look at the segments. The seemingly dwindling security connection in 2019 and 2020, as well as the lower security code rate in 2017 can have various causes. One interpretation would be that other security topics not covered by the vocabulary studied increased.<sup>1157</sup> With regard to the dese-

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<sup>1155</sup> Clarke 2018: 85. See also Section 3.2.

<sup>1156</sup> The wordlist for a gauging the frequency of direct security codes is designed to include various word endings and spellings (called truncation or stemming). These words are marked with the truncation symbol \*. We used MAXQDA to search for: adversary, adverse, armed, attack, challeng\*, combat, concern, conflict, confront\*, crime, criminal, critical infrastructure, danger, defen\*, disrupt, evil, extremis\*, harm, hostile, manipul\*, military, opponent, peril, prevention, protect, risk, safety, secure, security, separatist\*, spy, surveillance, terror\*, theft, threat, vulnerab\* weapon.

<sup>1157</sup> Any dictionary is subject to the limitation of incompleteness, so that the presented list of security terms provides only a starting point for analyzing BRI security signals. Please note that the incompleteness may affect the robustness of the quantitative results. However, since these numbers provide

curitization forms of Hansen, this would be signal a replacement of security issues. In a different reading, the frequencies may indicate that the language was desecuritized for rearticulating or silencing security debates.<sup>1158</sup> As this underscores the limitations of a pure frequency analysis, the content of security signals is examined and disentangled in the following.

### **6.2.1 Going Global: China, the BRI, and the United Nations Security Council**

Exploring the security references in the document of the Belt and Road Portal more closely, the passages on the UN and its security council provide indications of the PRC's views of the global order and its position in it. References to these bodies provide the most frequent word combination, with 42 direct mentions across the collected documents. As the most significant security connection, the UN Security Council is mentioned in the BRI documents of all years examined, with almost half of the text passages appearing in 2019 (20 out of 42).

Looking at the topics in the 2019 documents, there is no clear pattern that explains the intensified Chinese interest in this specific year. The topics range from the importance of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Iran to highlighting Chinese contributions in the UN to more general reform demands.<sup>1159</sup> In 2018, the United States withdrew unilaterally from the JCPOA, which was agreed to in 2015 by Iran, the US, Russia, China, France, Great Britain, and Germany. The global political theatre was struck by uncertainty concerning the future of multilateralism and US foreign policy under President Trump.<sup>1160</sup> The following year, 2019, marked at least two important events for the PRC: First, it was the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC.<sup>1161</sup> Second, Beijing invited all international partners to the 2nd BRF.<sup>1162</sup> Although many other factors play into it, from these key points of 2018 and 2019, Beijing's increased interest in the global stage in terms of the UNSC can be explained by the opportunity to fill the void left in the wake of the US retreat as a global multilateral partner. Since its establishment, the PRC has achieved significant development milestones and can now

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only an initial guide to the primarily qualitative analysis, the impact of erroneous conclusions can be contained to a certain degree.

<sup>1158</sup> Hansen 2012: 529.

<sup>1159</sup> 04-09-2019-BD; 09-27-2019-PR; 11-14-2019-BD.

<sup>1160</sup> Heidbrink and Nock 2021: 2.

<sup>1161</sup> Noesselt 2018a: 63.

<sup>1162</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 48.

contribute to international security by offering its own version of a global public good, the BRI, according to Wang.<sup>1163</sup> As such a beneficiary, promoter, and shaper of global institutions, the PRC demonstrates its commitment to the UNSC while providing its own ideas to reform the body. The year 2019 offered a window of opportunity to advance this profile and Chinese interest, as reflected in the culminating number of UNSC references in the BRI documents. This interpretation is based on indications in BRI documents of all years under review and requires a more detailed breakdown to understand the multifaceted components linked to the BRI. For this purpose, the signals on the UNSC are grouped from the segments to capture prevalent (security) policy ideas, the PRC's involvement with this institution, and its role for the BRI.

By categorizing the passages on the UN and its security council, five topics can be identified: reform calls (twelve passages), the UN as a conflict resolution body (ten passages), Chinese contributions to the UN (eight passages), fight against terrorism (six passages), and the UNSC's of the BRI (three passages). The first issue of reform calls is mainly about increasing the representation and voice of developing countries in the UN.<sup>1164</sup> These calls are present in a broad range of documents, including diverse stakeholder and organizations, including Vanuatu<sup>1165</sup>, the Republic of Suriname<sup>1166</sup>, the Kingdom of Tonga<sup>1167</sup>, Papua New Guinea<sup>1168</sup>, the Republic of Indonesia<sup>1169</sup>, BRICS<sup>1170</sup>, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)<sup>1171</sup>. This gives the impression of a broadly shared international concern, although the almost identical formulations indicate that the reform demands were introduced by Chinese actors. As these passages are exclusively found in documents with other developing countries, it offers a prime example for tailoring the discourse for target audiences. This confirms the findings in section 5.2 pointing to China's differing BRI approaches for developing and developed countries. In this case, the UNSC reform calls corroborate the Chinese com-

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<sup>1163</sup> Wang 2016: 461.

<sup>1164</sup> 01-13-2016-BD: China's Arab Policy Paper.

<sup>1165</sup> 09-28-2019-BD.

<sup>1166</sup> 11-27-2019-BD.

<sup>1167</sup> 03-01-2018-BD.

<sup>1168</sup> 07-08-2016-BD.

<sup>1169</sup> 03-27-2015-BD.

<sup>1170</sup> 11-18-2020-OD; 11-14-2019-BD.

<sup>1171</sup> 12-10-2015-BD. Established as the China-Africa Consultative Forum in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is the primary Chinese-Africa multilateral framework. It's a bedrock of South-South cooperation based on consensual and non-binding decisions (Parepa 2020: 181-183).

mitment for “a new form of international relations”<sup>1172</sup> based on signals of solidarity with developing countries.

Regarding the multilateral frameworks, where these reform calls appear, Parepa concludes that they have facilitated increased acceptance of the BRI, allowing China to position itself as a security partner.<sup>1173</sup> From this, the corresponding role of China as an advocate for the needs of developing countries in the global security architecture can be determined. In a more sceptic view, such calls fuel debates over China’s revisionist approach towards the global order in general.<sup>1174</sup> The passages express a desire for reform, but this does not mean turning away from the UN system, as the recognition of the UN as a conflict resolution body. This is demonstrated by the emphasis on China’s own contributions to the UN and the instrumental role of the UNSC in the fight against terrorism. These examples underscore a commitment to “the international system with the UN at its core”<sup>1175</sup>, which serves Chinese policy objectives. Reinforcing this impression, the 2020 Moscow and the 2019 Brasilia BRICS declaration include statements that UN functions should not be duplicated, although the institution shall be reformed.<sup>1176</sup> The 2019 Brasilia declaration reaffirms that the BRICS “recognize the role of the UN Security Council as bearing the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.”<sup>1177</sup> The conservative statements underscore a reformist rather than a revisionist policy towards the UN, in which China is preferring to reshape the current system from within instead of overturning it.<sup>1178</sup> Similarly, the BRICS declarations support Chu’s view that the organization acts as a policy-coordination platform for China to promote its global reformist ideas without disrupting the international order.<sup>1179</sup>

This is further corroborated by statements about UN efforts for contributing to the resolution of conflicts in the Kashmir region<sup>1180</sup>, Iran<sup>1181</sup>, Ukraine<sup>1182</sup>, and Syria<sup>1183</sup>, among

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<sup>1172</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019a: 111.

<sup>1173</sup> Parepa 2020: 195-196.

<sup>1174</sup> Chu 2020: 187.

<sup>1175</sup> 09-27-2019-PR. This commitment is less frequent in the collected documents than calls for reform.

<sup>1176</sup> 11-18-2020-OD; 11-14-2019-BD.

<sup>1177</sup> 11-14-2019-BD; Paragraph 41.

<sup>1178</sup> Mitter 2022: 9, 20; Chu 2020: 203.

<sup>1179</sup> Chu 2020: 197-198.

<sup>1180</sup> 03-17-2020-BD.

<sup>1181</sup> 04-09-2019-BD.

<sup>1182</sup> 04-09-2019-BD.

<sup>1183</sup> 11-14-2019-BD; 01-11-2018-BD.



others. As a member of the P5 in the UNSC, the acknowledgement of these positive efforts indirectly bolsters China's own international status. These hot spots are also in the center of UN counter-terrorism efforts, evident in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as well as UN Security Council counter-terrorism resolutions. Reaffirming to fight UNSC-designated terrorist organizations in Syria grants special legitimacy to the body. By recalling the UNSC definitions of terrorist groups, a common global denominator is recalled, which not only promotes the mandate of the UN, but also circumvents potential frictions between supporters of different warring parties, as in the Syrian conflict.<sup>1184</sup>

According to Ferguson, Beijing's UN support is a consequence of China's increasing involvement and investments in foreign insecure environments, which have expanded as a result of the BRI. Chinese UN support is interpreted as a positive commitment to global system stability, which also serves the purpose to tackle risks to China's external development conditions.<sup>1185</sup> Such engagement boosts China's prestige, hence soft power, by establishing itself as a security provider and cooperation partner rather than a security threat.<sup>1186</sup> This benevolent portrait is supported in the collected documents by the text passages that highlight China's major contributions to UN peacekeeping operations and its core value as a permanent member of the UNSC.<sup>1187</sup> Indeed, China was the eighth largest contributor in the UN of peacekeeping personnel with 1.877 forces as of March 2024, making it the largest troop contributor of the P5. It also contributed more than 15 percent to the UN peacekeeping operations budget for 2020-2021, which is the second largest financial contribution after the United States (almost 28 percent).<sup>1188</sup> Such figures are frequently used to promote China's image as a powerful and cooperative partner in shaping the international order. Another element supporting this image are official remarks about China being one of the founding members of the UN, hence the existing world and security system. This implicitly turns its back on the rejection of the UN as a tool of the United States, long prevalent under Mao. Thereby, the affirmative reframing of the UN underscores China's own history as an active global stake-

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<sup>1184</sup> 11-18-2020-OD; 09-27-2019-PR; 11-14-2019-BD; 11-04-2018-BD.

<sup>1185</sup> Ferguson 2020: 68, 71.

<sup>1186</sup> Ferguson 2020: 60, 64.

<sup>1187</sup> 09-27-2019-PR; 201801-11-2018-BD, 01-29-2018-OD.

<sup>1188</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping 2024; United Nations Peacekeeping 2023; 09-27-2019-PR.

holder.<sup>1189</sup> Domestically, the message is that global engagement serves the security and prosperity of the Chinese population, thus legitimizing the mobilization of resources for foreign political action.

Moreover, the documents contain text passages that highlight UNSC resolution 2344 for Afghanistan, which further support the described image. In addition to including the tifa of the community of a shared future for mankind, the resolution includes a call “to strengthen regional economic cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative.”<sup>1190</sup> As evinced in the previous section 5.2, this resolution was identified by Zeng as a discursive power success of the CCP, earning Beijing gains for domestic propaganda as well as international legitimacy.<sup>1191</sup> On these grounds, the UNSC’s mandate is used to promote the beneficial effects of the BRI for international security. The resolution serves as an example of the fact that the BRI runs through conflict-prone areas such as Afghanistan, which poses a challenge for the project. This underscores the hope for stability through development. To realize this hope, the BRI is promoted as a positive contribution to regional security, welcomed by the primary global security body, the UNSC. In the logic of this narrative, the BRI ultimately offers not only an invitation to development cooperation but to security cooperation.<sup>1192</sup> Both readings reduce a potential threat image of the BRI. Desecuritization is fostered through a promise of prosperity and stability in the first reading and in the later one through the impression the BRI itself is endangered and not the danger. Beyond the insight on the promotion of a desecuritized image for the BRI, this section revealed that central tifa in global governance bodies are fostered, whereby China actively shapes global security discourses and uses these institutions for favorable self-representation. In a broader interpretation of these and previous findings, the BRI subsumes an approach to security fostered by economic development that encompasses national, international, and even global policy spheres.

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<sup>1189</sup> Mitter 2022: 8, 14-15, 19. In the analyzed data set, Mitter’s observations are best reflected in the official „China and the World in the New Era“-document (09-27-2019-PR).

<sup>1190</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 5 (04-22-2019-OD). Similarly: 09-27-2019-PR and 05-10-2017-OD.

<sup>1191</sup> Zeng 2020: 127.

<sup>1192</sup> Ferguson 2020: 59; 66.

### 6.2.2 Building Sustainable Security Along the BRI

While the previous section only dealt with the numerous segments concerning the UNSC, this section concentrates on the most frequent security categories mentioned in the documents. These pertain to food security, non-traditional security, energy security, maritime security, national security, data security, security cooperation, security issues, sustainable security, and social security. Although this bears the risk of simplifying heterogeneous security issues, the documents often enumerate those very diverse terms in one sentence or paragraph. This can be interpreted as a high degree of interconnectedness of the security areas guiding BRI project planning and diplomatic approaches.

Food security, which is the second most frequently used word combination in our document corpus after the UNSC, underscores this strong intertwining of security issues. Early documents such as the FOCAC declaration of the Johannesburg Summit from 2015 already report the readiness to “jointly manage non-traditional security issues and global challenges such as, but not limited to food security, energy security, cyber security, climate change, biodiversity conservation, major communicable diseases and transnational crimes”<sup>1193</sup>. Later documents such as the 2018 China-Pakistan joint statement similarly tie together security terms along the issue dimension by agreeing to expand marine, science and technology, space, environmental and agricultural cooperation.<sup>1194</sup> Both examples showcase the combination of traditional and non-traditional security realms. Although there is no generally accepted standard definition of non-traditional security, it is usually used to describe nonmilitary security issues, which will be further explored later in this chapter by taking a closer look at the respective non-traditional security segments.<sup>1195</sup>

Although this distinction seems rough, food security can rather be classified in the area of non-traditional security as it is connected to human security according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP).<sup>1196</sup> The importance of food security for policy-making in China can be traced to the trauma of the Great Famine of 1959-1961. With millions of deaths, it is said to be the largest famine in human history, making it one of the fac-

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<sup>1193</sup> 12-10-2015-BD: Paragraph 25.4.

<sup>1194</sup> 11-04-2018-BD: Section 4.

<sup>1195</sup> Hongyi 2021: 507.

<sup>1196</sup> Hoogensen Gjørsv 2018: 225.

tors that contributed to the internal instabilities of the later Cultural Revolution.<sup>1197</sup> Consequently, food security is considered a critical to national security and political power. Food security is often conceived as national self-sufficiency in food, which is directly linked to regime security because of those historical experiences.<sup>1198</sup> This offers an explanation why food security and agricultural cooperation are recurrent themes in the BRI documents across all years under review. Although China is the world's top food-producing country, it is also the largest consumer and importer of food. Despite Xi Jinping's agenda to boost domestic supply, China's food self-sufficiency ratio fell by almost a third between 2000 and 2020, to 65.8 percent. In order to avert potential food stress, hence political instability, the BRI stimulates global agricultural cooperation and import sources.<sup>1199</sup> Agricultural cooperation along the BRI follows a multi-channel approach involving multilateral institutions such as the African Union (AU)<sup>1200</sup>, BRICS<sup>1201</sup>, WTO<sup>1202</sup>, UN<sup>1203</sup>, EU<sup>1204</sup>, ASEAN<sup>1205</sup>, or the G20<sup>1206</sup>, as well as bilateral formats<sup>1207</sup>. In the 2020 documents, the link between health and food security in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights World Health Organization (WHO) as a coordination platform. The pandemic has underscored health as a critical component of fostering development in the BRI documents, upgrading its significance as a human security issue.<sup>1208</sup>

China itself acts as a promoter for those cooperation ventures and claims prestige for its development achievements. Central to this is the document "Vision and Action on Jointly Promoting Agricultural Cooperation on the Belt and Road" issued in May 2017 by the Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce, and Foreign Affairs, and the NDRC:

"Since late 1970s, China has scored achievements in agriculture and rural areas and made contributions to the world food security. Committed to shouldering more responsibilities and obligations within its ability, China is ready to contribute its wisdom to the global

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<sup>1197</sup> Liu 2023; Noesselt 2018a: 64, 128.

<sup>1198</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 54.

<sup>1199</sup> Liu 2023.

<sup>1200</sup> 11-18-2020-OD; 12-10-2015-BD.

<sup>1201</sup> 11-18-2020-OD; 11-14-2019-BD.

<sup>1202</sup> 11-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1203</sup> 12-19-2018-PR.

<sup>1204</sup> 12-19-2018-PR; 03-27-2015-BD.

<sup>1205</sup> 05-2017-OD.

<sup>1206</sup> 03-27-2015-BD.

<sup>1207</sup> 11-04-2018-BD; 01-13-2016-BD; 03-23-2016-BD; 03-27-2015-BD.

<sup>1208</sup> 06-18-2020-OD; 11-18-2020-OD.

governance on food and agriculture, and share experience with Belt and Road countries so as to contribute more to agricultural and economic growth in the world.”<sup>1209</sup>

China’s “positive contribution to world food security”<sup>1210</sup> is complemented by its willingness to support other states in areas of health control and technology. These efforts are joined under the umbrella of the BRI, for example, through the Belt and Road Forum, a dialogue mechanism for agricultural cooperation, and information exchange on the Belt and Road Portal.<sup>1211</sup> Accordingly, the PRC and its governance experience are presented as essential in solving global distribution problems and providing for basic human needs. This creates a positive message (complying with the idea of “telling the Chinese story well”<sup>1212</sup>), which promotes attractiveness, ergo soft power. The combination of cooperation offers and contribution claims aligns with the second security discourse line extracted from the literature review, that the BRI tackles security issues.<sup>1213</sup>

By account of this combination, the BRI and China’s central position in it are desecuritized, which is likewise reflected in the examination of the other common security terms. Taking a closer look at non-traditional security, the positive contribution of China and its BRI to international security is reinforced. Especially in these segments on non-traditional security, classical defense policy terms and fields of action are introduced. Military components are not mentioned in the conventional sense as an instrument in interstate conflicts but in the fight against sub-state actors. This is evident from China’s January 2016 Arab Policy Paper, which states:

“We will jointly enhance the capability to cope with non-traditional security threats, support the international community’s efforts to combat piracy, continue to send warships to the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia to maintain international maritime security, and conduct cyber security cooperation.”<sup>1214</sup>

Anti-piracy, along with topics like counter-terrorism, drug control, cybercrimes, or arms smuggling, walks the fine line between military and policing tasks. Both constitute parts of classical security concepts representing the state’s monopoly on the use of force.<sup>1215</sup> Neither the military forces nor the police can be exclusively attributed as political in-

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<sup>1209</sup> 05-2017-OD: I. Background.

<sup>1210</sup> 05-2017-OD: VI. Action and Future.

<sup>1211</sup> 05-2017-OD: V. Mechanisms.

<sup>1212</sup> See Section 3.2; People’s Daily Review 2018.

<sup>1213</sup> See Section 3.4.

<sup>1214</sup> 01-13-2016-BD: 5.5 Non-Traditional Security.

<sup>1215</sup> Lanfer 2017: 51-53.

struments to the military category in the security taxonomy because both actors are also affecting human or cyber security. Nevertheless, both are traditional actors in terms of national security, which are central components of the original military security concept.<sup>1216</sup> In contrast to the definition from the literature mentioned above, non-traditional security, as depicted in the collected BRI documents, does not exclude military components. Instead, these military components are used in terms of an extended security concept, whereby the respective actors are desecuritized by interstate cooperation in contrast to confrontation, i.e., war. This combination of traditional and non-traditional security is similarly evident in other segments of this category. Moreover, these segments feature the extended security concept within non-traditional security by describing common challenges to economic transformation in the areas of “natural disasters, climate change, environmental problems, and pandemics”<sup>1217, 1218</sup> By referring to shared challenges and root causes of insecurity, the BRI is subtly reinforced as a remedy by a common cooperation platform in these documents.

In a similar vein, energy security being part of non-traditional security cooperation bridges different categories on the issue dimension. While energy security appears in documents of every year under scrutiny, the main guiding document “Vision and Actions on Energy Cooperation in Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”<sup>1219</sup> summarizes all major aspects of this area. It underlines that energy is “indispensable”<sup>1220</sup> and plays a “crucial”<sup>1221</sup> or “pivotal”<sup>1222</sup> role for promoting progress. The Belt and Road serves to build an energy cooperation system, which is built along four of the five connectivity goals (wutong), which are policy coordination, unimpeded trade, energy investments cooperation and energy infrastructure connectivity. These cooperation priorities are complemented by the idea of sustainable energy and better global energy governance, both demonstrating efforts to advance low-carbon, green energy production.<sup>1223</sup> The people-to-people dimension is not included by

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<sup>1216</sup> Daase 2010b: 144-145; Lanfer 2017: 57.

<sup>1217</sup> 03-23-2016-BD.

<sup>1218</sup> 01-12-2018-BD; 01-29-2018-OD; 03-23-2016-BD; 05-18-2016-BD; 01-13-2016-BD; 12-10-2015-BD.

<sup>1219</sup> 05-16-2017-OD.

<sup>1220</sup> 05-16-2017-OD.

<sup>1221</sup> 11-14-2019-BD.

<sup>1222</sup> 11-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1223</sup> 05-16-2017-OD: III. Cooperation Priorities.

name, although the document also proposes training programs for locals.<sup>1224</sup> Despite those sustainability pledges, fossil fuel assets accounted for the lion's share of energy investments in the early years of the BRI. Those projects create infrastructural path dependencies that will tie countries to carbon-emitting fuel sources for the years to come.<sup>1225</sup> However, newer studies find evidence that Chinese energy investments indeed shifted towards sustainable energy projects, which might follow the adaption according to the BRI 2.0 after the 2019 BRF.<sup>1226</sup>

Corresponding to the 2019 BRICS Brasilia declaration, access to inexpensive, green energy should be secured through “the diversification of energy sources”<sup>1227</sup>. Diversification of energy sources and supply lines is of central importance for the PRC's energy security. As more than 80 percent of China's oil imports are shipped through the South China Sea, BRI pipeline, railroad, and port projects alleviate the pressure potential of chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca.<sup>1228</sup> The so-called Malacca Dilemma refers to China's strategic vulnerability due to a potential blockade of this bottleneck by the US Navy in the event of a conflict. It is deemed a main reason for the modernization of the Chinese naval forces and BRI efforts to construct alternative transportation routes.<sup>1229</sup> Managing these waterways and expanding transport corridors is therefore central to “ensure China's territorial and energy security, and strengthen economic and political connections between regions”<sup>1230</sup>. Facilitating international transport cooperation under the BRI serves not only China but produces benefits for all countries and people involved, as the State Council claims in the “Sustainable Development of Transport in China”<sup>1231</sup>. In this way, China's energy security is linked to that of its BRI partner countries, which casts a positive light through mutual profits. All of this reinforces the narrative of BRI as a remedy for security concerns for aspects of economic, ecological and human security. These observations are supported by Zhang and Orbie, who argue that China's energy security concerns are the major driver for climate mitigation actions on the domestic and international front. In their view, the mere functioning of China's

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<sup>1224</sup> 05-16-2017-OD: II. Cooperation Principles.

<sup>1225</sup> Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 5.

<sup>1226</sup> Gu et al. 2022: 28-29.

<sup>1227</sup> 11-14-2019-BD.

<sup>1228</sup> Garlick 2020: 185.

<sup>1229</sup> Zhao 2019: 6; Gu and Mayer 2007: 71.

<sup>1230</sup> 12-22-2020-OD: II. China's Growing Strength in Transport.

<sup>1231</sup> 12-22-2020-OD: V. Building a Global Community of Transport for All

economy relies on transforming its industry accordingly.<sup>1232</sup> Despite all transformation efforts towards self-sufficiency, China's economic and energy security still depends on foreign trade via sea routes. Consequently, the maintenance of unobstructed sea lanes (for example, by sending warships to the Gulf region<sup>1233</sup>) touches on content from the military category of the security taxonomy.

The way, in which China is taking a cooperative approach to maritime security, is set out in the 2017 "Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative"<sup>1234</sup>. The Vision accentuates the safeguarding of maritime transport channels, while it avoids direct connections to hard power means for doing so such as the PLA. Dialogue and other cooperative mechanisms for joint maritime anti-terrorism or anti-violence measures are to be expanded among maritime law enforcement agencies, which includes the PLA Navy.<sup>1235</sup> The 2017 progress report sheds more light on mechanisms to safeguard the MSR referring among others to MoUs between the China Coast Guard and Vietnam or the Philippines, jointly agreed guidelines with ASEAN for maritime emergencies, and dialogues with India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.<sup>1236</sup>

Seven out ten coded statements related to maritime security occur in 2017, while the other three are found in 2015, 2016 and 2019 respectively.<sup>1237</sup> The 2017 seemingly sudden peak in maritime security segments in BRI documents came in the aftermath of the July 2016 judgment of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) arbitral tribunal ruling. The tribunal ruled in favor of the Philippines and against the PRC's claims in the South China Sea. Beijing rejected the ruling and insists on its historic claims illustrated as a nine-dashed line on maps of the South China Sea. The nine-dashed-line territory covers the majority of the South China Sea, which is often seen as a major driver of conflict in the region.<sup>1238</sup> Beijing takes the position that China discovered the islands in the South China Sea more than two thousand years ago during the Han Dynasty. The nine-dashed line map was already adopted in 1948. In

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<sup>1232</sup> Zhang and Orbie 2019: 21-22.

<sup>1233</sup> 01-13-2016-BD: 5.5 Non-Traditional Security.

<sup>1234</sup> 06-20-2017-OD.

<sup>1235</sup> 06-20-2017-OD: 9.

<sup>1236</sup> Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 40 (05-10-2017-OD).

<sup>1237</sup> 03-27-2015-BD; 01-13-2016-BD; 06-20-2017-OD; 06-20-2017-OD; 06-20-2017-OD; 06-20-2017-OD; 05-10-2017-OD; 04-09-2019-BD

<sup>1238</sup> Rosyidin 2019: 16-17; Lobell 2017: 354; Soeya 2017: 285.



Beijing's view, the 1994 ratified UNCLOS does not have a retroactive effect, which also applies to its 2016 ruling.<sup>1239</sup> Rejecting the UNCLOS ruling while upgrading maritime military capacities and building military bases in the South China Sea generates distrust of China's peaceful rise and military restraint. To mitigate spiraling insecurity, the PRC has expanded dialogue and infrastructure cooperation, for example with the Philippines. These efforts were welcomed but have not resolved the territorial disputes.<sup>1240</sup> Rosemary Foot argues that Beijing's references to its own sovereignty and development interests in the domain of maritime security can be understood as efforts to delegitimize the judgment of the 2016 UNCLOS ruling.<sup>1241</sup> This geopolitical backdrop fosters the interpretation and evolution of maritime security as part of the MSR, as the territorial conflicts in the South China Sea predate the BRI and have always shaped it.

Thereby, the initiative seems to be built on the general idea that cooperation on projects builds trust and produces security gains, which will sooner or later resolve difficult conflicts like those in the South China Sea. The imperative seems to be to pragmatically set aside differences so that interstate conflicts do not hinder cooperation under the BRI on common interests. This approach appears to be applied at bilateral, regional, as well as trans-continental levels in the BRI. The trans-continental scope of maritime security is reflected in the 2019 China-EU summit joint statement, in which both sides agree to expand cooperation and exchanges in maritime affairs, counter-piracy and UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>1242</sup> The joint statement further refers to peace and security in Africa, which viewed as a key partner for the BRI offering central transport hubs along the MSR.<sup>1243</sup> Being involved in peacekeeping and counter-piracy operations on the African continent and surrounding waters, Beijing demonstrates to be aware of the security challenges for BRI project in the region. This links the two security strands from the literature review: the BRI addresses the problems of maritime security that would otherwise threaten its success.

Combatting non-traditional security issues also involves ecologic risks such as marine disasters or pollution response requiring civilian (people-to-people) cooperation. In ad-

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<sup>1239</sup> Soeya 2017: 285.

<sup>1240</sup> Foot 2019: 154, 162; Rosyidin 2019: 16-17.

<sup>1241</sup> Foot 2019: 154.

<sup>1242</sup> 04-09-2019-BD: Paragraph 22.

<sup>1243</sup> Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 56 (05-10-2017-OD).

dition, the BeiDou Navigation Satellite system complements these efforts connecting marine, cyber, and space security management.<sup>1244</sup> A joint statement of China and Indonesia from 2015 is a showcase of all these fields of action, reinforcing their complementary nature.<sup>1245</sup> All those actions find resonance in the tenet: “Maritime security is a key assurance for developing the blue economy.”<sup>1246</sup> Blue economy in the Chinese view focuses on logistical infrastructures connecting China to the world markets according to Mayer and Balázs. Although the researchers attribute the convergence of economic development and maritime ecosystem protection to the more regionally directed Indian version of blue economy, the analyzed segments evince that this harmonization applies to the Chinese version of the concept.<sup>1247</sup> Accordingly, maritime security synchronizes the entire range of issue dimensions from military to economic, ecologic, human and cyber security, similar to the security terms examined above.

Closely synchronized are national security and data security. All but one segment on data security (seven out of eight) appears in China’s Global Initiative on Data Security proposed at the September 2020 International Seminar on Global Digital Governance in Beijing. The initiative calls for non-discriminatory trading rules in the global digital economy, evidence-based information and communications technology (ICT) policy-making, and extensive international consultations in terms of sovereignty, jurisdiction, and governance of data. States have the task to protect their governance information as well as data of the domestic businesses and population. All data security measures need to align a state’s national, public, and economic security interests.<sup>1248</sup> Three out of four national security segments in 2020 are found in this document, rendering data security as a matter of national security. The temporal correlation of these security issues can be explained both in terms of the PRC’s domestic and the broader geopolitical context. The 2020 peak of data plus national security may have been stimulated in part by events surrounding the 2019-2020 Hong Kong protests. In November 2019, US-President Donald Trump passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act demonstrating heightened sensitivity to the Chinese central government’s use of surveillance technolo-

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<sup>1244</sup> 06-20-2017-OD: 8-9.

<sup>1245</sup> 03-27-2015-BD.

<sup>1246</sup> 06-20-2017-OD: 7.

<sup>1247</sup> Mayer and Balázs 2018: 215-217.

<sup>1248</sup> 09-08-2020-OD.

gies. In addition, a companion bill placed US export restrictions on devices that would facilitate crowd control by the Hong Kong police forces. Beijing criticized these acts as interference in China's internal affairs. In turn, the June 2020 Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has been heavily criticized in the United States. The law is condemned as a massive expansion of Chinese authorities' surveillance rights in Hong Kong that would infringe on Hong Kong's autonomous status. This is rejected by Chinese authorities claiming that the autonomous status of Hong Kong is ensured by its status as a province under the One-China policy, hence mainland China's ruling, territorial integrity, and sovereignty.<sup>1249</sup> Reflecting this rhetoric, the Global Initiative on Data Security calls on states to respect the sovereignty, jurisdiction and governance of data and underlines each states' responsibility for national security and social stability.<sup>1250</sup> According to Wang and Ma, these are buzzwords under the headline of stability (稳定, wending) that are used in the central government discourse in order to legitimize its measures in Hong Kong.<sup>1251</sup> The combination of data protection and national security can thus be interpreted as pursuing both internal legitimation purposes and externally directed defenses against perceived interference. Despite the temporal connection and linguistic patterns, this cannot be attributed solely to the Hong Kong protests, as the timing of EU data regulations, among factors, offers another piece of the puzzle to explain the salience of this security synthesis.

The Global Initiative on Data Security was published just a few days before the first EU-China High-Level Digital Dialogue. At the time, there was a US campaign to ban Chinese suppliers such as Huawei from 5G networks and to convince international allies to follow suit on national security grounds. The Chinese initiative signals that these concerns have been heard, but it did not spark much attention or even support in Europe.<sup>1252</sup> This explanation is reinforced by the fact that the only other segment on data security is in China's Policy Paper on the European Union. In the paper, China expresses concern that the high demands of the EU General Data Protection Regulation could

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<sup>1249</sup> Wang and Ma 2021: 85-87, 96; Noesselt 2018a: 73-74.

<sup>1250</sup> 09-08-2020-OD.

<sup>1251</sup> Wang and Ma 2021: 95-96.

<sup>1252</sup> MERICS 2020.

affect their trade relations.<sup>1253</sup> Cyber security is, therefore, not the only policy area of the issue dimension that is affected by data security, as the name might suggest. Economic security, human security, or military aspects of national security are also affected by critical infrastructures and virtual data. Legislative procedures abroad, such as in the EU or political campaigns of the US aiming to address this bulk of security concerns may yet inhibit the BRI's progress. This creates a BRI security narrative that reinterprets and combines the two strands of the BRI being challenged by security issues and the BRI creating security issues.<sup>1254</sup> The BRI is not only challenged by security issues but also by foreign security concerns, which arise from the expectation that the BRI generates harm. In response to this securitized narrative, the Chinese Global Data Initiative on Data Security proactively formulated a collaborative proposal.

Beyond improving data security, national security<sup>1255</sup> is strengthened through diplomatic arrangements and development cooperation along the BRI, which reflect Chinese core interests.<sup>1256</sup> First, national security is framed around the issues of opposing foreign interference – particularly those issues concerning the PRC's sovereignty surrounding Taiwan, South China Sea or Hong Kong.<sup>1257</sup> The recognition of these positions is officially stipulated, as demonstrated by the Joint Statement of the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19: “The African side supports China's position on Taiwan and Hong Kong, and supports China's efforts to safeguard national security in Hong Kong in accordance with law.”<sup>1258</sup> In addition, Chinese calls to “oppose terrorism, separatism and extremism”<sup>1259</sup> in mutual support for national security establish a link to the three evil forces to be countered in Xinjiang and abroad.<sup>1260</sup> According to Trédaniel and Lee, a developmentalist ideology prevailed in Beijing in the 1990s. This ideology also aimed to foster political assimilation through economic development, particularly in Xinjiang, to counter unrest attributed to poverty.<sup>1261</sup> Devel-

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<sup>1253</sup> 12-19-2018-PR: Part Four.

<sup>1254</sup> See Section 3.4.

<sup>1255</sup> 06-17-2020-BD; 09-08-2020-OD; Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50-51 (04-22-2019-OD); 09-27-2019-2019-PR-11-14-2019-BD; 11-21-2018-BD; 04-10-2015-PR.

<sup>1256</sup> See Section 5.2 as defined by Müller and Polfuß 2021: 149-150; Zeng et al. 2015: 245.

<sup>1257</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 57.

<sup>1258</sup> 06-178-2020-BD: Paragraph 1.

<sup>1259</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 51 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1260</sup> Brakman et al. 2019: 3; Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 273; Noesselt 2018a: 45.

<sup>1261</sup> Trédaniel and Lee 2018: 182.

opmental impulses by the BRI thus qualify as measures of an extended security concept. Those statements promote a security-development nexus. Security is considered a key requirement for economic development, and vice versa, development is a necessity for upholding security. This synthesis of development and security providing for state stability predates the BRI as a policy for the PRC. Already in 1997, Jiang Zemin's Report at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP proclaimed: "Development is the absolute principle. The key to the solution of all China's problems lies in our own development."<sup>1262</sup>

Again, this merges human security and economic well-being with national security and state stability.<sup>1263</sup> As such, national security involves a military component bearing the risk of fueling threat perceptions abroad. A benign framing of China's military aspirations for national security, as found in the key document "China and the World in the New Era", may be interpreted as an antidote to a conventional security dilemma.<sup>1264</sup> In theory, a security dilemma is triggered by the accumulation of power by means of military armament, which is perceived by other states as an aggressive signal. By taking measures to maximize their own security, other actors (most prominently states according to the Realist school of thought) become more insecure and arm themselves.<sup>1265</sup> As John Herz observed in 1950, such behavior is provoking a "vicious circle of security and power accumulation."<sup>1266</sup> Corresponding concerns of international relations tipping into a security dilemma could be sparked by the PRC's military build-up. By 2035, military modernization is to be completed, as the CCP set out to accomplish in 2020. Pursuing this path until mid-century in line with the Two Centenaries, China is supposed to have a world-class military.<sup>1267</sup> Although Chinese officials refuse that the BRI is a vehicle for achieving these military aspirations, deep suspicions about these statements and ulterior motives are frequently raised by US, Indian, or Japanese representatives.<sup>1268</sup> Securitized as a means of accumulating Chinese military power, the BRI could evolve into a propellant for a security dilemma. It may be interpreted as an attempt to

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<sup>1262</sup> Jiang 1997: IV. The Basic Line and Program for the Primary Stage of Socialism. See also Foot 2019: 158 and Heath 2014.

<sup>1263</sup> Suchanek 2018: 21.

<sup>1264</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: IV. China Contributes to a Better World.

<sup>1265</sup> Gu 2018: 65-66.

<sup>1266</sup> Herz 1950: 157

<sup>1267</sup> Hart et al. 2021: 8-10.

<sup>1268</sup> Russel and Berger 2020: 8-9.

avert a security dilemma when Chinese representatives object to a military connection of the BRI or avoid to mention these in the first place.<sup>1269</sup> In addition, by pointing out in official documents that China's defense policy is "defensive in nature"<sup>1270</sup> This is complemented by the positive framing that the PLA ensures world peace, common security, and thus development.<sup>1271</sup> Along the same lines, Yong Wang argues that the BRI as a whole is rather defensive than offensive since it is a continuation of economic liberalism aiming to mitigate the security dilemma by building trust through trade and development.<sup>1272</sup> In this way, the security-development nexus is used to neutralize threat perceptions as a precursor of a security dilemma.

In the documents, the duality of security and development is virtually ubiquitous. For instance, the Global Initiative on Data Security invites states "to put equal emphasis on development and security"<sup>1273</sup>. The corresponding reasons against the backdrop of the security-development nexus are given in various documents of the collected BRI corpus. The MSR vision identifies maritime security as a "key assurance for developing the blue economy"<sup>1274</sup>. The BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration refers to the "great significance"<sup>1275</sup> of (rural) development for security. Approaching BRI states with this rhetoric of interconnected security and economic development aims to build a shared understanding of a progressive political, security, and social order, according to Foot. In her view, this Chinese security-development model is prioritized over militarized defense or individual human rights.<sup>1276</sup> This may trigger debates about the replacement of norms of the liberal order because it implicitly redefines the security-development nexus recognized by institutions such as the Western-led OECD less in individual than in collective terms.

Security and development are deemed necessary in the reviewed literature for a "harmonious society."<sup>1277</sup> In this concept, poverty reduction, employment, and systems of

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<sup>1269</sup> Styan 2021: 120; Russel and Berger 2020: 8.

<sup>1270</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: IV. China Contributes to a Better World.

<sup>1271</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: IV. China Contributes to a Better World.

<sup>1272</sup> Wang 2016: 462.

<sup>1273</sup> 09-08-2020-OD.

<sup>1274</sup> 06-20-2017-OD: S. 7.

<sup>1275</sup> 11-18-2020-OD: Paragraph 73.

<sup>1276</sup> Foot 2019: 159.

<sup>1277</sup> The Harmonious Society (和谐社会; hexie shehui) was a key tifa under Hu Jintao (2002-2012). It has revived Confucian teachings by embracing the people as the key to collective stability, which is the po-

social security benefit each individual human being but ultimately serve the stability of society, i.e., the state as a whole.<sup>1278</sup> More than 800 million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty since the beginning of China's reform and opening up policy in 1978.<sup>1279</sup> This constitutes a significant success in China's development and in the establishment of social security systems. This success story is accordingly narrated in the BRI documents and serves to boost prestige. In order to support this progress both domestically and internationally, China plans to extend cooperation in the area of social security – among others with the EU or in the BRICS format.<sup>1280</sup> This was included from the very beginning of the BRI as a cooperation priority in the 2015 Vision and Actions Document under the area of people-to-people bond.<sup>1281</sup> In this way, cooperation is sought in a security field, which, in contrast to military matters, is often defined as a matter of low politics. Cooperation in a non-securitized area, such as social security, does usually not fuel international perceptions of danger, as is the case with military or technological affairs. Parepa yet warns that China could expand economically and militarily into target regions via the BRI, avoiding public attention or repercussions by fostering relations based on promises of the security-development nexus.<sup>1282</sup> Given the combination of these assessments from the literature and its omnipresence in the collected document corpus reinforces the importance of the security-development nexus for understanding Chinese security policy-making under the BRI, which can be subsumed under the headline of sustainable security.

To begin with, sustainable security is vaguely explained in most documents to be part of “a raft of significant international concepts and initiatives”<sup>1283</sup>. In addition, there is no consensual definition of this term in the available academic literature, which makes it difficult to comprehend. By interpreting the seven segments<sup>1284</sup> on sustainable security in the collected BRI documents, it seems that it broadly corresponds to the idea of the security-development-nexus. So, the original circular reasoning persists with the addi-

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litional priority. Under the BRI, concepts of harmony incorporated internal and external stability goals (Garlick 2020: 114; Brown 2018: 216; Noesselt 2018a: 46). See Chapter 5.2 for more details.

<sup>1278</sup> Noesselt 2018a: 143-144.

<sup>1279</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: Box 1.

<sup>1280</sup> 11-14-2019-BD; 12-19-2018-PR; NDRC 2015 (03-28-2015-OD).

<sup>1281</sup> NDRC 2015 (03-28-2015-OD).

<sup>1282</sup> Parepa 2020: 182.

<sup>1283</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: I. China Has Found a Development Path Suited to Its Actual Conditions.

<sup>1284</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50 (04-22-2019-OD); 09-27-2019-PR; 11-04-2018-BD; 05-10-2017-OD; 01-13-2016-BD; 03-23-2016-BD; 12-10-2015-BD.

tion of sustainability: Development is a master key to security, security is an indispensable requirement for the BRI, the BRI is a central driver of development. Only by combining a cooperative approach to development and security, both are sustainable across all policy fields.<sup>1285</sup> The circular argument channels a warning of security issues challenging the BRI, for which the BRI itself may provide long-term solutions. The 2019 progress report offers a telling quote for this:

“Peace and security are the prerequisite and guarantee for building the Belt and Road. All countries should foster a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and ensure that a security environment is built by all and for all.”<sup>1286</sup>

“Built by all and for all” links to the previously explained BRI principles in chapter 5. In this context, the principles highlight the transnational dependency in tackling security issues transcending state borders. All countries have the responsibility to recognize the interrelatedness of each other’s security and to join forces for resolving international challenges. Security is to be built on a common denominator, which involves the upholding of non-interference and recognition of sovereignty. As stated before, disagreements are demanded to be set aside to pragmatically facilitate win-win collaboration on common challenges.<sup>1287</sup> This way, BRI cooperation can help defuse conflicts or promote negotiations through the development of positive relationships. This implicitly elevates the BRI to a peace initiative, which fosters Beijing’s (self-)image as a constructive world power and responsible stakeholder.<sup>1288</sup> Corresponding to the role of a responsible instead of a disruptive stakeholder, sustainable security is committed to the principles of the UN Charter and in advocacy of the UN as a whole.<sup>1289</sup> Connecting these explanations of sustainable security to the UN principles reinforces the impression of Beijing harboring reformist rather than revisionist aspirations towards the international community, as discussed before.<sup>1290</sup> Interpreting the sustainable security term recalls the previous ‘ego’ view’s analysis of the BRI being Beijing’s solution to promoting peace and tackling global as well as local security challenges.<sup>1291</sup>

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<sup>1285</sup> 11-14-2019-BD; 05-16-2017-OD.

<sup>1286</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1287</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 28; Xu and Wang 2019a: 110; Wang 2017: 147-150.

<sup>1288</sup> Wang 2019b: 97; Wang and Jiang 2019b: 126; Wang 2017: 37, 147.

<sup>1289</sup> 12-10-2015-BD.

<sup>1290</sup> Mitter 2022: 19-20; Chu 2020: 199.

<sup>1291</sup> Liu 2019: 136; Wang 2017: 24.



This resonates with the concept of “holistic national security” promulgated by President Xi Jinping and the Central National Security Commission since 2015. Holistic national security incorporates the whole security recognizing the intricacies of security issues and transnational effects in a globalized world.<sup>1292</sup> A prime example for this is found in China’s Military Strategy of May 2015:

“Internally and externally, the factors at play are more complex than ever before. Therefore, it is necessary to uphold a holistic view of national security, balance internal and external security, homeland and citizen security, traditional and non-traditional security, subsistence and development security, and China’s own security and the common security of the world.”<sup>1293</sup>

Both theoretically and politically, the Chinese concept of holistic national security appears to be quite expansive. It shows an awareness of increasingly complex international contexts encompassing broadening security categories, similar to the historic expansion of the concept of security described by Daase.<sup>1294</sup> Such a broad understanding under the directive of “holistic security” also ties in with the strong interconnectedness of security issues observed since the outset of this chapter. Despite the all-encompassing holistic security view, the core of the security framework can be inferred from the investigation results so far: The concept holistic national security is inextricably linked to the very existence of the Chinese state, which defines the political priority. According to the reference dimension, the scope of action is geared towards the state. Other referent objects are still included in the Chinese security calculus and not simply omitted as indicated by the multifaceted security terms found in the BRI documents. The measures associated with those other referent objects are, however, channeled towards national security. In other words, the security of each reference object has to serve state security. As evinced by the analysis, security terms usually associated with a people-centered concept of human security, such as food security or sustainable security, are adapted to a state-centered context in the PRC.<sup>1295</sup> Support for this interpretation is found in the *Decoding China Dictionary*. It explains the Chinese rationale that individuals can only be safe if the state is safe. The state is equated with the rule of the CCP. As “state security” and “national security” are the same word in Chinese (国家安全, *guojia anquan*),

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<sup>1292</sup> Ferguson 2020: 70; Ghiselli 2018: 616.

<sup>1293</sup> The Information Office of the State Council 2015.

<sup>1294</sup> Daase 2010a: 18. See Chapter 2 on the expanding security concept.

<sup>1295</sup> Persaud 2022: 147; Hoogensen Gjørsv 2018: 224.

threats to the CCP are threats to the very warrantor of security, hence threats to the existence of the PRC as a state.<sup>1296</sup> The extensive interweaving of security terms and their subordination for the purpose of collective state security under the BRI aligns with Chinese linguistic usage, as well as Beijing's political tradition and current policy framework. This observation is further confirmed by the expansion of the "comprehensive national security" (总体国家安全; *zongti guojia anquan*) concept from 2014 from 11 to 16 policy areas in 2022.<sup>1297</sup> According to Drinhausen and Legarda, these security policy areas are aimed at ensuring the party state's survival and political stability, representing a trend of "securitization of everything."<sup>1298</sup> In this context, the BRI can serve as a means to achieve national security, which is accelerating the fusion of internal and external, traditional and non-traditional security.<sup>1299</sup> This would automatically entail an all-encompassing securitization because every BRI issue is effectively connected to the existence of the state represented by the CCP. The analysis suggests that the securitization of everything is pursued using an ostensible desecuritizing rhetoric that constructs the promise and idea of sustainable security for everyone participating in the BRI.

### 6.3 BRI As a Means to Tackle Security Issues

This chapter set out to analyze what issues stand out in the Chinese official documents, particularly with regard to Germany and the UK, and which security issues of the BRI are communicated. Because the BRI documents are written in a predominantly positive tone, traditional-style securitizations that construct an urgent threat to a state's survival are not visible in a "Western" or rather low-context culture sense. This does not imply the absence of securitizations or threats impacting the BRI, but close interpretation sensitive to the Chinese high-context culture communication style. In contrast to the German low-context culture, these messages need to be deciphered in terms of how something is said and what is not uttered.<sup>1300</sup>

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<sup>1296</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 53-55.

<sup>1297</sup> The 16 security policy areas of the 2022 comprehensive national security concept are political security, territorial security, military security, economic security, cultural security, societal security, technological security, cybersecurity, ecological security, resource security, nuclear security, security of overseas interests, biosecurity, space security, polar security, and deep-sea security (Drinhausen and Legarda 2022: 2-3).

<sup>1298</sup> Drinhausen and Legarda 2022: 4-5.

<sup>1299</sup> Ghiselli 2018: 616-617.

<sup>1300</sup> Meyer 2014: 48.

From a bird's eye view, most direct references to the BRI's security relation are made in terms of how the BRI is framed to tackle security issues. In addition, the previous section drew attention to the few existing references of security challenges for the BRI such as rising regional turbulences<sup>1301</sup>, maritime crime<sup>1302</sup>, or risks caused by new technologies<sup>1303</sup>. The latter functions as a facilitator of the former as those risks are explained to be alleviated by in-depth cooperation "by all and for all"<sup>1304</sup> under the BRI. In this respect, the signal is sent: There are security risks to the BRI that the BRI will ultimately solve itself by moving forward. By moving forward, the BRI induces development, which is the key to domestic, international, and global security. By silencing potential security issues that first arise as a result of the BRI in the reviewed documents, the positive signal of the BRI as a vehicle for shared security and development is further reinforced. The inclusion of long-standing cooperation projects such as the China-Europe rail service with Germany under the BRI indicates a commitment on the part of China to continuity.<sup>1305</sup> In this way, the BRI becomes a framework for the universal and thus common desire for more security and development as a shared destiny<sup>1306</sup>.

Gallelli and Heinrich's study corresponds to this interpretation, stating: "The real novelty of the Belt and Road Initiative is the idea of forming a coalition to battle and better control the risks that stand in the way of achieving prosperity."<sup>1307</sup> How this coalition is formed and how it is fostering desecuritized cooperation for achieving security is subsequently illustrated by classifying and interpreting the results along the security taxonomy's issue dimension. Instead of simply reiterating the previous findings, this chapter draws the lines along the main messages of each security dimension. The study now processes the fine granulation of the previous sections according to outstanding signal patterns. For reasons of reduction and interpretation, as well as to avoid redundancy, the categorization requires not listing every single sub-aspect at this point, although they are included in the analysis of the responses if necessary. By categorizing the signals, the cross-case comparison with Germany and the UK is enabled. In doing so, the coherence

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<sup>1301</sup> 01-13-2016-BD.

<sup>1302</sup> 05-10-2017-OD.

<sup>1303</sup> 12-18-2018-PR.

<sup>1304</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1305</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1306</sup> See Section 5.2 for more details on the tifa of a "community of shared destiny for all humankind".

<sup>1307</sup> Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 34.

of the research framework is consolidated, as it allows for a systematic classification and juxtaposition despite the diverse document types and cultural contexts.

Contrary to the observations of Dadabaev or Mayer, who reported that Chinese officials deemphasize the BRI's military and security elements, the Chinese documents under review included several links to military security.<sup>1308</sup> Direct references to the military dimension – as explained in the previous sections – avoid direct mention of the BRI, either including it indirectly at the project level or via BRI-related *tifa*, or mentioning it as a project in the same document. For example, in the November 2018 joint statement by the Chinese and Singaporean governments, paragraphs 10 and 11 express willingness to enhance environmental and judicial cooperation along the Belt and Road. This is immediately followed by a paragraph without direct references to the BRI on promoting bilateral defense relations at the political and military levels, as well as further naval exercises between China and ASEAN. Paragraph 17 invites the Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to the 2nd BRF, an invitation the Prime Minister accepted.<sup>1309</sup> Therefore, the BRI provides a frame for cooperation in this joint declaration despite a missing direct link in the exact paragraph on military defense. Similar patterns can be detected in other publications of the BRI document corpus encompassing maritime security as a frequent marker for military security.<sup>1310</sup>

This interpretation is corroborated by the 2017 Building the Belt and Road document reporting on cooperation between China and ASEAN as well as individual countries such as India, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Vietnam against maritime crimes and for “safeguarding the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road”<sup>1311</sup>. Under the heading of maritime security, Beijing is also offering European partners – hence Germany and the UK – and Arab states closer cooperation. Cooperation involves a wide range of issues, such as joint exercises, communication, or humanitarian rescue. The latter is enumerated under non-traditional security fields.<sup>1312</sup> This could be interpreted as a desecuritization attempt because cooperation in such classic military areas is described as entailing civilian bene-

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<sup>1308</sup> Dadabaev 2018: 16; Mayer 2018c: 14-15. See Chapter 6.2.

<sup>1309</sup> 11-14-2018-BD.

<sup>1310</sup> The maritime sector was included in the BRI from the beginning, in line with the Maritime Silk Road, although interest in maritime security as a term (as shown above) peaked in the data collected in 2017 following the UNCLOS ruling.

<sup>1311</sup> Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017: 40-41 (05-10-2017-OD).

<sup>1312</sup> 04-09-2019-BD; 12-19-2018-PR; 01-13-2016-BD.

fits. Moreover, desecuritization is promoted in the field of maritime security by focusing exclusively on cooperation instead of addressing existing territorial disputes, especially with ASEAN countries. In terms of the main discursive strands elaborated in the literature review above, the main message connected to the predominance of maritime issues in the military dimension reads: The BRI addresses common maritime security challenges that would otherwise threaten its existence and progress. This involves classical defense and non-traditional cooperation for the sake of reducing security threats for all partners involved and the joint BRI investment projects.

Since several researchers claim that the BRI is, first and foremost, an economic project to moderate domestic and global imbalances, it can be assumed that economic security plays the most important role in Chinese BRI documents.<sup>1313</sup> The focus on commerce and economics in BRI documents has been evinced by the frequency analysis at the beginning of this chapter.<sup>1314</sup> Explaining related signaling requires further background knowledge on domestic drivers and political communication. Concerning domestic imbalances, overcapacity can be identified as a central domestic driver for the BRI in the literature, as it impedes China's economic growth. The BRI is reasoned to solve the issue by opening up new export markets.<sup>1315</sup> According to Li, the issue of solving overcapacity through the BRI would have undermined the credibility of Beijing's BRI promotion as an international public good, which is the reason why it was not stressed publicly.<sup>1316</sup> This assessment is supported by our data, as the challenge of overcapacity is almost entirely absent from the BRI documents. Only a single text passage in the whole document set can be identified in this regard, which is not directly linked to the BRI: In the April 2019 China-EU joint statement, both sides agreed to continue dialogue in the Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity, as steel overcapacity is identified as a "global challenge"<sup>1317</sup>.

In a similar vein, the documents do not explicitly integrate the BRI and development goals of Chinese Western provinces epitomized by the Hu Line.<sup>1318</sup> The BRI documents

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<sup>1313</sup> Li 2020: 173-174; Wang 2019b: 95; Xu and Wang 2019a: 109.

<sup>1314</sup> See Section 6.1.

<sup>1315</sup> Wang 2016: 457.

<sup>1316</sup> Li 2020: 174.

<sup>1317</sup> 04-09-2019-BD.

<sup>1318</sup> Wang 2017: 115-117. See Section 5.2.

refer rather generally to the respective regions, such as Xinjiang<sup>1319</sup>, that are identified as impoverished areas.<sup>1320</sup> In a high-context culture setting, this could be interpreted as a signal for a domestic driver, which is connected to the Reform and Opening up policy launched under Deng Xiaoping in 1978.<sup>1321</sup> The 2019 Progress Report underscores opening up as a pathway for countries to achieve progress resulting in mutual benefit: “The Belt and Road Initiative calls for opening up, which in turn will enable us to achieve both economic growth and balanced development.”<sup>1322</sup>

Domestic economic interests can thus be traced in the BRI documents if one is aware of the high-context communication style enriched by guiding tifa. These economic concerns are not presented in an inward-oriented fashion, because this could bring accusations of sinocentrism. Such accusations could, indeed, undermine official propaganda, as Li argues.<sup>1323</sup> Instead, domestic and international economic interests are merged in a positive outward-oriented wording. Originally, Chinese motives and policies such as opening up are transformed into shared cosmopolitan development interests that serve international public goods under the motto of mutual benefit.

The reframing or exclusion of domestic economic concerns in BRI documents helps to dispel potential enemy perceptions abroad and fosters a desecuritized atmosphere aiming to provide a platform for economic cooperation. This platform builds on the deep-held belief based on China’s historical experiences that economic development fosters security and stability. Consequently, the widening gap between North and South is not only a pressing economic challenge but also a source of insecurity.<sup>1324</sup> ‘Northern’ countries such as Germany or the UK are invited to join the BRI to contribute to easing these economic imbalances together with China as partners in third-party markets.<sup>1325</sup> Third-party market cooperation reduces the risks by sharing them across more stakeholders, as both ‘Northern’ and Chinese investors fear the risks of investing in conflict-prone, un-

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<sup>1319</sup> The BRI documents contain diplomatic reassurances for the One-China policy by Myanmar (08-21-2016-BD) and Afghanistan (05-18-2016-BD) that reaffirm support for China’s stance on Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang.

<sup>1320</sup> 12-22-2020-OD.

<sup>1321</sup> Brown 2018: 213. References to China’s opening up are found in 80 instances in 20 out of 65 BRI documents, which may be interpreted as a common marker for a domestic development rationale.

<sup>1322</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 54 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>1323</sup> Li 2020: 174.

<sup>1324</sup> 01-13-2016-BD.

<sup>1325</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 40 (04-22-2019-OD).

stable countries like Afghanistan, Sebastian Harnisch contends.<sup>1326</sup> This poses the risk that repaying the huge investments needed to bridge the North-South divide will take a long time if they do not fail at all because of the consequences of instability.<sup>1327</sup> These investment concerns are not detailed in the BRI publications, so that a securitization of projects and target countries is avoided. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for economic development, requiring “an even stronger community with a shared future,”<sup>1328</sup> i.e., collaboration along the BRI as underlined in the Joint Statement of the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19. The main message derived for the economic dimension draws on the frequently invoked security-development nexus and can be summarized as follows: The BRI advances economic development in various sectors, be it energy, agriculture, health, or transport infrastructure, which will lead to greater security around the world, as economic backwardness is the main cause of discontent and thus instability. Instead of resorting to securitization and militarization in unstable regions, investments in development provided under the BRI help mitigate risks and pursue common economic interests.

Common interests are also at the forefront of the Chinese signals concerning ecologic security. Similar to the economic dimension, the BRI documents contain statements about the environment in every year under review. Environment-related terminology is so common that it ranks among the top ten most frequently used terms in BRI publications. This suggests that the environment is of significant concern for BRI stakeholders. Looking more closely at the evolution of statements, interest in greening the BRI peaked in 2017 in the wake of the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF.<sup>1329</sup> More than half of the statements directly referring to the environment were made in 2017. Counting the environment-connected terms, the coding of the respective statements resulted in 23 segments for 2015, 22 in 2016, 520 segments in 2017, 110 in 2018, 121 in 2019, and 74 in 2020.<sup>1330</sup> Xi Jinping’s

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<sup>1326</sup> Harnisch 2018: 41-42.

<sup>1327</sup> Wang 2016: 460.

<sup>1328</sup> 06-17-2020-BD.

<sup>1329</sup> Using both upper and lower cases for counting the terms “environment\*”, “ecologic\*”, and “green”.

Although this is a rather incomplete list of terms connected to ecologic security, they cover the most commonly used terms as revealed by the frequency analysis at the beginning of the chapter. It can thus be argued that the frequency of those terms still offers a sufficient metric for trends in this dimension.

<sup>1330</sup> The figure of 570 environmentally-connected segments is reduced slightly if non-ecologic environment references are deleted. For instance, 39 segments referred to the “business environment”, which might be but is not necessarily related to eco-environmental concerns. This again proves the problems of a purely computerized analysis and the need for qualitative investigations.

signatory speech stressing green development at the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF provided a significant impetus for raising this issue on the political agenda.<sup>1331</sup> Accordingly, key documents were published around the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF or in the close aftermath: the Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road<sup>1332</sup>, followed by The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan<sup>1333</sup>. The documents describe multiple challenges in BRI developing countries and emerging economies, such as environmental pollution, ecological degradation, tackling climate change, and nuclear and radiation safety. China's own progress for tackling these issues serves as a positive example in the documents to be shared along the BRI for the purpose of achieving environmental protection and cooperation based on consensus. This should pave the way for the Green Belt and Road within 3-5 years from the inception of the BRI, a milestone China achieved as early as 2019. Noteworthy is the idea of establishing a green-oriented philosophy as an underlying BRI principle, which should foster a mindset for ecological civilization. The ecological civilization integrates eco-environmental measures and goals into all five connectivity areas. Philosophically, this builds on the community of shared destiny, common interest and common responsibility. Enriching these guiding concepts with eco-environmental messages tailoring them to development challenges and the UN SDGs encourages their dissemination among both developing as well as developed countries. Dialogue on eco-environmental themes with the latter, particularly the European states of interest in this study, is signaled to be enhanced at the Euro-Asia Economic Forum. In addition, environmental technology bases are envisioned in Central and Eastern European states, which should energize technology innovation and transfer.<sup>1334</sup> In the same vein as the BRI principles are 'ecologized', the unspoken but omnipresent security-development nexus is expanded with ecologic security by stating that "countries also need a favorable ecological environment in seeking economic and social development"<sup>1335</sup>. The environment and its changing conditions are set as a determining factor for both security and

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<sup>1331</sup> Xi 2017.

<sup>1332</sup> 05-08-2017-OD.

<sup>1333</sup> 05-14-2017-OD\_2.

<sup>1334</sup> Liu and Bennett 2022: 175-176; 05-08-2017-OD; 05-14-2017-OD\_2.

<sup>1335</sup> 05-08-2017-OD.



development: “Climate change has posed real and potential threats to eco-environmental security and economic and social development.”<sup>1336</sup>

Despite these efforts to promote green goals in the BRI, political interest waned the next year and did not regain momentum in the subsequent years, although BRI documents collected showed a slight increase in 2019. This trend seems quite surprising with regard to the official launch of the Green BRI and the institutionalization of the BRI International Green Development Coalition at the 2nd BRF in 2019. While this could be attributed to a selection bias of the BRI documents, the observed signaling, nevertheless, shifts away from this issue casting doubt on the dedication for a Green BRI. Adding to this, the Green BRI itself was only named 18 times<sup>1337</sup> in the whole document corpus leaving the impression of a loose initiative rather than a concerted effort. Such loose and consensual practice corresponds to the general BRI modus operandi and curbs its securitization. Despite the overall high frequency of references to environmental ideas, ecologic security as a concept concentrating on potential harm caused by natural hazards is not stressed in the data at hand. These warnings are, by contrast, issued clearly in the reviewed BRI literature. Wang warns of the “big ecological and environmental risks”<sup>1338</sup> affecting the implementation of the BRI.

Even more explicitly, Huadong Guo outlined the challenge in the February 2018 issue of *Nature*: “Natural hazards are another threat. Belt and Road nations experience about 85% of the world’s major earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, floods, droughts and heat-waves.”<sup>1339</sup> As a consequence, Guo argues, a Digital Belt and Road is needed to manage climate and environmental challenges.<sup>1340</sup> This points to the interconnectedness between ecologic and cyber security for effectively managing security risks within the BRI, for which enhanced cooperation under the BRI is framed as the primary remedy for all participating countries. In the Belt and Road publications, the fragile natural environment of BRI countries is not directly discussed in terms of securing Chinese or third-party investments. Adding the humanitarian dimension, these natural hazards do not only

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<sup>1336</sup> 12-22-2020-OD.

<sup>1337</sup> The Green BRI is only named 14 times in 2017 and only 4 times in 2019 in 4 out of 65 documents (04-22-2019-OD; 05-08-2017-OD; 05-10-2017-OD; 05-14-2017-OD\_2).

<sup>1338</sup> Wang 2016: 6.

<sup>1339</sup> Guo 2018: 26.

<sup>1340</sup> Guo 2018: 26-27.

threaten human lives in affected regions, but also agricultural development and consequently food security. Desecuritization is thus fostered by silencing existential and financial threats originating from the environment. In an optimistic view, this sends a message of investment opportunities for commonly shared goals, whereas potential backlash and risks are largely left out of the equation. Summing up the main message of the ecologic area: BRI addresses environmental threats that impede sustainable development - from natural disasters to man-made pollution and climate change - by promoting a green philosophy in all projects and among all participants.

The impact of environmental catastrophes and change on human life immediately connects to the next security category of human security. Human security as a term appears only one time in the entire corpus in the “China and the World in the New Era” document. The State Council Information Office states:

“We need to establish relevant rules and standards that facilitate technological innovation and development while ensuring the bottom line of human security. We should accommodate the interests of all countries and in particular those of the developing countries. It is unfair to apply the standards and security rules of developed countries or individual countries to all the other countries. It is essential to respect the sovereignty of every country.”<sup>1341</sup>

The quote illustrates that the PRC’s differs in its pursuit of a people-centered human security approach to sustainable development from a “Western” understanding of the concept. It is intrinsically directed towards comprehensive national security indicated in the quote by calls for respect each state’s interests and sovereignty.<sup>1342</sup> As mentioned before, this redefines human beings as referent objects of security to human beings as co-producer of state security.<sup>1343</sup> Accordingly, statements about BRI cooperation in “pursuit of high-standard, people-centered and sustainable development”<sup>1344</sup> do not replace the centrality of the state. Quite the opposite, they stress the importance of a state’s capability to provide for its citizens in order to establish a “harmonious society”<sup>1345</sup>. This pervades virtually all policy areas in the BRI documents, be it economy, technology, health just under the COVID-19 pandemic, food, environment, or social security sys-

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<sup>1341</sup> 09-27-2019-PR

<sup>1342</sup> This is similar to what Persaud (2022: 153-154) describes as a controversial co-optation of the human security concept by Japan since the 1970s. Note that “comprehensive national security” is also a distinct concept proposed by Xi Jinping as explained before (Drinhausen and Legarda 2022: 2).

<sup>1343</sup> Persaud: 2022: 147; 153-154; Bandurski, et al. 2021: 53-55; Noesselt 2018a: 143-144.

<sup>1344</sup> 06-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1345</sup> See Chapter 5.2 for more details on the concept of harmony.

tems. Rules, norms, and standards for technology, industrial products, infrastructure, transportation, financial cooperation, environmental protection, and so on, are to be developed under and shared across the BRI.<sup>1346</sup>

Such rules, laws, and standards not only play a techno-economic role in implementing the BRI but serve as mediators for human security and, thus, state stability. Possible frictions could arise with the normative governance model of other states if a too forceful approach or simple export of Chinese rules is pursued. The BRI is thus based on an approach combining non-binding policy commitments with consensus-based harmonization of rules and standards. It is planned to “encourage businesses to adopt voluntary measures”<sup>1347</sup> for environment-friendly behavior. The noncommittal approach is further underscored in the joint communique of the leaders’ roundtable of the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF, which declares that “taking into account international standards where applicable, and (...) harmonizing rules and technological standards when necessary”<sup>1348</sup> will maximize synergies in infrastructure projects. These observations support Carey and Ladislaw’s assertion that the Green BRI fosters voluntary guidelines with a preference for shallow multilateralism.<sup>1349</sup> The above-mentioned links to the Paris Agreement tie in with this approach and offer a common reference point for Western and non-Western BRI partners. In terms of green financing, the Western partners – such as Germany and the UK – are involved in the AIIB and other financing mechanisms. The Guiding Principles on Financing the Development of the Belt and Road published at the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF, which was signed by the UK, reiterate the commitment to environmental protection for warranting economic and social development.<sup>1350</sup>

The environment was established as a key determinant of social development and human security as early as 2017 and subsequently lost momentum, whereas the opposite can be observed for health. Health references are present in all documented years, but increase sharply in 2019 and 2020, which can be connected to the COVID-19 pandemic

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<sup>1346</sup> This was already highlighted in the 2015 Vision and Actions, especially concerning the five connectivity areas under III. Framework (NDRC 2015).

<sup>1347</sup> 05-08-2017-OD.

<sup>1348</sup> 05-16-2017-OD\_3.

<sup>1349</sup> Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 1-2, 6.

<sup>1350</sup> 05-16-2017-OD\_2.

outbreak.<sup>1351</sup> This indicates that within the human security category, there was a replacement of issues due to an international shock. As the BRI included this cooperation aspect from early on, it was able to adjust to these changing circumstances. New formats such as high-level virtual conferences were held such as the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19<sup>1352</sup> or the High-level Video Conference on Belt and Road International Cooperation: Combating COVID-19 with Solidarity.<sup>1353</sup> Cooperation to combat COVID-19 was ushered at all levels into the BRI – be it bilaterally with France<sup>1354</sup> or multilaterally among the BRICS<sup>1355</sup>. COVID-19 is considered a serious world-wide threat, which puts severe constraints on sustainable development and consequently requires united efforts.<sup>1356</sup> The sheer magnitude of COVID is turning individual health into a systemic stability challenge for all states alike.<sup>1357</sup> Human security, in this view, is less about the individual than about collective humankind, as Bandurski et al explain.<sup>1358</sup> This seamlessly connects to the community of shared destiny, which is transformed to “a community for health for all”<sup>1359</sup>, in which a state’s governance capacities and global health are highly intertwined. This allows us to condense a key message from these very different aspects connected to human security in the collected BRI publications: Human security serves the state, and the state provides for human security. The BRI supports all participating states and organizations in this endeavor with an appropriate framework to initiate flexible cooperation efforts and disseminate high standards, thereby fostering economic and social development in tandem.

The last domain, in which security threats are studied in this section is the cyber domain. An initial quick scan through the document corpus reveals that the attention to

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<sup>1351</sup> The BRI publication set contain the term “health” in 12 segments in 5 documents in 2015, 7 segments in 5 documents in 2016, 19 segments in 7 documents in 2017, 17 segments in 7 documents in 2018, 26 segments in 7 documents in 2019, and 53 segments in 7 documents in 2020. COVID-19 is only discussed in documents from 2020. The term itself is used 89 times in 7 documents of that year (03-17-2020-BD; 12-22-2020-OD; 06-17-2020-BD; 06-18-2020-OD; 08-24-2020-BD; 11-18-2020-OD; 12-10-2020-BD).

<sup>1352</sup> 06-17-2020-BD.

<sup>1353</sup> 06-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1354</sup> 12-10-2020-BD.

<sup>1355</sup> 11-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1356</sup> 06-18-2020-OD; 11-18-2020-OD.

<sup>1357</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 244.

<sup>1358</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 55.

<sup>1359</sup> 06-17-2020-2020. See Section 5.2.

cyber issues increased over time and took a leap forward in 2018.<sup>1360</sup> The chronological progression points to an increasing relevance of the topic. One explanatory factor may be that there was a scandal in 2018 when reports were published about suspected Chinese intelligence penetration at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, which China was involved in building.<sup>1361</sup> This brought international attention to China's involvement in digital infrastructure, which has become increasingly institutionalized in the Digital Belt and Road. The development of new technologies such as 5G or artificial intelligence has gained momentum, which is reflected in the BRI documents.<sup>1362</sup> The increasing prioritization of cyber issues can be attributed to the progressing digitization of infrastructures and the response to concerns through greater cooperative efforts. This is matched by a positive vision in official BRI publications that the BRI will reduce the digital divide between developing and developed countries.<sup>1363</sup> Bridging the gap is a four-dimensional venture that requires connectivity on land, sea, air, and cyber.<sup>1364</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan aims at integrating this four-in-one (四位一体, siwei yiti) connection, which once again emphasizes the strong linkage between domestic and international development goals through the BRI.<sup>1365</sup> Cyberspace plays a unique connecting role between physical-tangible infrastructures and virtual networks. The BRI documents aim to foster cooperation in combating cybercrimes such as cyberattacks, intellectual property theft, and crimes facilitated through cyberspace like drug trafficking, terrorism, corruption, and money laundering.<sup>1366</sup> Hence, the documents imply a wide range of measures when pledging to advance cybersecurity cooperation or combat cybercrime.<sup>1367</sup> Paralleling Dunn Caveltly's definition of cyberspace in security policy, the BRI documents address both cyber security as a value in itself and cyberspace as a tool for achieving security in other policy areas.<sup>1368</sup>

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<sup>1360</sup> By searching for the terms cyber, cybersecurity, digital, DBAR, Digital Belt and Road, Information Silk Road, and digitalization/digitalisation, we find 3 counts in 2015, 1 in 2016, 3 in 2017, 18 in 2018, 22 in 2019, and 28 in 2020, which is a total of 75 keyword uses in 23 documents.

<sup>1361</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 324.

<sup>1362</sup> 04-09-2019BD; 09-27-2019-PR; 12-19-2018-PR.

<sup>1363</sup> 11-18-2020-OD; 08-24-2020-BD; 09-27-2019-PR; 04-22-2019-PR.

<sup>1364</sup> 12-22-2020-OD; 04-22-2019-OD.

<sup>1365</sup> Murphy 2021: 101. See Chapter 5.

<sup>1366</sup> 04-09-2019-BD; 09-27-2019-PR; 01-11-2018-BD; 01-12-2018-BD; 11-212-2018-BD; 03-27-2015-BD; 12-10-2015-BD.

<sup>1367</sup> 04-22-2019-OD; 01-12-2018-BD; 12-10-2015-BD.

<sup>1368</sup> Dunn Caveltly 2019: 411.

In the context of international cyber cooperation, it is noticeable that only the segments that address European partners recall the Charter of the United Nations with regard to responsible state behavior and the protection of intellectual rights.<sup>1369</sup> These segments underline, once again, how the PRC frames messages for different target audiences. Over the years, Beijing expanded its influence in international standardization bodies, leading to the impression of a “geopolitical battle on 5G standards”<sup>1370</sup> between the US, China, and the EU. The analyzed documents yet positively signal that Beijing is willing to collaborate bilaterally and multilaterally in the China-EU Cyber Taskforce. Other mechanisms, such as the China-EU Dialogue on Information Technology, Telecommunications, and Informatization, further aim to deepen cooperation on 5G, jointly tackle risks, and foster technological exchange and cooperation on digital standards. This reinforces the framing of Beijing being a responsible stakeholder and its aspirations to participate in normative decision-making.

While the cyber cooperation and security measures with the EU (hence Germany and the UK before Brexit) are primarily aimed at technological innovation and standardization, the security cooperation with BRI partners from the global South and China’s Asian neighborhood are directed at building infrastructure, combating transnational crimes and countering the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism and extremism.<sup>1371</sup> This communicates an understanding of cyberspace as an instrument of the state to ensure national security. Surveillance and intelligence sharing measures are legitimized both domestically and internationally by constructing terrorism, for example, as a “common enemy of humanity”<sup>1372</sup>. All those facets are integrated into the overarching vision of building “a community with a shared future in cyberspace”<sup>1373</sup>. From this, the main message of this area can be derived: Physical and virtual infrastructures built under the BRI connect distant spaces, open landlocked regions, and allow the eradication of the digital divide. All states are in the same boat and must jointly address insecurities caused by digital underdevelopment as well as transnational cyber risks. The BRI provides a platform for both developing and developed partners to expedite cyber connec-

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<sup>1369</sup> 04-09-2019-BD; 12-19-2018-PR; 01-11-2018-BD.

<sup>1370</sup> Gu et al. 2019: 6.

<sup>1371</sup> 04-22-2019-OD; 03-27-2015-BD; 12-10-2015-BD.

<sup>1372</sup> 03-27-2015-BD: Paragraph 7.

<sup>1373</sup> 09-08-2020-OD; 12-19-2018-PR. This expression is repeated verbatim in both cited documents.

tivity and security. Collaboration and dialogue in all areas of cybersecurity under the BRI, whether virtual, legal-normative or virtual, thus form the global backbone for a digital-security development nexus.

Within the six years under review, the BRI evolved to a global network of thousands of Chinese-led projects. The sheer mass of actors involved makes it ridiculous to speak about the one 'ego' perspective attached to the project, although the central tifa of the BRI allow to identify the guiding policies and overarching vision. These principles rather loosely guide than exactly define the path of the project. They create a recognition value and positive vision for involved actors and leave enough space to maneuver BRI projects in different theatres on the ground. This creates the impression that every foreign Chinese project is a BRI project, which makes it hard to define the boundaries of the initiative. The initiative is omnipresent at all government level and involves banks, companies, civil societies and research institutions, which are amalgamated by new institutions such as the AIIB. Its framework yet leaves enough room to adapt the BRI to the needs and demands from within and abroad, which is most visible in upgrading it to a more sustainable BRI 2.0. The evolution and adaption of the BRI points to central security challenges, most importantly the stark development divide within China itself in a domestic perspective and between developing countries and developed countries in a global perspective. The analysis of the documents indicates that an alarmist tone, as a driver of securitization, is deliberately avoided, which points to the challenge of interpreting securitization in different communication settings. Even without an alarmist tone, security issues and concerns are visible in the Chinese BRI documents. Development gaps enclose grave security challenges, as it breeds discontent hence political instability. Connectivity is implicitly framed as the silver bullet for insecurity. Therefore, the BRI documents focus on messaging the promise that the BRI tackles security issues.

The downside of greater connectivity is left out of official BRI documents. In a cultural-communicative perspective, this pattern can be related to the Chinese tendency to avoid direct negative criticism and open disagreement.<sup>1374</sup> Desecuritization is mainly fostered by depoliticization. This involves the silencing of certain risks challenging BRI projects

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<sup>1374</sup> Meyer 2014: 246-247.

or those created by the BRI.<sup>1375</sup> Although the documents report certain regional turbulences<sup>1376</sup>, avoiding too explicit descriptions of these challenges helps to build a positive cooperation invitation. Beijing yet largely relies on local security forces to protect investments and its own labor force. These security interests are reinforced by an expanding BRI, which is hardly reflected in the analyzed documents.<sup>1377</sup> Avoiding these considerations promotes an outward-oriented impression of the BRI and underpins the principle of non-interference in the political affairs of other countries.<sup>1378</sup>

Sidelining risks created by the BRI nurtures a benevolent projection of China's international engagement in line with Xi's doctrine to tell the Chinese story well.<sup>1379</sup> But just as many remedies also have toxic ingredients, the silver bullet of connectivity carries a risk of harm. Opening formerly landlocked areas fosters development, but as the example of Xinjiang demonstrates, it may also feed separatist unrest instead of healing it. The Karakoram Highway, opened in 1979, between Kashgar in Xinjiang and Pakistan, created new trade routes between Pakistani and Uyghur traders. This route is now suspected of forming connections between separatist movements in China and Pakistani extremist groups.<sup>1380</sup> These experiences feed into the security coordination offers found in the BRI documents, e.g., in the fight against terrorism or border control issues.<sup>1381</sup> Korosteleva and Petrova claim that Beijing initiated the BRI to manage growing uncertainty, fragmentation, and dwindling control over the internal and external environment.<sup>1382</sup> However, the BRI could also fuel rather than resolve these insecurities. This highlights the political impetus for holistic security as a guiding concept that is introduced by key words such as non-traditional security or sustainable security in the BRI documents. Both buzzwords offer invitations for security cooperation under the BRI following the logic of a security-development nexus. Although these terms appear demilitarized at first glance, they imply a state-centric approach to establish national security and including military cooperation. The BRI documents confirm this, for example,

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<sup>1375</sup> Hansen 2012: 544-545.

<sup>1376</sup> 01-13-2016-BD.

<sup>1377</sup> Ferguson 2020: 64.

<sup>1378</sup> Gloria 2021: 501. See Section 5.2. for more on the BRI principles that align with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

<sup>1379</sup> Chan and Song 2020: 424.

<sup>1380</sup> Brewster 2017: 284-285.

<sup>1381</sup> Holzer 2020: 190-191.

<sup>1382</sup> Korosteleva and Petrova 2020: 431.



by calling for enhanced law enforcement or by the positive framing of the PLA.<sup>1383</sup> Following Ferguson's argument, these invitations for security cooperation have the potential to trigger spiraling security dilemmas, risk heightened military competition and securitization of traditionally non-military realms such as the environment.<sup>1384</sup> Analyzing the receiver side is, therefore, necessary to decipher the effects of Chinese signals and to explore the opportunities and limits of BRI cooperation. This shifts attention the following analysis of Germany and the United Kingdom, which will demonstrate whether or not they respond to China's security concepts and interests.

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<sup>1383</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 53-55; Ghiselli 2018: 616-617. See Section 6.2. for more details.

<sup>1384</sup> Ferguson 2020: 59.

### **Part III: Silk Road Securitization from Germany to UK and China**

Germany and the United Kingdom each have their distinct special relations to China, that guide their reactions and interests in the BRI. As the previous part revealed, both countries are targets of the BRI, although neither Germany nor the UK have signed a MoU and are showing no willingness to do so. Nevertheless, both are working with Chinese actors in BRI projects below the governmental level. Both Germany and the UK have hybrid roles in the BRI: they are targeted with transportation or energy projects on their own soil and serve as cooperation partners in international organizations and third-party markets. These projects require high levels of trust because they involve the knowledge-transfer, sharing of sensitive engineering information and critical infrastructures. The extent to what the BRI is perceived as a security issue may impact day-to-day project implementation on the ground. Involved actors are continuously asked to interpret and respond to each other's security concerns within an every-changing geopolitical climate. If one does not listen to, understand and respond what his counterpart signals, small-scale projects are as doomed to fail as international political relations in general. As parliaments are the primary forum for democratically elected elites to exchange views, hence listen and respond, parliamentary publications provide a formidable basis for studying BRI perceptions in Germany and the UK. As justified in the methods section these are complemented by releases from the government in order to provide additional context, corroborate findings from the parliamentary documents and gain insights into government strategies.<sup>1385</sup>

In accordance with Schreier's methodological guidance, the analysis will initially focus on identifying general patterns within the individual country cases. We will start to analyze the development of the German statements from 2015 to 2020 (Chapters 7), before shifting to the UK's debate (Chapter 8). Delving into specific country cases allows for a disaggregated, nuanced understanding of unique contextual factors and intricacies that may affect the securitization process. This will facilitate the cross-country comparison of securitization degrees within and between the categories (Chapter 9) and the three security discourse lines (Chapter 10), which will include Chinese signals as well. Transitioning to a more aggregated cross-country perspective enables the identification of

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<sup>1385</sup> As explained in Chapter 4.

commonalities, differences, and trends across diverse contexts.<sup>1386</sup> Such a two-step approach fosters a thorough exploration of securitization processes, offering both depth and breadth to the study. Utilizing a deductive-inductive qualitative content analysis, the extended categories of Daase’s issue dimension facilitate the study of broad trends. Adding a bottom-up view, the issues transcending the borders of the categories are identified. Arguments for or against the BRI are traced, which will demonstrate cooperation opportunities and limits of China’s international engagement. Their contents and co-occurrence hold more specific information on how the BRI discourses shifted and enable cross-country comparisons. This approach traces the evolution or absence of securitization both in quantity and quality.

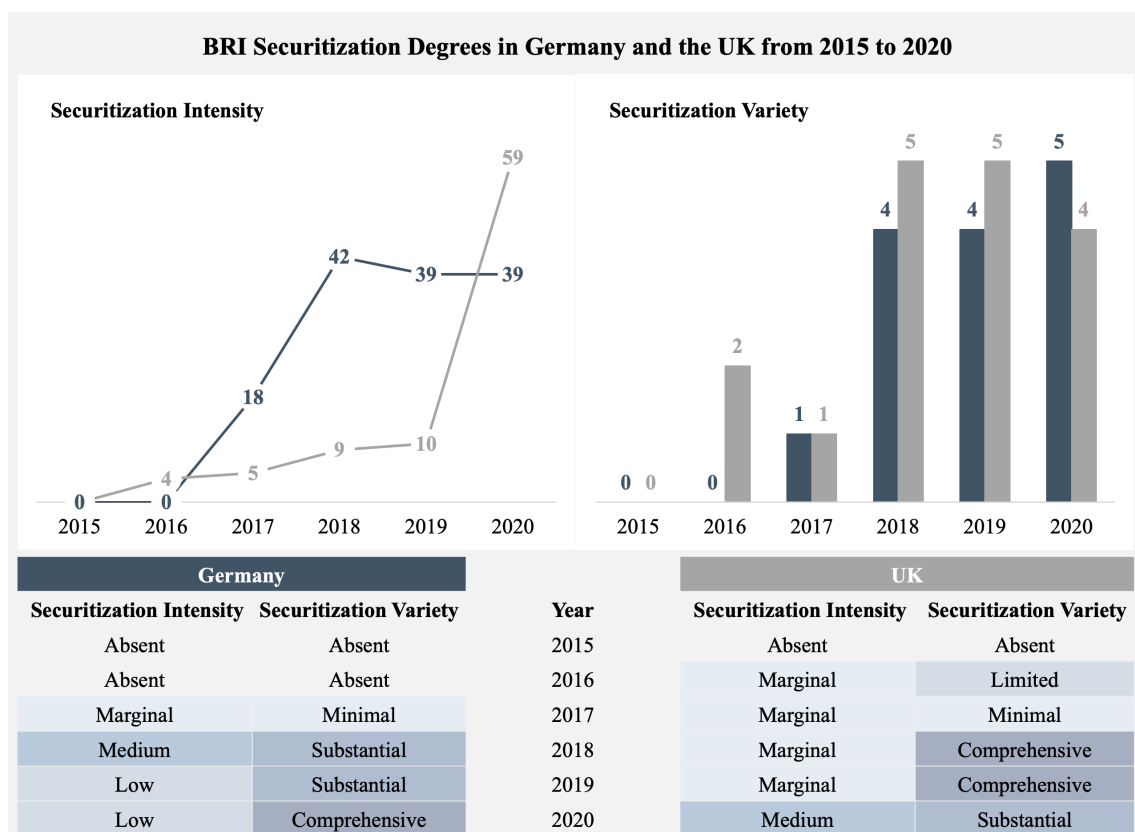


Figure 6: BRI Securitization Degrees in Germany and the UK from 2015 to 2020.

Source: Own Illustration.

Before jumping into the analysis, a brief overview of the major trends shall be provided based on the final metrics derived by the coding, as presented in the tables of Appendix 6 and Figure 6. Upon initial observation of the coding data, it is clear that the UK had a

<sup>1386</sup> Schreier 2012: 1.

much more extensive discussion on the national level compared to Germany throughout the entire observation period. The total number of coded segments for the UK was 816, which is one-third higher than Germany's total of 605 segments across all sentiments. This difference is also evident in the upcoming country analysis chapters' lengths. These subsequent chapters reveal a shared pattern in both countries, marked by a subdued national-level discourse during the initial three years following the formal introduction of the BRI in 2015. While Germany exhibited minimal discussion at the national level, both within parliament and on government websites, the UK demonstrated notably higher activity. With over four times as many publications collected for the UK compared to Germany during this period, there appears to be limited parliamentary attention to the BRI as a foreign policy issue in Berlin. Despite this, both nations predominantly presented desecuritized perspectives on the BRI in its early phase. The UK even exhibited predominantly positive views on the BRI, a sentiment aligning with the overarching declaration of residing in a 'Golden Era' of relations with China.

These patterns shifted in both countries in 2018 when the BRI discourse gained momentum. This year, the number of documents that contained remarks by the national-level political elites soared, so did the number of negative statements on the BRI. In Germany, the negative statements exceeded positive and neutral remarks in absolute numbers, but not in relative terms making up 42 percent of the coded segments. This is, nevertheless, the highest intensity measured for Berlin in the whole observation period. This moderate intensity of securitization does not yet cover the full spectrum of securitization with four out of five security categories being addressed. In the UK, the number of negative statements rose on a much smaller scale making up less than 10 percent of all coded segments, whereas the number of collected documents peaked this year. However, these skeptic remarks can be categorized into all five security categories. Accordingly, the BRI discourse in the UK in 2018 features a comprehensive coverage of security areas but marginal intensity of securitization.

In the following year, Germany witnessed a peak in the total number of documents featuring speech acts on the BRI, while in the UK, the total number of BRI statements reached its zenith despite a smaller overall number of publications. The year 2019 can hence be called the year of ascending national-level attention. In both countries, state-

ments featuring a neutral, balanced tone had been most salient and demonstrated some shared themes, such as frequent allusions to international norms and standards. Despite containing over twice as many negative statements, the German BRI reports continue to overlook the cyber security category, as was the case in previous years. This indicates a discourse gap on the security links between the digital sphere and the BRI in Germany, whereas in the UK, this issue received slightly more attention. Correspondingly, the UK exhibited comprehensive securitization in this year, which then decreased by one degree – losing environmental security – to substantial securitization in the ensuing year, 2020. This year saw a significant decrease in the attention given by the British national political elite to the BRI. To illustrate this point: while British publications had 375 segments coded with a negative tone for the BRI in 2019, this number dropped to only 22 in 2020. For the first time, negative remarks prevailed in the UK's discourse, indicating persistent security concerns. This decline might seem linked to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering that the discourse in Germany also experienced a decrease, albeit not as pronounced (from 253 tone-coded segments in 2019 to 188 in 2020), the pandemic should not be overestimated as the sole factor. The collective yet disparate decrease in attention and the concurrent erosion of positive perceptions point to varying trajectories among countries. In the latest year of observation Germany saw its most comprehensive securitization, with all five security categories documented. Ultimately, both countries display conspicuous and thematically diverse security concerns that never escalated to the highest intensity during the period of observation. As this should only provide a rough overview of the main trends, the following chapters contain more details and numbers to evince these patterns.

## 7. Germany: From Sleepwalking to Talking?

Examining the 152 documents amassed in Germany, a range of document types, involved actors, and political stances toward the BRI become evident. The trajectory of the deliberations among German and British political elites' regarding the BRI can be delineated into the same four distinct phases. These heuristic phases offer a suitable foundation for the subsequent cross-country comparative analysis with the UK. The first phase summarizes the years 2015 to 2017. In the initial three years under scrutiny, the German discussion surrounding the BRI remained relatively inactive.<sup>1387</sup> For each year, only four documents have been collected, demonstrating little attention from national-level political stakeholders. In comparison, the British dataset encompasses over four times the number of documents for the same period, totaling 53, indicating a significantly higher level of awareness regarding the BRI and its ramifications. No negative remark was found on the BRI in the collected documents from 2015 and 2016. Accordingly, the political discourse can be characterized by desecuritization in the form of absent securitization in both years. In 2017, a slight shift was noticeable when, for the first time, two negative remarks appeared in the economic security category. Still, the discourse can be described as non-securitized, displaying minimal securitization variety and marginal intensity. In these three first years under review, neutral statements dominated the debate, demanding a thorough review of the utterances to identify the topics that emerged in the first three years and gained or lost traction in subsequent talks.

2018 marked a turning point in Berlin. Political attention surged, with the number of BRI documents released jumping from four in 2017 to 29 in 2018. The shift can be attributed to internal and external factors. Internal factors include the changing configuration of the German Bundestag after the 2017 national elections. External factors include incoming reports from abroad about backlash on the BRI and repressive actions towards the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, gaining further momentum in 2019. The changing dynamics in Berlin have resulted in a significant uptick in securitized statements, with four out of five security categories being addressed in 2018 and 2019; the debate demonstrates substantial securitization across various policy areas. Only the topic of cybersecurity did not enter the discussion until 2020. While 2019 saw a ballooning number of documents

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<sup>1387</sup> See Appendix 6 for all figures.

(68 in total) and statements related to the BRI in Berlin's national-level debate, the 2018 debate was, in relative terms, slightly more pessimistic, with 42 percent (43 in total) negative utterances compared to 39 percent (99 in total). Correspondingly, 2018 is the year with the highest yet overall medium level of securitization intensity, while the following two years saw a decrease, falling below the benchmark to low intensity.

In all years, the economic security category was responsible for most securitized statements, which peaked in 2018 in relative terms at 48 percent (23 utterances) and culminated in absolute measures in the following year (48 utterances, equating to 44 percent). This was closely followed in 2019 by the human security category, which rose from 11 utterances (23 percent) in 2018 to 46 utterances (43 percent). Particularly regarding the BRI's impact on the European Union, the German publications revealed closely related concerns about market and normative distortions, forming an extensive perception cluster.<sup>1388</sup> These issues were discussed next to Beijing's human rights record in Xinjiang and violent protests in Hong Kong, spurring attention in this policy area, but with a more European emphasis in Berlin compared to London. Largely as a result of these issues, the 2019 sentiments persisted in their deteriorating trajectory from the previous year. This is less visible in the negative statements than in the declining number of positive utterances, whose share in the discourse decreased from 21 percent in 2018 (21 utterances) to only seven percent in 2020 (13 utterances).

This last year under investigation saw two opposing trends. While the German public discourse produced significantly fewer documents (43) than the previous year, code density increased.<sup>1389</sup> The year 2020 demonstrated the highest code density across all sentiments and security categories despite a general flattening curve of negative remarks. Although negative statements did not markedly increase, the combination of eroding positive perceptions and diplomatically articulated criticism indicates growing wariness in Berlin. The impression is further corroborated by a comprehensive level of securitization. This implies that a new concept must be developed within securitization theory to describe such intricate patterns, which will be elaborated in this study as veiled securitization.

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<sup>1388</sup> As highlighted in the Code Map in Appendix 7.

<sup>1389</sup> Code density figures indicate how often codes appear on average per document.

## 7.1. 2015-2017: Sleepwalking Instead of Talking

As previously indicated, the initial phase of observation, spanning from 2015 to 2017 can be characterized as a period of sparse public discussion in Germany. During this phase, only twelve documents have been collected; eight issued by the German parliament and four by the German Federal Foreign Office<sup>1390</sup>. The latter contained the most statements because two of them are speeches by State Secretary Markus Ederer at specialized BRI events in 2016.<sup>1391</sup> The other two Foreign Office documents are related to a regional ambassador conference on ‘Eurasian Connectivity’ and another speech by Ederer at the annual reception of the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations (‘Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft’).<sup>1392</sup> The Federal Foreign Office documents inflated the BRI count of this year more than three times, from 17 segments in parliamentary documents to 62 segments in total.<sup>1393</sup>

Within the German Bundestag, only individual scattered remarks on the BRI are found, whereas the four Foreign Office documents make more sophisticated assessments. Neutrally coded segments rose from meager three (60 percent) utterances in 2015 to 37 (80 percent) in 2016, underscoring the significant impact of the executive’s more focused BRI accounts. In 2017, the figures for neutrally coded statements dropped to seven (64 percent), demonstrating the influence of individual thematically focused papers on the raw numbers with more extensive accounts of the issue. Following a similar curve, the positive statements increased from only two (40 percent) in 2015 to nine (20 percent) before reverting to the original figure of two utterances in 2018 (18 percent). The tone in the documents of these three first years thus leans from neutral to slightly positive.

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<sup>1390</sup> As explained in the methods chapter, the four documents have been included to account for central executive debates that potentially influence parliamentary debates. However, when gathering the data, only these four documents featured the BRI in the title and made qualitative assessments on the project instead of mentioning it only by name without any further remarks (02-02-2016-DEU-AA-EdererOBOR; 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI; 06-28-2017-DEU-AA-EurasischeKonnektivität; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien). This indicates a low-key, reluctant approach by the German government on the BRI.

<sup>1391</sup> 02-02-2016-DEU-AA-EdererOBOR; 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI.

<sup>1392</sup> 06-28-2017-DEU-AA-EurasischeKonnektivität; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien.

<sup>1393</sup> During the entire phase from 2015 to 2017, a total of 17 segments were coded in the eight parliamentary documents. Among these 17 segments 11 had a neutral tone, while six had a positive tone. None of these segments presented a negative assessment of the BRI. Including the documents from the Federal Foreign Office, the total number increases to two negative, 47 neutral and 13 positive segments.



In fact, the only two negative remarks on economic security aspects are recorded in a speech by State Secretary Ederer in 2017.<sup>1394</sup> This corroborates the impression of a predominantly inactive parliamentary discussion in Germany regarding the BRI. Considering the remarkably restricted number of statements, despite Germany's formal elevation of its "comprehensive strategic partnership"<sup>1395</sup> with China in 2014, the BRI discourse within and around the national parliament remains virtually dormant. Likewise, the scant number of just four specialized government documents from the Foreign Office for the whole period under review indicates a sense of reluctance within the executive to engage the BRI publicly. This interpretation is empirically reinforced by the fact that China as a country is frequently discussed in parliamentary and executive forums and regularly visited by high-ranked officials as part of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the countries.

Some of these forums are also included in our database, although the documents did not disclose much about the details of the meetings. For example, the German parliament reported that as early as June 2015, a delegation of members of the National People's Congress visited Berlin and discussed with their German counterparts the "Silk Road Economic Belt".<sup>1396</sup> However, the Sino-German Parliamentary Group did not release any further information on the contents of this meeting. Neither did the meeting spark any political actions or public parliamentary debates. Nevertheless, the report reveals that the German parliamentarians were engaged by Chinese actors in talks about the BRI in its early phase. These aspects related to economic security are only publicly linked to the BRI in subsequent years. On the executive side, the four publications from the Federal Foreign Office indicate that government representatives participated in numerous events such as conferences, symposia, and high-level ambassador meetings debating the BRI and its implications. However, neither the significantly more visible government events nor the parliamentary ones sparked extensive public discourse within the examined elite circles. Having said that, some observations can be drawn from the few existing documents of this period, indicating that the BRI was deliberated from a security perspective.

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<sup>1394</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2.

<sup>1395</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2019: 154.

<sup>1396</sup> 11-05-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs18661: 30.

In a condensed form, some early signs of friction are evident in the Foreign Office's releases in 2016 and 2017. Although these documents lean towards a moderate tone on the BRI, the statements contain central debates that have been elevated on the security agenda in the succeeding years. State Secretary Markus Ederer states to aim for a "sober view"<sup>1397</sup> on the BRI. He distances himself to a certain extent from the critics of the BRI while reporting their concerns in his 2016 speeches, as illustrated with the following quote: "Some even believe, OBOR is a means to create unilateral economic and political dependencies. And the same people would say that 'win-win' for China means that China wins twice."<sup>1398</sup> His words point to two central debates: firstly, the geopolitical implications of the BRI and, secondly, the unequal distribution of profits, which primarily benefits Chinese actors rather than the self-proclaimed mutual gains. In Africa, for example, the question arises as to what extent the Chinese approach of taking over everything from planning to implementation can drive development. According to Ederer, the Chinese approach would not find support in most EU members. He further states that it is legitimate for states like China to pursue their national interests. Still, he also calls for the audience to advocate mutually beneficial cooperation and critical exchange on existing challenges more strongly. Such a critical exchange is needed, for instance, on economic regulations, including conditions of competition or tender, according to the State Secretary. Regarding competition, he finds concerns about the export of Chinese overcapacity, such as steel, at dumping prices. Chinese-sponsored BRI infrastructure projects in Poland or Hungary did not comply with European tender procedures. All BRI projects in the EU, as Ederer demands, need to adhere to European rules, laws, and standards. Environmental protection safeguards, labor standards, and shared technical standards to ensure the interoperability of software and hardware infrastructures are further challenges for BRI cooperation within and outside EU territory.<sup>1399</sup>

In July 2017, Ederer takes a more critical look at the geopolitical challenges and calls on the audience not to be naïve about the economic security implications. In this third and last speech by the State Secretary, he underscores that the BRI offers development prospects for the countries along the way, but at the price of "greater economic dependence

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<sup>1397</sup> 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 3.

<sup>1398</sup> 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 3.

<sup>1399</sup> 02-02-2016-DEU-AA-EdererOBOR: 3; 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 3-4.

and political tribute obligations”<sup>1400</sup>. This would result from the political goal of shifting global power in Beijing’s favor and rejuvenating the Chinese nation to its historical centrality. The economic penetration of central Asia, which China pursues poses a substantial challenge for Russia. Reporting his personal experiences on this issue, Ederer claims to have witnessed a sense of frustration among his Russian interlocutors. They perceive that while China benefits from Russia’s regional security efforts, Moscow does not receive commensurate economic rewards, relegating Russia to a subordinate, junior partner position.<sup>1401</sup> The securitized statements of this 2017 speech thus imply in the area of economic security that the BRI creates security issues realizing a geopolitical power agenda in China’s favor.

In this way, Ederer’s speeches offer an outlook on the key debates surrounding the BRI in Germany. His speeches provide a level of explicitness unmatched by other documents regarding the early observation period’s connection between key security aspects and the BRI. In other documents, such as the annual expert report on economic developments 2017-18, security-related statements on unequal market access and Chinese state subsidies are made, but they do not directly connect these issues to the BRI.<sup>1402</sup> Opposed to this, the State Secretary emphasizes that the BRI could bring business opportunities for Europe if these challenges were managed.<sup>1403</sup> Awareness of the challenges regarding the broader struggle to shape global order is imperative in his eyes to develop cooperation and own European offers. He advises against thinking in terms of “Us or Them”<sup>1404</sup> as false dichotomies that need to be avoided. Ideally - as difficult as it may be - even trilateral models shall be implemented, as Ederer observed in Tajikistan.<sup>1405</sup> By foregrounding critical cooperation instead of defensive or confrontative emergency measures, the BRI’s challenges are desecuritized to some extent. This is reinforced by certain positive statements on the BRI, as the State Secretary agrees and welcomes Beijing’s strongly signals to strive for closer, faster and better connections

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<sup>1400</sup> Own translation. Original: “größerer wirtschaftlicher Abhängigkeit und politischen Tributpflichten” (07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2).

<sup>1401</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2-3.

<sup>1402</sup> 11-21-2017-DEU-BT-BTdrs1980.

<sup>1403</sup> 02-02-2016-DEU-AA-EdererOBOR: 4; 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 5.

<sup>1404</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 5. English used in the original.

<sup>1405</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2-5.

with its trading partners.<sup>1406</sup> To turn this vision into reality, Ederer welcomes the establishment of the Silk Road Fund and the AIIB.<sup>1407</sup> However, neither the State Secretary, nor any other document of this phase assesses Germany's founding membership in the AIIB. This is the one and only time in the German documents, where the AIIB was positively presented in relation to the BRI. Most of the later AIIB statements feature a sober neutral tone, which was markedly more welcomed in the UK as a positive signal for cooperation.<sup>1408</sup>

To what extent the Federal Government processed the BRI and its consequences for the economy in this early phase remains hardly assessable as the following example illustrates: On February 2, 2016, the Federal Foreign Office held a working conference involving EU institutions, official Chinese representatives, business and industry representatives, and other relevant departments to take stock of the implementation of the BRI and provide information on opportunities for the German economy. As per the government's written statement, Kazakhstan serves as a crucial link between China and Europe. This has led the German government to monitor the impact of the BRI after its proclamation in that country. Both the German Federal Government and the EU display keenness to strengthen infrastructure connectivity among China, Kazakhstan and Europe. This cooperation hinges on shared norms and standards, particularly within platforms like the EU's Connectivity Strategy. According to the statement of the government in the 2016 document, German businesses are free to engage in BRI projects, while the administration's responsibility lies in ensuring technically compatible legal frameworks as within international rail transport organizations.<sup>1409</sup> However, more information about the Working Conference or action plans specifically concerning the BRI was not published.

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<sup>1406</sup> 02-02-2016-DEU-AA-EdererOBOR: 2.

<sup>1407</sup> 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 2.

<sup>1408</sup> In fact, the AIIB was mentioned in 69 times in 14 German documents, but only 17 times in direct relation to the BRI. In the 2015 and 2017 documents, the AIIB is absent from the discourse. In 2016, only the two remarks by State Secretary Ederer on the AIIB are found in the dataset. In 2018, there is only one statement by the government that the AIIB evaluates its projects according to international standards (11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195624: 3). Most of the statements are in 2019 (10) and 2020 (5). Most of these later remarks are characterized by a neutral tone (12 out of 17). Nevertheless, these BRI-related AIIB statements highlight the caution among opposition parties and expert observers, whereas the government justifies participation in the AIIB on the grounds that it is a multilateral bank that is well integrated into the international financial architecture (e.g., 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 3; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 29).

<sup>1409</sup> 01-20-2016-DEU-BT-BTPP187336: 5.

In a similar vein, the Foreign Office's report on the June 2017 regional ambassadors' conference on Eurasian connectivity provides scant evaluations of the BRI, much less any action intentions from Berlin. The representatives only declared their willingness to accompany the integration efforts with interest and a critical eye. The BRI is portrayed in a sober manner as a comprehensive Chinese political and economic initiative aimed at enhancing cooperation. Infrastructure investments would bring China closer to Europe and involve economic offers to Central and Eastern European states. The report highlights the German viewpoint, underscoring the significance of preserving free trade and upholding global social and environmental standards. These aspects were addressed much more frequently and almost constantly in connection with the BRI later on and similarly appear in the UK's discourse.<sup>1410</sup>

While these remarks suggest a cautious approach, the primary themes in the early years of the discourse, as reflected in German parliamentary documents, convey a tempered sense of optimism regarding the infrastructural and economic progress facilitated by the BRI. This optimism is notably underscored with respect to Afghanistan, a topic that was occasionally addressed in the whole period under review. As early as 2015, Roderich Kiesewetter, a member of the then-ruling party, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), voiced this hope in a parliamentary debate, advocating for leveraging initiatives like the BRI to facilitate the challenging task of fostering Afghanistan's development.<sup>1411</sup> In the subsequent years, the BRI's potential as a catalyst for Afghanistan's development and stability remains a recurring theme within German parliamentary documents. For instance, the 2018 report by the Federal Government on Germany's Afghanistan engagement highlights infrastructure projects to intensify third-party-market cooperation with China for enhancing stabilization and reconstruction.<sup>1412</sup> A 2018 statement by the Federal Government recognizes China's economic support and investments in Afghanistan as well as the signing of Afghanistan's BRI MoU in 2016.<sup>1413</sup> In 2019, the right-wing opposition party Alternative for Germany (AfD) emphasized China's security interests in its neighboring countries, which were manifested in diplomatically supporting the Afghan peace process and economically through the

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<sup>1410</sup> 06-28-2017-DEU-AA-EurasischeKonnektivität: 1-2.

<sup>1411</sup> 04-23-2015-DEU-BT-BTPP18100: 9570.

<sup>1412</sup> 03-09-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs191120: 18.

<sup>1413</sup> 02-25-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198031: 18.

BRI, counteracting economic reasons for extremism.<sup>1414</sup> In the subsequent year of 2020, the German government welcomed investments in infrastructure and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan by neighboring countries, which also includes China and its BRI.<sup>1415</sup> This discourse strand depicts the BRI as a developmental prospect for Afghanistan. Although this theme can be traced over almost the entire observation period, it remains weakly pronounced and lacks substantive elaboration in the documents. Despite staying superficial, these scattered remarks demonstrate Germany's continuous involvement in Afghanistan, which is focused on stabilization and development objectives, including establishing security institutions such as the police force.<sup>1416</sup> In a broader picture, this view of Afghanistan signifies a noticeable link within the context of the Chinese discourse encompassing the BRI in the security-development nexus. Nonetheless, tangible steps such as executing third-party-market infrastructure projects in Afghanistan failed to materialize. At this point, this indicates a latent skepticism coupled with a low willingness by German actors to engage in the BRI.

Apart from the remarks above made by Ederer in his capacity as a government representative, other documents extracted from the German parliamentary website also highlight the China-Russian relations within the framework of BRI as another key issue. Similar to the Afghanistan-issue, this discourse theme is apparent in the scarce segments of the early discourse years and persists within subsequent German documents. In this Sino-Russian perception cluster, the BRI is depicted as a strategic instrument to enhance China's geopolitical power, potentially acting as a conduit for facilitating economic integration interests between Moscow and Beijing. The role of the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), signed in 2014, is a focal point in this first phase of the German BRI debate. The EEU is much smaller than the BRI, as it features only five member states, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. An official MoU between the EEU and the BRI was signed in May 2015, which elevated the EEU as a critical partner for China despite its limited member base.<sup>1417</sup> Scanning the context of the collected German parliamentary documents, the EEU occupies a much larger

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<sup>1414</sup> 12-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916225: 1.

<sup>1415</sup> 01-08-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916389: 2.

<sup>1416</sup> The German Bundeswehr was deployed in Afghanistan between December 2001 and 2021. Bartscher (2024) and Suchanek (2018) evaluate Germany's state-building engagement in Afghanistan.

<sup>1417</sup> Shakhanova and Garlick 2020: 34-35.

space for discussion than the BRI. As can be inferred from the records, this higher level of attention could be due to the geographical proximity of the EEU member countries and the problematic relationship with Russia, which has been at war in Ukraine since 2014.<sup>1418</sup> This intricate relationship provides a potential explanation for the different emphases on the BRI's influence on the security situation of Germany and the EU. First, the BRI is perceived as a central vehicle for deepening infrastructural and economic integration between China, Moscow and the Eurasian region. Both the EEU and the BRI find common ground in projects that expand trade routes.<sup>1419</sup> This view contrasts the observations by State Secretary Ederer, who underscored the structural complexities inherent in the strategic partnership between Russia and China. According to the State Secretary, Russia frequently finds itself marginalized within the BRI, as evidenced by the tendency of some new transport routes to circumvent the country. This underscores the challenges in fostering cooperation and integration between the BRI and the EEU despite political affirmations and shared interests to modernize infrastructures for economic cooperation.<sup>1420</sup>

Tracing the Russia-China theme in documents issued in subsequent years, both hopes and skepticism is expressed in the German documents. Upgrading infrastructures in Eurasia are described as holding the chance of enhancing economic cooperation for Europe. This view is shared by the German government as revealed in a response to a small inquiry by the Free Democratic Party (FDP) in 2018, in which the German government generally welcomes initiatives that address and meet actual infrastructural needs.<sup>1421</sup> The positive effect of upgrading infrastructures is most prominently pronounced by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly as reported by the German delegation in 2018 and 2019. Both reports highlight that the BRI may foster transport links and cooperation in OSCE countries, which is spearheaded by the Silk Road Support Group within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.<sup>1422</sup> The 2019 OSCE parliamentary declaration even acknowledges that the BRI “is beneficial for the security, stability, and prosperity

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<sup>1418</sup> Consult in particular the overview study by the scientific service of the parliament under the identifier 12-07-2015-DEU-BTdrs187016 and the 2016 document on the Eurasian Economic Perspective under 05-11-2016-DEU-BT-WD03016.

<sup>1419</sup> 12-07-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs187016: 46-47.

<sup>1420</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2-3; 05-11-2016-DEU-BT-WD03016: 15.

<sup>1421</sup> 11-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195477: 4.

<sup>1422</sup> 10-24-2018-ENU-BT-BTdrs195285: 15, 40-41; 10-31-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914664: 10-11.

of OSCE participating countries”<sup>1423</sup> Although the same report warns that the security-related implications arising from the growing influence of China should be monitored, the positive outlook of the BRI on security is strongly pronounced.<sup>1424</sup> As the Russian Federation and some BRI-partner countries in Central Asia are members of the OSCE, this may have positively biased the declarations. Consequently, these statements must be treated with caution and are not representative of German perceptions. While these are not genuinely German positions but rather statements negotiated within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE declarations underscore that some German parliamentarians participated in the discourse that addresses security risks and benefits associated with BRI. This suggests that there have been extensive international debates in parliaments and organizations about the implications of the BRI, while the German parliamentary discussion remained largely dormant up to 2018.

Nevertheless, these statements express concerns about the strengthening of Chinese influence and increasing bloc formation with negative security implications for Germany and other OSCE states. These consist of rather diffuse geopolitical concerns, which, on the one hand, are connected to China’s overall power projection capabilities enhanced through the BRI. On the other hand, these are related to a potential bloc formation between Russia and China intertwining their respective foreign policies under the EEU and BRI and the European Union. In a parliamentary debate on the EU’s eastern partnership, Franz Thönnies from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) called to dovetail the European ideas, the OSCE and the BRI in order to prevent such a bloc formation and new divisions.<sup>1425</sup> His statement represents a minority opinion, as this aspect is scarcely addressed in the overall observation period. On the contrary, the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy is emphasized as a distinct EU framework for the Eurasian region, instead of actively seeking connections to the BRI or pursuing cooperation, as evidenced by a government statement from 2019.<sup>1426</sup> The discourse surrounding the EEU and Russia’s connections to the BRI has been consistently present in parliamentary discourse throughout the study period, both directly and indirectly. Optimistic statements regarding cooperation possibilities and positive effects for the OSCE contrast with

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<sup>1423</sup> 10-31-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914664: 17.

<sup>1424</sup> 10-31-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914664: 12.

<sup>1425</sup> 06-28-2017-ENG-BT-BTPP18242: 24834.

<sup>1426</sup> 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 27.



warnings about the strengthening of China and the potential formation of opposing blocs. Thus, this thematic field reflects both the discourse strand viewing the BRI as a remedy for security concerns and the counter-discourse of the BRI as a source of uncertainties, even in the early phase of limited German parliamentary attention. This theme persists in subsequent phases, albeit with an overall shift in attention toward the latter discourse strand. Nevertheless, this topic largely remains at the surface level of Sino-Russian relations. There is no in-depth exploration regarding Russia's role as a geostrategic gatekeeper for the BRI in post-Soviet states<sup>1427</sup>, which indicates a certain capability gap in geostrategic planning within the German parliamentary arena.

Across the 2015 to 2017 period, the German BRI discourse reflects minimal engagement by the political representatives in the analyzed documents, as evidenced by the dearth of activity in analyzed documents. This reflects a passive stance: It seems as if the German parliamentary representatives are sleepwalking in terms of the BRI. Similarly, on the executive front, the German government does not publish more BRI-specific documents. Only the three speeches focusing on the BRI by State Secretary Ederer provide a sophisticated assessment of the BRI hopes and challenges. As demonstrated in this chapter, early German discourse themes resurface in the subsequent years, with a focus on primary strategic interests such as stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and Russia's foreign policy. Despite their inherent security implication, the early statements refrain from securitizing the BRI, instead adopting a sober, cautious or even mildly optimistic perspective. In summary, the initial years of the BRI witness limited public discourse in Germany, largely devoid of securitization.

## **7.2. 2018: Shifting Gears**

After the first phase featuring a comparably tentative approach, the following years saw a remarkable increase in awareness of the BRI in the German parliamentary arena. This trend is generally mirrored in the UK, which is why each of the following years is analyzed in a specific sub-section. Similar to the previous section, some thematic clusters will be studied across the years for a denser analysis. The number of documents featuring relevant statements jumped from four publications annually between 2015 and 2017 to 29 papers in 2018. Given the further surge in German documents, which the database

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<sup>1427</sup> Heidbrink 2022: 477.

recorded in 2019 with 68 papers and the subsequent reduction to 43 documents in 2020, 2018 appears to represent a significant turning point and can thus be called the year of shifting gears.

This shift can be partly explained by the Bundestag elections that took place in September 2017. In the German elections in 2013, the liberal FDP and right-wing AfD failed to surpass the 5-percent threshold of votes required to be included as a party in the Bundestag but subsequently succeeded in crossing the threshold in late 2017 and 2021.<sup>1428</sup> Both parties have been vocal about the BRI within the parliament, as the documents collected since 2018 indicate. In fact, the FDP has been the most active party of the Bundestag in our dataset to include the BRI in its parliamentary inquiries to the government or parliamentary motions. Our dataset includes 37 documents originating from the FDP (including 14 government responses to its inquiries). 17 documents are related to AfD activity (including 10 government responses). These numbers are remarkable as only three documents are related to the Green party (including one government response and one joint motion), and two joint motions related to the governing Union parties and SPD.<sup>1429</sup>

The higher number of parliamentary inquiries since 2018 on the BRI helps to discern both specific party positions and the executive's attitudes. While the British documents also encompass several written answers, the UK's parliament inquiry mode in this form is far shorter regarding parliamentary questions and government responses. The German inquiries, in comparison, provide far more insights on the respective positions as they are typically introduced with a statement on the inquirer's perspective, which is mirrored in the response documents with an official governmental viewpoint before commencing the questions catalog. Considering that no specific BRI parliamentary debate was held over the whole observation period, these inquiries offer rich insights into German stakeholder's perceptions. However, it should be noted that these inquiries rarely exclusively focused on the BRI. The changing parliamentary composition has thus stimulated the public BRI discourse between German parliamentary representatives and government actors at the national level. This is evidenced by both quantitative and qual-

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<sup>1428</sup> Deutscher Bundestag 2021.

<sup>1429</sup> These counts only refer to the official parliamentary inquiries, motions, and government responses to the inquiries. Not included are activities within the parliamentary debates.

itative measures: The augmented volume of parliamentary documents acquired after the 2017 elections contains a broader spectrum of more frequently voiced security issues. Negative statements surged from 2 (18 percent) in 2017 to 43 (42 percent) in 2018, indicating a medium level of securitization intensity as well as a substantial variety across four out of five security categories. By contrast, the 38 neutral statements identified in 2018 made up 37 percent of tone-coded segments. This is the only year under review, where a higher number of negative statements were recorded in Germany compared to neutral statements, reinforcing the impression of broadly shared wariness regarding the BRI among German stakeholders.

The occurrence of growing wariness coincides with a much more conflict-laden international atmosphere. US President Donald Trump issued tariffs against Chinese products as well as quotas for imports in 2018, which prompted Beijing to impose customs barriers on its own. In the following, the so-called trade war resulted in a tit-for-tat of both great powers targeting each other with ever harsher trade policies and rhetoric. In addition, the United States targeted EU steel and aluminum imports with higher taxes (a 25 percent tax on the former and a 10 percent tax on the latter), which further worsened a hostile international trade climate.<sup>1430</sup> As a European country, of which the US and China are the most important trading partners, Germany was severely affected by the raging trade war. This is one factor sparking more attention to the economic initiatives of its trading partners since the Trump administration politically pressured its European partners to follow the US approach to China in areas such as 5G.<sup>1431</sup> The trade tensions strike at one, if not the central core of German foreign policy. This core is based on a self-image as an international trading power whose preferred modus operandi for promoting stability and security is based on economic cooperation, which is closely linked to the EU both normatively and geo-economically.<sup>1432</sup> Correspondingly, economic security concerns are the most frequently addressed category across all German documents (109 segments in total). Their share was the highest in 2018, with 48 percent of all security-coded statements falling into the economic security realm, a total of 23 utterances. To compare, the second-highest category of human security statements this year totaled

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<sup>1430</sup> Goulard 2020: 56.

<sup>1431</sup> Gu et al. 2019: 7, 47-48.

<sup>1432</sup> Hilz 2017: 148-153.

11 segments (23 percent). Nine statements have been coded for military security (19 percent) and only four for ecological security (8 percent).

This latest category underscores little overall but, over the years, growing concern about the BRI's environmental but even more general normative impact. In 2018, the scattered concerns on ecologic security were identified next to other, more regularly articulated remarks about human and economic security challenges. Two of those four concerns in 2018 about the environment are formulated by the German government, highlighting its commitment to demand from China that the BRI adheres to international norms and standards, including financing, environmental, tendering, and labor standards.<sup>1433</sup> Concerning upholding sustainability standards in BRI projects, the executive states clearly in 2018: "In the view of the Federal Government, this is not yet sufficiently guaranteed."<sup>1434</sup> Over the years, the German government has repeatedly called upon China in similar ways to comply with international rules, including sustainability standards in the environmental, human, and also debt management sense, as will be discussed below. By linking these issues, a thematic cluster of co-occurring human, economic, and ecologic security concerns is formed, as illustrated in the code map in Appendix 7. This cluster on norm compliance features a high degree of thematic consistency over time, as the central deficiencies of the BRI appear in different and sometimes diplomatically neutral formulations but maintain essentially the same priority areas on the list. Listing ecological concerns alongside and even below economic-human-security nexus, reinforces these key pillars of German foreign policy.

The categories of economic security and human security have become increasingly interconnected and refined in relation to perceived security concerns associated with the BRI. From a bird's-eye view, a stronger link between these two categories can be determined on the basis of the code-relations-browser in MAXQDA. The code-relations-browser measures the proximity of codes within the same document. It reveals the interrelationship of codes, which is a useful tool to identify patterns of reasoning, variables and master-narratives.<sup>1435</sup> Applying the codes-relations browser reveals a strong asso-

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<sup>1433</sup> 12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2; 11-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195477: 4.

<sup>1434</sup> Own translation. Original: "Dies ist aus Sicht der Bundesregierung derzeit noch nicht ausreichend gewährleistet." (12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2).

<sup>1435</sup> Kuckartz and Rädiker 2019: 160.

ciation between economic and human security in the German dataset, culminating in 2018.<sup>1436</sup> Following the lines of argumentation of this discursive cluster, China's economic ascent is channeled and propelled through the BRI around the globe. Consequently, human rights violations and authoritarian practices, once regarded as significant domestic issues in the PRC, become internationalized through the BRI, subsequently affecting Germany. On the national level, Germany is affected due to its position as a destination of the BRI. On the international level, due to its membership in international institutions, particularly in the European Union. These perceived multi-level effects are exemplified by the following statement by Michael Brand (member of the CDU). This represents the initial and sole quotation from the 2018 documents that incorporates the multi-level impact on Germany and the liberal international order:

“The human rights violations in Xinjiang have something to do with us here, and they challenge us here. (...) They challenge us here because we have to understand that China is not only concerned with economic dominance, but with a challenge to the liberal Western system. With new dependencies, China is trying to make countries compliant in order to silence critical voices at the international level and in international organizations. The EU also needs a strategy on the ‘New Silk Road’, especially because of its long-term economic and political impact on Europe. China is making repression in its own country a negative perfection in 2018 with new and refined methods.”<sup>1437</sup>

Brand's words stress the interconnection between human rights violations in Xinjiang and aggravated leverage and insecurities resulting from China's growing economic influence. Some insecurities may yet remain concealed due to the potential impact of Chinese economic coercion, following this line of argumentation. This phenomenon aligns with Lene Hansen's concept of the “Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma” introduced in the study's analytical framework.<sup>1438</sup> Such practices constitute an exercise of

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<sup>1436</sup> The code-relations-browser confirms that economic and human security codes are the strongest interconnected categories within the German document collection. In 2018, 27 out of 34 segments (79 percent) of these two categories co-occurred within one paragraph. In 2019, the absolute number almost doubled to 51 out of 93 co-occurring segments (56 percent). In 2020, the co-occurrence of economic and human security segments fell to 34 out of 66 (52 percent). Although the relative count is the highest for 2018, the qualitative judgment became increasingly detailed and critical.

<sup>1437</sup> Own translation. Original: “Die Menschenrechtsverletzungen in Xinjiang haben etwas mit uns hier zu tun, und sie fordern uns hier. (...) Sie fordern uns deswegen hier, weil wir kapieren müssen, dass es China nicht allein um wirtschaftliche Dominanz geht, sondern um eine Herausforderung des freiheitlichen westlichen Systems. Mit neuen Abhängigkeiten versucht China, Länder gefügig zu machen, um auch auf internationaler Ebene und bei internationalen Organisationen kritische Stimmen verstummen zu lassen. Die EU braucht auch eine Strategie beim Thema „Neue Seidenstraße“, vor allem wegen ihrer langfristigen wirtschaftlichen und politischen Auswirkungen auf Europa. China macht mit neuen und verfeinerten Methoden im eigenen Land Repression im Jahr 2018 zu einer Negativ-Perfektion” (11-08-2018-DU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939).

<sup>1438</sup> Hansen 2000: 287. See Section 4.1.

hard power on the global stage and infringe on the principles of fairness, equal treatment, and diplomatic conflict resolution inherent in most international organizations.<sup>1439</sup> Accordingly, the quote conveys the master threat narrative of an ascending China, whose policies, such as the BRI, pose a challenge to the Western liberal system. This impression is reinforced by entrusting the adequate means for managing the perceived threats to the European level. His words encapsulate a commitment in conservative German foreign policy to collaborate with European partners in ensuring peace, freedom, and prosperity, which implicitly heightens the normative distinction from China.<sup>1440</sup> Taking this observation to the next abstraction level, Brand's argument resonates with fundamental tenets of liberal peace theory, which posit that democracies may perceive autocracies as projecting domestic violence onto the international stage, leading to heightened aggression. This aligns with a central component of the dyadic peace concept within democratic peace theory, suggesting that while democracies tend to exhibit peaceful interaction among themselves, they resort to a more confrontational stance towards autocratic regimes. As autocracies are seen as unable to maintain peaceful domestic policies, they are likewise perceived as incapable of diplomatically resolving international conflicts, rendering them a persistent threat to global security.<sup>1441</sup> As shown repeatedly in the upcoming chapters, this quintessential quote underpins a series of allegations narrated in various forms within the economic and human security sphere.

These concerns are exacerbated by a perceived lack of strategy in Germany, which several parliamentarians decry. This discourse strand manifests itself diversely within the examined documents.<sup>1442</sup> Germany is chastised for not forging comparable infrastructure or development initiatives akin to the BRI. This deficiency is feared to adversely affect Germany's foreign policy actions, particularly in African states and other developing states around the globe. Opposition members most strongly but not exclusively demand that the German government fill this strategic void by developing a more proactive foreign policy. For example, Klaus Ernst from the Left Party criticizes the Federal

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<sup>1439</sup> Fels 2017: 132.

<sup>1440</sup> Hilz (2017: 148) underscores that all Federal Governments have demonstrated this strong commitment to the European Union so far, which is thus forming a central pillar of Germany's foreign policy.

<sup>1441</sup> Gu 2018: 124-128; Hasenclever 2010: 224-225; 230.

<sup>1442</sup> This discourse strand is found in over 13 German documents starting in 2018. This does not include implicit allusions to a perceived lack of strategy or overly passive German foreign policy, which are even more numerous because these can also be linked to segments that reveal a wait-and-see attitude toward the BRI.

Government's absence of strategy as "embarrassing,"<sup>1443</sup> comparing it to the comprehensively implemented Silk Road. Ernst restated this observation during a 2019 discussion on German economic development, urging action by the Federal Government as Germany has neither a similar economic initiative nor a response to the BRI.<sup>1444</sup>

Another version of this critique pertains to Germany's perceived lack of direction regarding the BRI on a national and European level, which also leaves a questionable void concerning its own participation within the BRI framework. This coincides with Brand's call for a European strategy mentioned previously. This discourse strand can also be identified in the parliamentary debate on German international development policies in March 2018, which provides several illustrative instances of a perceived strategic vacuum. In the debate, the "Marshall Plan with Africa," an initiative spearheaded by Development Minister Gerd Müller, serves as a focal point for criticism.<sup>1445</sup> Christoph Hoffmann, a representative of the FDP, characterizes the German initiative as mere symbolic politics, underscoring China's steadfast execution of the BRI and the current absence of a European response.<sup>1446</sup> In addition, a quote by Markus Frohnmair, representing the AfD party, illustrates both sides of the coin – lacking effective political initiatives and lacking a BRI response – during the parliamentary debate:

"In 2014, the Chinese President visited the city with Europe's largest inland port, Duisburg. Since then, the city has had a freight train connection with Chongqing, the industrial heart of China and a city of 30 million people. Thus, Duisburg is also a focal point of the ambitious Silk Road project of the Chinese leadership. So, you see, China obviously has an economic development strategy that works. (...) It works in China, it works in Africa,

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<sup>1443</sup> 05-17-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1933: 3141.

<sup>1444</sup> 01-31-2019-ENG-BT-BTPP1977: 8935.

<sup>1445</sup> The so called "Marshall Plan with Africa"-initiative was initiated in January 2017 under the leadership of Development Minister Gerd Müller. The initiative constitutes the overarching framework for German-African development cooperation, which, in a multilateral context, was integrated into the G20 Compact with Africa plan during Germany's G20 presidency. The primary focus was on investments in African enterprises, amounting to up to one billion euros, along with political reform agendas and sustainable, environmentally friendly development. Unlike the BRI, infrastructure projects were not prioritized, and greater emphasis was placed on political programs addressing peace, security, and rule of law reforms (BMZ Division 200 – Africa policy and initiatives 2021: 5, 11.). Similarly, the political aspiration for an equal partnership with African counterparts, as expressed by the German government through the use of "with" rather than "for" Africa, underscores this distinction. Interestingly, the BRI is sometimes called a Chinese version of the Marshall Plan, which was officially rejected by former Foreign Minister Wang Yi due to the geostrategic connotation of the term (Rolland 2019c: 228; Xin and Matheson 2018: 4258-4259; Xu and Wang 2019a: 108). Therefore, this label highlights the disparities in Germany and China's understanding and orientation of international development cooperation.

<sup>1446</sup> 03-21-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1922: 1899.

it works in Europe, and yes, ladies and gentlemen, it works in Duisburg. Your development strategy, Mr. Müller, on the other hand, works nowhere.”<sup>1447</sup>

Frohnmaier concludes his speech with the assertion, “In this case, one can say: Learning from China means learning to win.”<sup>1448</sup> Although this simplified positive assessment of the BRI’s overwhelming success is not reiterated elsewhere in parliamentary discussions on the BRI, it underscores the perception of strategic acumen on China’s part, in contrast to Germany’s perceived lack of strategy. Examining the evidence in the German dataset shows that this perspective gained traction in 2019, with other parliamentary representatives such as the conservative Manfred Grund stating that neither Germany nor the EU have developed concrete measures to approach and even counter the BRI.<sup>1449</sup> Essentially, even those assessments that are neutrally coded but tend to lean towards German or European politics end up reinforcing negative perceptions of their inability to address the risks of the BRI. This contributes to a latent self-other dichotomy, where a perceived strategic China, thought to be solely executing its political objectives with the BRI, is contrasted with a strategically challenged Germany that is seen as struggling to strengthen its own capabilities.

These concerns and the ‘strategic China’ narrative are implicitly linked to (overall weakly pronounced) military-geopolitical considerations, which peaked in 2018 with 9 out of 17 military segments. This can be illustrated by the very first public report that takes a sophisticated look at the BRI in the German dataset, which was published by the Research Services of the Bundestag in October 2018.<sup>1450</sup> The report does not focus ex-

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<sup>1447</sup> Own translation. Original: “Bereits im Jahre 2014 besuchte der chinesische Staatspräsident die Stadt mit dem größten Binnenhafen Europas, Duisburg. Die Stadt hat seitdem eine Güterzugverbindung mit der industriellen Herzkammer Chinas, der 30-Millionen-Menschen-Metropole Chongqing. Damit ist Duisburg auch ein Knotenpunkt des ehrgeizigen Seidenstraßenprojekts der chinesischen Führung. Sie sehen also: China hat offensichtlich eine wirtschaftspolitische Entwicklungsstrategie, die funktioniert. (...) Sie funktioniert in China, sie funktioniert in Afrika, sie funktioniert in Europa und, ja, meine Damen und Herren, sie funktioniert auch in Duisburg. Ihre Entwicklungsstrategie, Herr Müller, funktioniert hingegen nirgendwo” (03-21-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1922: 1904).

<sup>1448</sup> Own translation. Original: “In diesem Fall kann man sagen: Von China lernen heißt siegen lernen” (03-21-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1922: 1905). Initially, the sentence „Learning from the Sowjetunion means learning to win” (“Von der Sowjetunion lernen heißt siegen lernen”) was a 1950s propagandistic parole used in the former German Democratic Republic. The adaption made by Frohnmaier in his Bundestag speech thus indicates a continuation of political thinking in the tradition of pro-communist preferences.

<sup>1449</sup> 09-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19111: 13676.

<sup>1450</sup> Wissenschaftliche Dienste: Sachstand. China und Südostasien. (Scientific service: State of Affairs. China and Southeast Asia) Published on 25.10.2018. (WD-2 - 3000 -097/18. Identifier: 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718.



clusively on the BRI, but examines the current state of affairs on China and Southeast Asia and devotes several subchapters to the initiative. It features 52 coded tone segments, of which 29 negative segments were classified in the security dimensions, making this the key document with the highest code density for 2018.<sup>1451</sup> The report illustrates instances of the interplay between the security dimensions, in particular the economic and military dimensions. Over 60 percent of the coded segments (17 out of 28) in the study pertain to economic considerations, while nearly 30 percent are related to military aspects (8 out of 28).<sup>1452</sup>

Highlighted as a primary concern is the potential for target countries in the region to accumulate excessive debt owed to China, which provides substantial funding for its infrastructure projects. Towards this financial burden and lack of infrastructure, the QUAD, comprising the USA, India, Australia, and Japan, is reported to express significant concern. Economic vulnerability resulting from indebtedness could render these nations susceptible to Beijing's political influence and potentially grants China a military advantage through these new infrastructures. Each of the QUAD nations is found to harbor these and related reservations regarding the BRI, which revolve around their specific spheres of influence in the region, energy security, and the maintenance of free maritime trade. Consequently, the strategic significance of the Strait of Malacca, China's military base in Djibouti, and the Hambantota port project are analyzed by the Research Services for their potential adverse effects on the security interests of these QUAD countries, thereby diminishing their strategic leverage vis-à-vis China amidst Beijing's increasing assertiveness.<sup>1453</sup> This criticized assertiveness is epitomized by the concept of debt trap financing, with the report citing Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Laos, and even Africa (in a general sense) as illustrative examples.<sup>1454</sup>

The case of Laos is noteworthy, as per the report, due to its high-risk situation of potentially entering a debt trap through the construction of a railway. In this scenario, China

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<sup>1451</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718.

<sup>1452</sup> Only two segments are coded for the human security category (7 percent), one for the ecologic dimension (4 percent), and zero for the cyber dimension. One segment was not assigned to any of the categories as it did not evaluate negative consequences according to any of the dimensions, but refers to general backlash for the BRI and resistance against the project (10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 23).

<sup>1453</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 16-19. See Chapter 3 for more information on the QUAD.

<sup>1454</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 18-20.

exhibits greater interest in the collateral provided by Laos in the form of mining rights, as opposed to the repayment of loans. This reflects a Resource-for-Infrastructure (RFI) deal that is disproportionately large in relation to Laos' economic capacity. As per the Research Service, the local population has received limited consideration, both in the construction process and regarding compensation for resettlement. This partly attributed to both the Chinese and the Laotian government called a socialist dictatorship.<sup>1455</sup> Similarly, the city of Sihanoukville in Cambodia underscores the interplay between the economic dimension human security, revealing that Chinese investments bypass the local workforce, exacerbating social tensions. These projects primarily serve China's strategic interests, which extend to substantial investments in the political campaigns of Cambodia's China-friendly autocratic government led by Hun Sen. Consequently, Cambodia has evolved into what the report characterizes as a "quasi-colony" of China. This has sparked negative perceptions among Cambodians towards the Chinese indicating limited soft power, as well as significant backlash.<sup>1456</sup>

Without mentioning the great variety of country perceptions toward the BRI, the report concludes that China's expanding economic and political influence faces growing criticism and resistance. Concerns about financial risks perceived as unfair outweigh potential benefits, leading to the downsizing or termination of some BRI projects, particularly in countries with democratic structures such as Malaysia or Myanmar. Autocratic regimes as in Laos or Cambodia are found more risk-taking and cooperating with China.<sup>1457</sup> This implicitly recreates the dichotomy between autocracy and democracy. It implies an Othering of responsible, limited BRI cooperation in democracies and irresponsible, reckless BRI cooperation among autocracies. All of these concerns exhibit both direct and indirect connections to Germany, although they are not explicitly emphasized in the report. Instead, these links are indirectly implied, broadly pertaining to China's significance as a pivotal economic trading partner for Germany and strategic influence of its transatlantic ally, the United States in the region.<sup>1458</sup>

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<sup>1455</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 25-26.

<sup>1456</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 19-20.

<sup>1457</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 27.

<sup>1458</sup> 10-25-2018-ENU-BT-WD09718: 4.

In a broader perspective, the report unveils pivotal discursive currents concerning BRI from the year 2018 onwards. These currents offer a fertile ground for comparative analysis in the following. This again connects to the identified narrative of a strategic China, in which Beijing's long-term political-economic interests are viewed as the main drivers behind the BRI. This discourse strand encompasses, as previously expounded, the resolution of China's reliance on the narrow Strait of Malacca for its energy imports – and the amplification of its political sway in the participating nations, ultimately culminating in an elevated global power position for China.

The 'strategic China' narrative is accompanied by an implicit counter-framing of the win-win-principle as found in German documents, transforming the principle from a notion of mutual benefit to a scenario where China garners dual advantages. Chinese state-owned enterprises are reported to be investors, executors, and even the primary users of BRI infrastructures.<sup>1459</sup> These advantages are perceived to emanate from the loans provided by Chinese banks, the construction conducted by Chinese labor, and, in a broader view, the eventual repayment facilitated through the exchange of critical natural resources. Consequently, the BRI is portrayed as being 'by and for China,' countering the aforementioned official narrative, which asserts that the BRI emanates from China but belongs to the world.<sup>1460</sup> In essence, this perspective reframes the 'win-win' principle into a counter-narrative of 'China wins twice', with China emerging as the sole beneficiary of the BRI.<sup>1461</sup>

Associated with this reinterpretation and the 'strategic China' discourse strand is a rhetorical pattern found in the German documents, which is casting doubt on the potential benefits of the BRI. Sticking to the 2018 key document from the scientific service for illustration, the pattern emerges that positive remarks about the upgrading of the infrastructure by the BRI are immediately contrasted in the same or following sentence by

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<sup>1459</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14; 10-12-2018-U-BT-BTPP1956: 6191.

<sup>1460</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 2.

<sup>1461</sup> A 2020 document identifies a direct contradiction to the Chinese win-win perspective. Examining official development assistance (ODA) patterns, the Research Service notes that the principle of mutual benefit is also incorporated in Chinese ODA projects. The idea that ODA projects may also economically benefit the donors is largely frowned upon in Western donor contexts and potentially contributes to the impression that 'China wins twice.' However, as China is not an OECD member, it does not classify financial flows according to the same criteria for ODA as OECD countries. This also adds to the confusion regarding the implausible categorization of BRI engagement into aid, development assistance, and direct investments (10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 4-5, 8, 11).

negative evaluations, which is similar to the aforementioned rejection of Chinese narratives about mutual benefit. The quantitative predominance and qualitative specification of negative statements strengthen the effect of the negative contrast and, with it, the instant relativization of positive accounts. Positive remarks are at times encircled by negative ones, which increases the contrast. Exemplary for this are the following sentences, in which the BRI's benefits are outweighed by financial risks, social costs and ecological impact in Laos:

“In addition to the financial risk, the railway project also has other impacts on Laos. While it undoubtedly represents a significant improvement in infrastructure and thus offers substantial economic and social benefits, it also entails consequences such as landscape and environmental destruction due to construction, as well as, primarily, the expansion of towns and villages along the route. Furthermore, there are concerns about uncontrolled growth in Chinese tourism after the railway becomes operational.”<sup>1462</sup>

This contrasting pattern is prevalent throughout several documents from 2018 onwards, further strengthening the narrative of rejecting the BRI and emphasizing securitization rather than promoting desecuritization through positive remarks.<sup>1463</sup> Similar antithetical juxtapositions occur in government statements that generally acknowledge the benefits of the BRI but then address specific criticisms such as standard-setting and procurement practices. This can be illustrated by the following quotation from December 2018:

“From a development policy perspective, the Chinese ‘New Silk Road’ launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has the potential to promote sustainable development in developing countries. However, in doing so, the interests of recipient countries, sustainable financing conditions, transparent planning and implementation processes, and compliance with international rules (including high sustainability standards) must be safeguarded. According to the German Federal Government, these aspects are currently not sufficiently guaranteed.”<sup>1464</sup>

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<sup>1462</sup> Own translation. Original: “Neben dem finanziellen Risiko hat die Trasse auch andere Auswirkungen auf Laos. Zwar stellt sie unbestreitbar eine große Aufwertung der Infrastruktur dar und bietet entsprechend große wirtschaftliche und soziale Vorteile, doch sind auch Landschafts- und Umweltzerstörung Folgen des Baus sowie vor allem des mit dem Bau verbundenen Anwachsens der Städte und Dörfer an der Strecke. Zudem wird ein unkontrolliertes Anwachsen des Tourismus aus China nach Inbetriebnahme der Eisenbahn befürchtet” (10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 26).

<sup>1463</sup> See for example: 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 10; 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 15; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 2.

<sup>1464</sup> Own translation. Original: “Aus entwicklungspolitischer Sicht kann die 2013 von Präsident Xi Jinping lancierte chinesische ‘Neue Seidenstraße’ (Belt and Road Initiative/BRI) die nachhaltige Entwicklung in Entwicklungsländern befördern. Hierbei müssen aber die Interessen der Empfängerländer, nachhaltige Finanzierungsbedingungen, transparente Planungs- und Implementierungsprozesse und die Beachtung internationaler Regeln (u. a. hohe Nachhaltigkeitsstandards) gewahrt werden. Dies ist aus Sicht der Bundesregierung derzeit noch nicht ausreichend gewährleistet” (12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2).

This approach maintains the diplomatic framework while simultaneously offering criticism, which eventually sponsors securitization. The observed phenomenon of this contrast can be elucidated through a psychological lens, specifically with regard to the primacy and recency effect. Both primacy and recency effects build on cognitive biases and highlight what items of a message are memorized disproportionately more by people. While the primacy effect holds that items of early message are better remembered, the recency effect builds on the most-recent encountered item. These effects have broadly been supported by studies from political psychologists as they are key to providing convincing speeches or written statements.<sup>1465</sup> This underscores that a mere quantitative text analysis can hardly capture the nuances of securitization in political discourse, as it requires a deeper context interpretation along political-diplomatic speech patterns.

Drawing from this observation, the diverse range of themes in the 2018 German documents highlights a more vivid discourse dynamic and amplified reservations among the national-level political elites under study. In addition to the changing parliamentary composition, the political awakening and identified themes might be explained in light of EU-China-related events in 2017 as observed by Harnisch. Hungary blocked a joint EU letter condemning the torture of imprisoned lawyers in China. Later that year, stricter EU controls on foreign direct investment were weakened by a coalition of EU member states, including Greece. Additionally, Greece blocked a joint EU statement on human rights violations in China within the UN framework in June 2017.<sup>1466</sup> Beyond a mere quantitative evaluation emphasizing the securitization level of substantial variety, intriguing discursive patterns have been identified. These include a counter-frame of the win-win principle, an ‘Othering’ tendency between a seemingly aimless Germany and China strategically orchestrating the BRI and a reinforced antithetic rhetoric based on a primacy-recency effect. These patterns validate the value of combining qualitative content and discourse analysis methods. By and large, the 2018 analysis revealed significant ambivalence in German commentaries, evident in appreciation for BRI investments in other countries alongside concerns regarding neglected standards or unfavorable political-economic dependencies, particularly in the EU.

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<sup>1465</sup> Panagopoulos 2011: 80.

<sup>1466</sup> Harnisch 2018: 42-43.

### 7.3. 2019: Ascending Awareness

The 2019 documents indicate a further surging awareness regarding the BRI among national-level political stakeholders in Berlin. This increased attention is manifested in a growing number of BRI-related documents and high qualitative variation in the issues raised. In fact, this year marked the zenith of coded segments in the dataset, with a majority (124 out of 253 segments) being neutrally coded. In comparison, positive statements comprised the most minuscule fraction (30 out of 253 segments). Negative statements more than doubled compared to the previous year (99 out of 253 segments). As these account for only 39 percent of the coded segments, securitization intensity fell to a low degree and remained on this level in 2020. While these statistics signify swelling concerns surrounding the BRI, a comprehensive securitization across all policy areas had yet to occur. The cyber security category remained absent in the studied parliamentary documents despite an escalating debate on 5G in 2019. In addition, the categories of military and environmental security were equally weakly pronounced in Germany in 2019, with 5 (5 percent) and 6 coded utterances (6 percent), respectively. In contrast, the previously identified intricate discourse cluster of economic and human security statements strongly expanded. An almost equal number of economic and human security statements (48 utterances compared to 46) reinforces this impression. As will be explained below, this cluster continues on the previous path to critically observe the impact of the BRI on the EU in terms of feared market distortions and human rights violations in China. These elements connect to broadly shared pillars in Germany's ontological self-image, such as the role as a civilian power that is internationally advocating good governance.<sup>1467</sup>

For examining this salient discursive cluster, an initial spotlight can be placed on German debates about human rights violations, especially in Xinjiang. The debate about human rights violations in Xinjiang culminated in the document collection in 2019, but extended to the following year.<sup>1468</sup> Public hearings of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid were held on May 8, 2019, and November 18,

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<sup>1467</sup> The German political scientist Hanns W. Maull mainly developed the civilian power concept. Maull (2014: 143-144) views the support of 'good governance', a sustainable development orientation, the promotion of human rights and democracy as central directives of Germany's (normative) foreign policy style.

<sup>1468</sup> This does not reflect the complete development and scope of the German parliamentary discussion on Xinjiang as only those documents have been collected and analyzed that are connected to the BRI.

2020, which produced a series of protocols and expert.<sup>1469</sup> In some of these documents, the BRI was raised as a specific policy pursued by Beijing. However, it remains a minor issue in comparison to the overall length of the written testimonies and protocols on the human rights situation in China. Two salient security discourse strands can be identified in the documents on this topic. The first focuses on the effects caused directly or indirectly by the BRI in Xinjiang and other key regions. The second discourse strand follows the previously identified liberal paradigm, which particularly regards Xinjiang as a warning sign that domestic violence could be disseminated through the BRI.

Starting with the 2019 hearing on religious freedom and the human rights situation of religious minorities in China, the former Director of the Mercator Institute for China Studies, Frank N. Pieke, emphasized that there are legitimate government concerns regarding terrorism in China, as the re-education camps had been a response to a terrorist attack in Kunming in 2014. However, these concerns do not justify labeling the entire culture and population of Uyghurs in Xinjiang as the enemy. According to Pieke, the CCP deemed these measures necessary to ensure stability and to secure Xinjiang's development as a regional hub for the BRI. He firmly asserts that such detention practices contravene Chinese national law and breach the UN Convention on Human Rights, of which China is a signatory. This introduces an international dimension to the issue that has implications for Germany.<sup>1470</sup> A security dilemma can be deduced from this statement: The BRI is challenged by security issues such as terrorist attacks, but the measures taken against these issues may themselves create insecurities with regard to human rights. This finds loose correspondence in a small inquiry issued by the right-wing AfD in December 2019. In this inquiry, the AfD contends that the BRI, through economic development in Xinjiang and Afghanistan, has the potential to mitigate the breeding ground for extremism.<sup>1471</sup> This implicitly echoes the Chinese narratives on the three evils as discussed before but remains an isolated positive viewpoint in the collected dataset.

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<sup>1469</sup> The frequency exploration of the word Xinjiang in MAXQDA finds 268 references in 25 documents. 51 instances are found in 4 documents in 2018, 127 instances in 11 documents in 2019, 90 instances in 10 documents in 2020. Almost half of those references (42 percent) are concentrated in three documents that are connected to the two public hearings of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid on May 8, 2019 (05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751) and November 18, 2020 (11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966).

<sup>1470</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 19.

<sup>1471</sup> 12-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916225: 1.

In opposition to this viewpoint are concerns that the BRI is contributing to certain human rights violations in China. However, the documents suggest that this relation cannot be determined unequivocally. During the human rights committee hearing in May 2019, Green representative Kai Gehring inquired about the extent of reliable evidence regarding the use of forced labor in Xinjiang camps. Additionally, he sought clarification on the direct correlation between forced labor, internment, and implementing the BRI in Xinjiang, indicating severe human security concerns. In response to Gehring, Director Pieke states that he could not answer the question as he had no relevant information on it. He further contends that the use of forced labor is not illegal and a common practice in Xinjiang and other provinces in China.<sup>1472</sup> By contrast, Dolkun Isa, president of the World Uyghur Congress, clearly states in his written statement for the committee that the BRI “is a major reason why the Uyghur people have been subjected to such horrific repression”<sup>1473</sup>. In his view, the escalation of tensions in the area correlates with Xinjiang’s strategically important geographic location:

“East Turkistan is the gateway from China to the rest of the world, which all planned BRI infrastructure must go through. The mass arbitrary detention of over 1 million innocent people in internment camps is therefore culmination of China’s attempts to forcibly assimilate the Uyghur people and an attempt to establish complete social control in the region to ensure the success of the BRI. Xi Jinping’s legitimacy and hold on power is linked to the success of the BRI, which the Chinese government is pursuing at all costs.”<sup>1474</sup>

Rather than advocating to abolish the BRI, Isa calls for the responsibility and accountability of BRI partner states and companies. He suggests that potential BRI partners should be insisting on human rights safeguards as a precondition for participating in the initiative.<sup>1475</sup>

In a similar vein, Wenzel Michalski, Director of Human Rights Watch Germany, testified that the BRI, which is designed to foster economic growth, access to resources and trade routes, is a significant factor why the Chinese government has intensified the suppression of Uyghurs.<sup>1476</sup> In Michalski’s written statement from May 2019, this is the only mention of the BRI, which, in turn, deemphasizes the BRI’s significance in this con-

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<sup>1472</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 45.

<sup>1473</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191749: 8.

<sup>1474</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191749: 8-9.

<sup>1475</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191749: 8-9.

<sup>1476</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191752: 4.



text. However, in his statement at the Human Rights Committee in November 2020, Michalski explicitly warns that the human rights issue in China is not merely confined to China but is being exported through the BRI. Especially, the EU risks being divided due to its economic dependencies on China, for which Michalski cites Hungary, Greece, and Poland as examples. In his view, the Chinese foreign conduct and political system would also endanger democracy in Germany, which presents a strong securitization resulting from human security concerns.<sup>1477</sup> These cautions about adverse effects for European countries and particularly for Germany, demand further attention in the following lines, particularly in view of their interconnected nature in 2019 and 2020.

In various documents from 2019 and 2020, the cited and other European BRI countries like Italy or Serbia are referenced in warnings that China is buying political influence through BRI investments.<sup>1478</sup> These practices engender economic disincentives, including opaque tender procedures.<sup>1479</sup> From a broader perspective, these practices and dependencies also produce normative challenges pertaining to the human security dimension. The narrative within the examined German documents unfolds as follows: China offers cooperation to BRI target countries in the form of infrastructure projects and loans. Within the EU, these cooperation proposals tend to undermine established EU tendering procedures. Regardless of whether they are located within EU member states or beyond, BRI projects are said to lack transparency, raising concerns about potential corruption in the awarding of infrastructure contracts to Chinese entities. Eventually, those elites are awarded contracts that are willing to disregard EU tendering regulations and human rights concerns over BRI projects.<sup>1480</sup> These perceived practices contribute to the erosion of the rules-based international order on a global scale. At the European level, such practices exacerbate centrifugal tendencies, fostering disunity within the EU, which is called a “divide and conquer”-strategy.<sup>1481</sup> This cluster of concerns identified in the documents elucidates the argumentative progression within the overarching narrative of China contesting the Western liberal system with the BRI.

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<sup>1477</sup> 1-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9.

<sup>1478</sup> E.g., 01-02-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs196759: 1-2; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751: 15; 05-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910041: 29; 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 6; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 11; 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 8.

<sup>1479</sup> 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 6.

<sup>1480</sup> 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 9; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58.

<sup>1481</sup> 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 9.

A specific area of concern is the China-CEEC, where China could create economic dependencies and exert influence on economic and human rights decisions of these countries and on the EU, to which some of them belong.<sup>1482</sup> As Ulrich Delius, Director of the Society for Threatened People, argues, China is purchasing influence and voting power within the EU through the BRI. The lack of a common European strategy has allowed China to play EU member states against each other, eroding the EU's democratic values.<sup>1483</sup> In the same direction argues Kelsang Gyaltzen, the former Special Envoy of the 14th Dalai Lama, who is convinced that Chinese investments in the port of Piraeus are directly linked to Greece blocking a joint EU statement at the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2017.<sup>1484</sup> This is in line with the previously outlined EU context, which includes Hungary, Greece, and Croatia jointly blocking a unified EU call to China aimed at urging Beijing to adhere to the UNCLOS ruling in 2016 and other instances of disunity in 2017. Such instances are used in argumentative lines to illustrate China's "divide and conquer"-strategy and its influence-buying efforts.<sup>1485</sup>

Tracing these instances in the dataset, another report by the parliamentary research service elucidates that in early 2017, the European Commission terminated its legal proceedings against Hungary. These proceedings were initiated due to concerns about EU law violations regarding the financial sustainability of the BRI-funded Belgrade-Budapest railways and compliance with EU regulations in the contract awarded to China International Railway Cooperation. The initial tender was invalidated, but after another public tender, the Hungarian government later entered into a new contract with Chinese companies. This decision raised renewed concerns among EU member states such as Germany.<sup>1486</sup> This coincides with the Hungarian ambassador's abstention to sign a report by all other 27 out of 28 EU ambassadors to Beijing in April 2018, which criticized the BRI for its detrimental impact on free trade and its provision of an unfair

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<sup>1482</sup> E.g., 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 44; 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 262; 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20424, 20438; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 1-2.

<sup>1483</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751: 15.

<sup>1484</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191748: 16.

<sup>1485</sup> Gurol and Rodríguez 2022: 449. See Section 6.2.2 for more background information on the UNCLOS ruling. This context is, for instance, crucial for interpreting statements related to China's perceived aggressive actions in the South China Sea, as made by the Green Party representative Jürgen Trittin (09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582).

<sup>1486</sup> 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 6; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 9.

advantage to Chinese interest.<sup>1487</sup> While the scientific service points out these concerns over the China-CEEC, it references scholarly findings that the platform has been overestimated both politically and economically.<sup>1488</sup> This assessment has a desecuritizing thrust as it implicitly neglects the urgency and security implications of the platform. However, this desecuritizing remark remains a rather singular position in the papers. BRI target countries, particularly Greece and Hungary, as members of the China-CEEC, are primarily portrayed as the Achilles' heel for the EU's normative unity.

Further following this discourse line, European countries participating in the BRI are perceived as being tempted toward authoritarianism, with the same risk noted for African states. Such a global authoritarian temptation by the Chinese system poses a danger to democracy in Germany, which was likewise noted by Michalski in the public hearing of the Human Rights Committee in 2020.<sup>1489</sup> This danger is intensified by China's two-pronged strategy, as claimed by Markus N. Beeko, Secretary General of Amnesty International Germany in his written statement in Mai 2019. This strategy, ingrained in the BRI, involves silencing international criticism of the PRC's human rights violations and introducing its own human rights norms. In his view, China's reinterpretation of universal human rights as a right to development dilutes UN statutory human rights.<sup>1490</sup> Consequently, Beeko asserts that the German government should intensify its advocacy for the enforcement of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in relation to China and its companies due to the poor record of the BRI:

“Human rights should also play a central role in discussions on the German and European approach to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Previous projects have often failed to adequately involve affected communities and have led to human rights violations, for example through forced evictions and environmental damage.”<sup>1491</sup>

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<sup>1487</sup> Rolland 2019c: 221.

<sup>1488</sup> 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 8.

<sup>1489</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9. Similarly involving securitization, Adrian Zenz, Professor at the European School of Culture and Theology warns the November 2020 Committee that China's domestic human rights record linked to the BRI are for Germany a matter of national security and the future of German freedom (11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 14).

<sup>1490</sup> 06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759: 12.

<sup>1491</sup> Own translation. Original: “Auch in den Diskussionen zum deutschen und europäischen Umgang mit der chinesischen ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ sollten Menschenrechte eine zentrale Rolle spielen. Bisherige Projekte haben oftmals betroffene Gemeinden unzureichend eingebunden und zu Menschenrechtsverletzungen, beispielsweise durch Zwangsvertreibungen und Umweltschäden, geführt” (06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759: 18).

Echoing this sentiment, Eva Pils, Professor at the Faculty of Law, King's College London, contended at the Human Rights Committee in 2020 that the BRI is designed to propagate Beijing's human rights concept. In her view, the Chinese government also promotes this 'right to development' in the UN human rights forums and the AIIB.<sup>1492</sup> To render this alternative human rights narrative internationally acceptable, China utilizes an extensive media strategy along the BRI, as warned by Christian Mihr, Executive Director of Reporters Without Borders.<sup>1493</sup>

In summation, it is evident that China is perceived as increasingly authoritarian in its domestic human rights affairs, as is argued in the cited testimonies not only with regard to Xinjiang but also with regard to Tibet and the protests in Hong Kong breaking out in the summer of 2019. This internal behavior is said to be transferred to Beijing's foreign policy manifesting in the BRI – relating to the liberal IR perspective as identified in the 2018 section. Given the extensive challenges at hand, members of the opposition in the German parliament further contended that neither the EU connectivity strategy nor the Merkel government offered satisfactory solutions, which links back to the lacking strategy narrative.<sup>1494</sup> These observations indicate that the critical statements mentioned in the human security debate, most do not completely reject the BRI. Instead, they seem to advocate for a stronger commitment from Germany to address the BRI's adverse impact on the environment, human rights, and the increased political leverage from the authoritarian Chinese system.

Exploring the more optimistic views expressed on the BRI in 2019, it is notable that positive assessments of the BRI constitute the smallest portion of coded segments in the discourse (12 percent). These assessments point towards much-needed infrastructure investments, development opportunities, and modernization effects in BRI target countries but do not express particular enthusiasm for the projects.<sup>1495</sup> For German companies, the BRI and related connectivity efforts are described as have the potential for

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<sup>1492</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs1917125: 18.

<sup>1493</sup> 06-05-2019-U-BT-ÖA-1935: 18.

<sup>1494</sup> 01-31-2019-ENG-BT-BTPP1977: 8935; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 1-2; 09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582.

<sup>1495</sup> 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 10, 14; 03-28-2019-ENU-BT-WD03919: 5; 01-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs-197307: 5.

participation and opening new export markets.<sup>1496</sup> In a written response in July 2019, the German government asserts that BRI presents opportunities for the German export industry to engage while also acknowledging the concurrent competitive pressures it imposes on the sector.<sup>1497</sup> This underscores a critical monitoring of the BRI, which is further corroborated in the statement surrounding the 2nd BRF in 2019. In his speech at the forum, President Xi Jinping announced to enhance participation opportunities, financial sustainability, and social and environmental standards. In May 2019, State Secretary Claudia Dörr-Voß declared in a written statement that the German government welcomes the PRC's leadership commitment to certain principles and urged for the rapid implementation of the announcements. She further promoted the EU Connectivity Strategy as a positive contribution to the same infrastructural needs that would already offer a sustainable alternative.<sup>1498</sup> This intrinsic self-other dichotomy needs further examination, which is provided in the next section due to the unfolding discourse on the EU initiative in 2020. In a comparable response to an inquiry by the AfD in August 2019, the government acknowledged the potential for China's BRI engagement in Africa to promote sustainable development if Beijing delivers on the promises made.<sup>1499</sup> In a statement to a parliamentary inquiry delivered in October 2019, the executive maintains its approach of critically monitoring the BRI by stating:

“With the expansion of transcontinental infrastructure, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to meet existing investment needs by 2030. However, international standards are rarely applied to the corresponding projects.”<sup>1500</sup>

In these statements, Berlin adeptly balances signaling its stance that “China is and will remain an important partner”<sup>1501</sup> with critical assessments of specific core values. It seems yet to avoid criticizing China for violating norms and standards. Instead, the executive continues to use diplomatic language to underscore the importance of upholding norms and standards or mentions that it is strongly advocating for Beijing to adhere to

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<sup>1496</sup> 03-28-2019-ENU-BT-WD03919: 4; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765: 47; 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 6; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 2.

<sup>1497</sup> 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 6.

<sup>1498</sup> 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765: 46.

<sup>1499</sup> 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 3.

<sup>1500</sup> Own translation. Original: “Mit dem Ausbau transkontinentaler Infrastruktur soll die chinesische „Belt and Road Initiative“ (BRI) einen vorhandenen Investitionsbedarf bis 2030 bedienen. Internationale Standards finden bei den entsprechenden Vorhaben allerdings kaum Anwendung.” (07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471: 3).

<sup>1501</sup> 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 29

international norms and standards. Despite this continuity, the German government appears to be increasingly disillusioned, as optimistic statements about development potential and the PRC's willingness to gear the initiative towards sustainability are regularly contrasted with the BRI's shortcomings.<sup>1502</sup> Keeping in mind the primacy and recency effect outlined before, this framing potentially mitigates or even offsets the positive statement. This discursive pattern persisted and grew in 2020, where the government, in some cases, avoided direct statements on the BRI and instead addressed the EU connectivity strategy as an infrastructure project.

#### **7.4. 2020: Juggling Engagement Amid Rising Securitization**

In the last year of the observation period, the documents reveal a significant degree of consensus between the Federal Government and opposition parties regarding the BRI's shortcomings. However, the executive still adopts a more balanced and diplomatic attitude. Correspondingly, the year 2020 saw a rise in the prevalence of segments with a neutral tone, accounting for 102 segments or 54 percent. This increase can be attributed to a decline in positive statements (13 segments, 7 percent), while negative expressions remained at the same level (73 segments, 39 percent). Along with the erosion in positive perceptions, 2020 indicates a diminishing discourse dynamic. This is reflected in a lower number of documents mentioning BRI compared to the previous year (from 68 to 43) and a similarly reduced number of coded statements (from 253 to 181). While this may be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic redirecting focus away from the BRI, the studied statements also indicate a progressive political shift towards more selective engagement whilst propelling the EU Connectivity Strategy. As discussed in this section, selective engagement in the BRI and non-commitment are accompanied by measured objections against unfulfilled pledges to improve the BRI and reservations in military and cyber domains. For the first time in the observation period, the 2020 German documents illustrate the full extent of securitization across all security dimensions. The most prominent categories are economic and human security, with 36 (44 percent) and 31 (38 percent) segments, respectively. Ecological concerns received slightly more attention in 2020, with 9 segments (11 percent), while military (3 segments, 4 percent) and cyber (2 segments, 2 percent) are almost absent from the debate. However, some in-

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<sup>1502</sup> 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910783: 2; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 3-4.

sightful concerns about national security ramifications are revealed, starting with these latter categories, before delving into the EU Connectivity Strategy discourse.

Both the military and the cyber segments connect to the previously identified ‘strategic China’ narrative, where the BRI is primarily deemed a geopolitical tool of Beijing to advance its interests abroad. All three statements are sourced from reports by the Research Service, with two military references found in an assessment of the current tensions between India and China, and the third from a study on the PRC’s development cooperation efforts.<sup>1503</sup> The Research Service describes India’s resistance to the BRI as reflecting increasing geopolitical tensions with China. This is in response to hegemonic tendencies in Beijing’s regional engagement. BRI projects in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Pakistan are reported to affect India’s vital security interests.<sup>1504</sup> Sri Lanka serves as a common example under the banner of debt-trap diplomacy, which is also highlighted in the other report by the Research Service.<sup>1505</sup> The example pertains to the leasing of the Hambantota port, underscoring that it is discussed as a strategic takeover. This reinforces the widespread economic security alerts regarding the Chinese debt trap policy, masquerading as infrastructure investments. New Delhi, in particular, perceives this as a surrounding of its territory, with Chinese ports and other infrastructure, forming a “String of Pearls”<sup>1506</sup> around India.<sup>1507</sup> Even though this issue has not been widely discussed in Germany, it is also found in a parliamentary debate in 2019, Jürgen Hardt (CDU/CSU) raised concerns about Chinese trade and logistics bases being built as part of the BRI, which pose a specific challenge for India. These installations would provoke India to defend itself using peaceful means, including economic and political strategies. Hardt urged the German parliament to support India, naming it a key partner in

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<sup>1503</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD, 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420.

<sup>1504</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2.

<sup>1505</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 18. Sri Lanka and its port Hambantota is found in 16 documents in the dataset, but these are coded in only four documents in direct reference to the BRI, which demonstrates that this issue plays a minor role for German parliamentary elites (06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD; 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192).

<sup>1506</sup> The String of Pearls is a geopolitical concept referring to a Chinese strategy to encircle India through the development of strategic ports in the Indian Ocean. The term suggests that these facilities build under the BRI create a dangerous string, with each facility representing a “pearl” along a necklace of strategic points around India and securing China’s maritime maneuverability. While not necessarily used for direct military purposes, these BRI projects are thus discussed to serve China’s security goals, including strategic depth, alternative supply routes, energy security, and increased mobility (Prebilič und Jereb, 2022: 2).

<sup>1507</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 18

strengthening the global order.<sup>1508</sup> Even if neither Hardt nor the Research Service are antagonistic to the BRI, their assessment of its tactical benefits potentially spurs the securitization of the project, which even implies Germany's involvement in supporting India as a liked-minded value partner. Furthermore, while the Research Service rejects oversimplified generalizations that present the BRI as a centrally orchestrated plan to pursue hegemony, it still acknowledges the geostrategic intentions behind the BRI.<sup>1509</sup>

Similarly, there is suspicion of political motives behind the development of 5G infrastructure and digital projects along the BRI. While only two segments in two documents are coded on this topic, both emphasize the lack of trust regarding the construction of digital infrastructure under the BRI.<sup>1510</sup> Although these two cyber segments do not appear in close relation to the other military security concerns in the German papers, their emphasis on national security indicates a military-defensive thrust.<sup>1511</sup> According to the Federal Government, Germany is considered an attractive target for state-sponsored cyber-attacks. These activities involve illicit knowledge transfer through cyber espionage, company reconnaissance before partnering with Chinese firms or acquisitions by Chinese stakeholders, and political and economic espionage in BRI countries. Beyond Belt and Road countries, potential vulnerabilities for exploitation by malicious cyber actors are attributed to all countries engaged in negotiations with the PRC for the expansion of 5G networks.<sup>1512</sup> This might be due to the perceived control of Huawei by the CCP, which is cited as a source of distrust.<sup>1513</sup> Still, the Federal Government does not disclose any further details on the official threat assessment but declares that concrete information on cyber defense is strictly classified and can only be accessed by parliamentary stakeholders with security clearance.<sup>1514</sup> This option for parliamentary oversight suggests that some cybersecurity discussions are held behind closed doors, which remains a central obstacle for gauging securitization in this field.

In comparison to the military and cyber dimensions, environmental concerns receive more attention within the German national-level political documents. Notably, concerns

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<sup>1508</sup> 10-24-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19121: 14991-14992.

<sup>1509</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 18.

<sup>1510</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346; 12-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924927.

<sup>1511</sup> As illustrated in the Code Map in Appendix 7.

<sup>1512</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 55.

<sup>1513</sup> 12-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924927: 6

<sup>1514</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 55.



about the BRI's environmental impact have increased over the years, with zero mentions from 2015 to 2017, four in 2018<sup>1515</sup>, six in 2019<sup>1516</sup>, and peaking at nine coded segments in 2020<sup>1517</sup>. Those nine coded segments related to ecologic security in 2020 still indicate that this security category is addressed peripherally. Six out of these nine segments are found in the government's response to the Green Party's key document from 2020, highlighting a consensus between the government and the Greens. They share the view that the BRI is taking an unfavorable path by funding fossil fuel infrastructures, potentially undermining the Paris Agreement and UN SDG sustainability goals. The government emphasizes the negative consequences of insufficient compliance with environmental standards in BRI target countries and calls for increased attention to these issues by the Chinese government. This governmental stance is reiterated in the Indo-Pacific guidelines and in response to a minor inquiry by the FDP, which draws attention to deficiencies in environmental standards in BRI projects in developing nations. Moreover, this position remains consistent over time, as the German government has consistently expressed in previous years that the BRI does not yet meet international sustainability standards.<sup>1518</sup>

Similar to military and cyber concerns, there is a lack of sophisticated assessments regarding the BRI's impact in these respective categories, and most ecological warnings are issued in a generalized manner. In addition, the code-relations-browser reveals that the environmental category correlates with economic and human security codes.<sup>1519</sup> From this, it can be deduced that the BRI's poor sustainability is criticized in all dimensions of the term, financial, ecological, and social, which are viewed as strongly interconnected. The interconnected deficiencies present an opportunity for differentiation and self-promotion, particularly in relation to the EU Connectivity Strategy as a distinct European infrastructure initiative. This undertaking serves as a focal point in the Ger-

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<sup>1515</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718; 11-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195477; 12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328; 12-11-2018-DEU-BT-WD14318.

<sup>1516</sup> 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182; 06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759; 06-27-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19107; 07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192

<sup>1517</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346; 09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222

<sup>1518</sup> 07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471: 3; 12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2.

<sup>1519</sup> Across all years under review, 47 out of 128 segments (37 percent) in the categories of economic and ecological security co-occurred within the same paragraph. In the categories of human and ecological security 37 out of 107 segments (35 percent) were found to co-occur within a single paragraph.

man documents and gains traction parallel to the eroding optimism on the BRI in 2020, as elaborated in the following.

Indications for growing attention concerning the EU Connectivity Strategy are provided by the rising number of references in the dataset. All in all, references to the EU-Connectivity strategy are found in 88 instances across 20 collected German documents. There was only one reference in the strategy's release year, 2018.<sup>1520</sup> The frequency of references experienced a remarkable surge in 2019, with 37 mentions distributed across nine documents.<sup>1521</sup> In 2020, the strategy was mentioned 50 times within ten documents reflecting the unfolding discourse surrounding the EU's connectivity strategy.<sup>1522</sup> The connectivity strategy is consistently associated with positive attributes, which are similar to the 2018 release document by the European Commission, revolving around sustainability, rules-based, and a level-playing field, which pertains to non-discrimination of companies.<sup>1523</sup> The German Federal Government adopts this wording in its contributions to the parliamentary discourse, endorsing the EU Connectivity Strategy as a sustainable and rules-based project.<sup>1524</sup> The strategy is described as enabling the participation of EU companies and transparent tenders. In contrast, in the BRI, chances for European companies are perceived as limited due to a lack of transparency, open tenders, and compliance with international standards. This familiar-sounding list highlights the ongoing continuity of concerns outlined by the German government in an answer to an AfD inquiry on the BRI in February 2020 with reference to a study by the European Chamber of Commerce in China.<sup>1525</sup>

In addition to the economic and normative concerns, the Federal Government confirms the EU Commission's statement that the BRI undermines the Paris Agreement through

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<sup>1520</sup> 11-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195477: 4.

<sup>1521</sup> 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707; 03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182; 05-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910041; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910777; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910783; 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440; 07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471.

<sup>1522</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687; 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164; 06-17-2020-DEU-Adrs191796; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs199681; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346; 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540; 09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254; 10-06-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1923123; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222.

<sup>1523</sup> European Commission 2018: 13.

<sup>1524</sup> 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707: 2; 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 2; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 59; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 7.

<sup>1525</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 2.

investment in coal-fired power plants. This behavior of China, which can be called that of an ‘irresponsible stakeholder’<sup>1526</sup>, is contrasted with the EU Connectivity Strategy, which seeks sustainability in social, financial, and societal terms.<sup>1527</sup> Although these direct negative statements by the government are rare compared to the veiled criticism stated in recommendations to improve the BRI, they reinforce the securitization of the BRI. They shed light on the concerns of the executive branch, which culminate in a clearly formulated rejection of national participation in the BRI within the framework of an MoU.<sup>1528</sup> In this context, it can be observed that the Merkel government, in response to some inquiries from opposition parties about the BRI, avoids making statements about the initiative. Instead of referring to the BRI, the government emphasizes the EU Connectivity Strategy as a genuinely European idea in a positive light.<sup>1529</sup>

A similar approach can be seen in the Indo-Pacific Guidelines released by the German government in September 2020. While these guidelines only offer criticism of the BRI in relation to debt issues and sustainability at three points, they extensively articulate the positive agenda of the EU Connectivity Strategy. The Guidelines outline the EU-Asia connectivity strategy, emphasizing standards, the rule of law, political sovereignty as well as ecological and financial sustainability as central to its partnership-based cooperation approach.<sup>1530</sup> This list of attributes stands diametrically opposed to the numerous concerns voiced by the Federal Government regarding the Chinese project. In this way, even in a statement without directly rejecting the BRI, a stark contrast to the EU Connectivity Strategy is implicitly fostered. This representation follows a pattern of sustainable versus non-sustainable in environmental and financial matters, transparent versus non-transparent, and compliance with international standards versus non-compliance. It creates a self-other dichotomy based on Germany’s positive portrayal as part of the EU and the negative characteristics of China’s BRI as the Other.<sup>1531</sup> Therefore, statements in a neutral or even positive tone following this representation of the BRI and the EU

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<sup>1526</sup> The term was coined by Patrick (2010), among others, who explored how rising powers such as China could be integrated by the US into the international system in a way that supports it, including the established norms and rules, rather than challenging them.

<sup>1527</sup> 06-24-2020 DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 10-11.

<sup>1528</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 3.

<sup>1529</sup> See Question 36 in 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 27.

<sup>1530</sup> 09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254: 27-28.

<sup>1531</sup> Van Dijk 1998: 24; Gaufman 2017: 184.

Connectivity Strategy contribute to this polarization, while the diplomatic habitus is maintained in a sense of veiled securitization.

Still, a friend-foe dichotomy is built, which aims at underscoring an ideal type of social and political unity within the EU. This ideal is framed around a jointly pursued EU strategy that is endangered through the bilateralization of foreign relations under the BRI and the China-CEEC.<sup>1532</sup> Expanding on this observation, any implicit or explicit warnings in the documents against the potential division of the European Union or a perceived strategy of “divide and conquer” under the smokescreen of the BRI is fostering the friend-foe dichotomy.<sup>1533</sup> This interpretation is in line with the study by Rogelja and Tsimonis, who term this form of Othering as the sanctity of European unity. They place this within a securitizing master narrative of the China Threat in European discourses and caution against the resulting oversimplified monolithic view of the EU.<sup>1534</sup> In the last two years under observation, this effect is intensified through the recurring reproduction of these depictions. This is reflected in the terminology calling the EU Connectivity Strategy as an alternative, counterproposal, or counterpart to the BRI, thereby intensifying the process of Othering and contributing to its securitization.<sup>1535</sup> The 2020 report of the Monopolies Commission to the Federal Government underscores verbatim that the EU connectivity strategy is a “counterpart”<sup>1536</sup> to the BRI. It further warns against the competition-distorting effects of the BRI, through which China expands its political and economic influence abroad. This influence is said to manifest in the EU through the acquisition of the Greek port of Piraeus and the China-CEEC framework. These consequences could be alleviated by the Connectivity Strategy, according to the Monopolies Commission, and strengthen the EU’s collective pursuit of shared interests in third countries.<sup>1537</sup>

This creates the impression of competition between the Chinese BRI and the EU Connectivity Strategy, indicating the potential for conflict. While the AfD, for example,

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<sup>1532</sup> Gaufman 2017: 27.

<sup>1533</sup> 09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582; 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20438; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 2.

<sup>1534</sup> Rogelja und Tsimonis 2020: 119-123.

<sup>1535</sup> 03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137: 12, 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 245; 372.

<sup>1536</sup> The independent panel of experts submits its report every two years, which is also disseminated in the Parliament (08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 1).

<sup>1537</sup> 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 250-251; 256; 262, 372.

emphasizes this impression of competition in the statements analyzed, the government seeks to moderate any sense of antagonism.<sup>1538</sup> The Merkel administration stresses that the Connectivity Strategy is generally open to Europe-China cooperation and that it is itself working to expand EU cooperation with China.<sup>1539</sup> Exchange formats in multilateral forums such as the International Working Group on Export Credits are named to underscore these efforts.<sup>1540</sup> An expansion of EU-China cooperation under the framework of the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy was likewise demanded by the FDP in a motion in October 2020.<sup>1541</sup> It is yet striking that these documents do not mention dovetailing the BRI and the Connectivity Strategy, but rather coordination or even cooperation under the EU format, which reinforces the impression of skepticism toward the BRI. In a similar vein, a March 2019 briefing note on the European Union's stance on BRI from the Bundestag's Europe Section indicates that the EU has not yet taken an explicit position. The briefing paper notes that the European Commission itself rejects the view that the EU Connectivity strategy is directly competing with the BRI. Despite all difficulties, the European Commission is reported to aim for harmonizing the initiatives in favor of infrastructure interoperability. While the briefing note seems desecuritizing by the prospect of coordination, it underlines that central EU bodies are reluctant and cautious about active BRI cooperation. Neither the commission nor the president of the European Council participated at the first BRF in May 2017.<sup>1542</sup>

Mirroring this caution, the German government states that it has addressed its concerns about the BRI with the Chinese government in bilateral talks.<sup>1543</sup> Especially the previously outlined concerns on transparency, sustainability, and participation are explicitly cited by the government as why BRI cooperation with China remains limited. Nevertheless, the Federal Government is not rejecting BRI outright. Therefore, its political approach can be interpreted as a combination of selective engagement and non-commitment. Selective engagement is reflected in Germany assuming an observer status within the Cooperation Mechanism of Tax Administrations of the Belt and Road Initia-

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<sup>1538</sup> 03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137: 12.

<sup>1539</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58.

<sup>1540</sup> 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 26.

<sup>1541</sup> 10-06-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1923123: 2.

<sup>1542</sup> 03-22-2019-ENU-BT-WD03219: 1-2.

<sup>1543</sup> 06-24-2020 DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 11. The protocols of these talks not available for the public.

tive (BRITACOM) in 2020.<sup>1544</sup> Moreover, the Federal Foreign Office engages in discussions with representatives of the German economy through the Connectivity Working Group to assess the economic opportunities and risks associated with participating in the BRI and to enhance the involvement of German companies.<sup>1545</sup> The executive emphasizes that it sees participation opportunities for the German export industry in the BRI but that a level playing field still needs to be established.<sup>1546</sup> However, the Federal Government has no official overview of German corporate BRI cooperation or a list of BRI projects in Germany. Moreover, by 2020, no development projects carried out by the German development cooperation implementing organizations on behalf of the German administration had been implemented with the BRI.<sup>1547</sup>

Nevertheless, Germany, as a founding member of the AIIB, is indirectly involved with the BRI, although these institutions are rhetorically clearly set apart from one another in the documents. The Federal Government categorizes the AIIB as a multilateral institution that adheres to international standards. While the AIIB is said to be initiated by the PRC but multilateral, the BRI is described as a national development and security policy project led by the Chinese government.<sup>1548</sup> This separation advances the securitization of the BRI through its direct classification as a security policy instrument, distinct from the AIIB. On the contrary, the participation in the AIIB is desecuritized and legitimized. This supportive government stance is noteworthy in light of Eva Pils' aforementioned warning at the 2020 Human Rights Committee that the AIIB serves as a forum for China to propagate its own human rights understanding.<sup>1549</sup> Against the advice of the US government, Germany bought into the bank as the largest shareholder outside Asia. This gives Germany more weight vis-à-vis China. It allows Berlin to introduce international standards into the AIIB, to foster China's integration into international financial institutions and, on the other hand, to publicly criticize perceived Chinese influence on internal EU coordination processes, according to Sebastian Harnisch.<sup>1550</sup> Taking all together, the German involvement in the AIIB can be viewed as a combina-

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<sup>1544</sup> 01-20-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916620: 2.

<sup>1545</sup> 02-26-2020-ENU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 3.

<sup>1546</sup> 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 6.

<sup>1547</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395 3; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 3.

<sup>1548</sup> 6-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 27; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 2.

<sup>1549</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs1917125.

<sup>1550</sup> Harnisch 2018: 41-43.

tion of selective engagement and non-commitment: According to the German government, no cooperation with the EU connectivity strategy will be sought under the AIIB, which in turn feeds the impression of competition between the BRI and the EU connectivity strategy.<sup>1551</sup> This is in line with Harnisch, who views the establishment of a distinct EU connectivity strategy as a direct consequence of geopolitical and normative conflicts between the Chinese leadership and the EU.<sup>1552</sup>

Parallel to these tensions, the German Federal Government in 2020 appears to be further disillusioned about the BRI's prospects despite the formal recognition of much-needed infrastructure investments and its selective engagement. In its response to the Green parliamentary group's major inquiry in June 2020, the Federal Government highlights the BRI's shortcomings.<sup>1553</sup> Specifically, the disappointment following the second BRF, which the government previously welcomed as an opportunity for improvement<sup>1554</sup>, appears to have fueled the German government's skepticism: "At the second Belt and Road Forum in April 2019, the Chinese government announced its intention to make the BRI more sustainable in the future. So far, the German government has no information on concrete steps to be taken."<sup>1555</sup> This quote suggests the increasing skepticism regarding China's ability to fulfill the welcomed change pledges, which was observed in late 2019, as mentioned in the previous section, seems to have taken hold within the government. Previous cautious hopes for change have been harshly dismissed within the context of systemic rivalry by the opposition, as apparent in a speech by Green politician Jürgen Trittin in September 2020. According to his assessment, China is acting increasingly repressively in domestic politics, from Xinjiang to Hong Kong, and with growing audacity along the BRI and in the South China Sea. Trittin further describes his

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<sup>1551</sup> 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 3.

<sup>1552</sup> Harnisch 2018: 44.

<sup>1553</sup> The document with the identifier 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346 is a response by the German Federal Government (official number 19/20346) to a major inquiry by the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) concerning the way to a joint rules-based and realistic EU-China-policy (inquiry number 19/17687). The inquiry included 100 questions to the Federal Government so that the response document on more than 60 pages includes rich remarks on both the Greens and the governments perceptions of China. The document contains 40 coded sentiment segments (19 negative, 16 neutral, 5 positive). The negative statements are coded in 25 segments out of which eleven refer to economic security, seven to human security, six to ecologic security and one to cyber security revealing a multi-dimensional securitization of the BRI even though the military category is missing.

<sup>1554</sup> 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765: 47.

<sup>1555</sup> Own translation. Original: "Beim zweiten Belt-and-Road-Forum im April 2019 kündigte die chinesische Regierung an, die BRI künftig nachhaltiger gestalten zu wollen. Konkrete Schritte sind bislang der Bundesregierung nicht bekannt" (06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58).

concerns about the world heading towards a battle between the two great powers of the USA and China, which required a new China policy for Europe. With the words “China is not a strategic partner, China is a difficult partner,”<sup>1556</sup> Trittin warns then-Chancellor Merkel of the naivety behind the concept of strategic partnership with China.<sup>1557</sup> This example suggests that growing skepticism seems to cut across party lines, with opposition members expressing an ever-clearer rejection of the BRI by 2020.

To synthesize the key trends of the studied BRI discussion in Germany, a clear shift has become evident. In the initial years of the German discourse, there was remarkable silence regarding the BRI, almost as if the parliamentary elites were sleepwalking through the BRI’s rapid evolution. The year 2018 marked a turning point akin to a wake-up call. While the first three years did not contain a single security code, the number of security codes surged to 48 in 2018, 108 in 2019, and 81 in 2020. In the most recent year, there were fewer negative remarks overall (73 negative statements involving 81 security segments). However, the code density for security categories, which is the number of coded segments relative to the number of documents, was the highest in 2020. This indicates that statements on the BRI have been increasingly accompanied by security concerns, particularly as the optimistic voices have become almost silent.<sup>1558</sup> Despite the absence of a single explanatory factor for this increase and changing attitudes, the German documents reflect some underlying drivers, including the altered composition of the parliament following the late 2017 federal elections, emerging debates on the debt trap, disappointed hopes for change following the 2nd Belt and Road Forum, and evolving discussions on human security issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

Furthermore, 2020 was the only year that encompassed the full variety of securitization policy areas, as the BRI raised concerns across all security categories. Both in this year and in general, the economic and human security categories were the most prominent, signifying the highest level of securitization among German parliamentary elites. Military and ecological aspects played a minor role in the overall BRI debate studied, while cyber security was almost absent. These imbalanced focal points in the discourse corre-

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<sup>1556</sup> 09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582.

<sup>1557</sup> 09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582-21583.

<sup>1558</sup> The code density for security codes in German parliamentary documents was zero between 2015 and 2017, but it jumped to 1.66 for 2018, 1.59 for 2019, and 1.88 for 2020. See Appendix 6.



spond to key ontological security pillars identified by other scholars, such as the self-understanding as a trading power and ‘anchor of stability for the EU’ according to Hilz and good governance promoter in line with the civilian power concept by Maull.<sup>1559</sup> These concepts provide support for understanding the growing self-other dichotomy in relation to the BRI, which is exemplified by the EU’s connectivity strategy as advocated by the government.

Despite the significant number of diplomatically formulated, neutral comments, German parliamentary leaders are carefully evaluating the BRI with increasing skepticism. Some instances of seemingly diplomatic accounts of the weaknesses of the BRI, which have consistently been voiced on the issue of norms and standards, underscore the impression of measured objections and even veiled securitization by the Federal Government.<sup>1560</sup> Over the review period, the government has maintained a diplomatically balanced stance and has shown interest in selective engagement, although this appeared to wane by 2020. This is reflected in the expressed securitized perceptions by the German parliamentary that remained at an average low intensity level. In every year examined, the combined number of neutral and positive statements about the BRI exceeded the number of negative statements. Even in 2018, when the level of securitization reached its peak, it only reached a medium intensity in the reviewed German documents. This is seemingly at odds with the variety of securitization that was the most diverse in 2020, involving all conceptualized policy areas. Coincidentally, there was a noticeable decline in positive sentiments, indicating increased caution and avoidance rather than direct opposition. Reviewing these discourse dynamics, it seems like German national-level political elites progressed from a state of sleepwalking when it comes to the BRI to a more active engagement with the initiative. Nonetheless, a parliamentary debate dedicated solely to the BRI was missing, as were national-level activities to shape or collaborate with the EU connectivity strategy along the BRI before the discussion seemed to lose steam in 2020. Consequently, the national-level German debate lost momentum just as the national-level political elites were on the verge of talking about the BRI.

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<sup>1559</sup> Hilz 2017: 149, 153; Maull 2014: 143-144.

<sup>1560</sup> See Chapter 10.3 for a cross-country interpretation of this neologism.

## 8. BRI Debates in the United Kingdom: The Fool's Golden Era

The document set compiled for the United Kingdom consists of 152 documents issued by both Houses of Parliament and the executive. The repository shows a rising trend of publications from 2015 to 2018 discussing the BRI. Peaking in 2018 with 47 documents, the first three years underscored a comparatively low-key yet accelerating debate, with 13 documents collected in 2015, 14 in 2016, and 26 in 2017.<sup>1561</sup> The data suggests that UK national-level political stakeholders have been more eager to participate in the BRI compared to their German counterparts during the same period. Additionally, during the first three years, there has been a positive outlook on the BRI, with British statements spearheaded by government representatives being predominantly favorable. In 2016, 51 percent of the statements were positive (24 segments), and in 2017, 80 percent (48 segments). Neutral remarks were the second most common sentiment. By contrast, in 2015, no negative statements were found, while only a few were present in 2016 and 2017.<sup>1562</sup> When looking at these numbers, the first year, showed no signs of a securitized discussion. In the following year, there was a slight increase in securitization, but with marginal intensity and limited variety, as only two security policy areas were affected by negative comments. In 2017, the intensity level remained marginal, whereas the variety of securitization decreased to a minimal level, with all three negative statements falling under the category of economic security. Taken together, 2016 and 2017 can be considered as predominantly desecuritized. These first three years under review represent the so-called Golden Era of UK-China relations spilling over to optimism on the BRI.

From 2018 onwards, the national-level discourse in the UK underwent a transformative shift towards skepticism. Positive sentiments decreased substantially, accounting for 37 percent of the total (108 segments), while neutrally formulated statements became more prominent, making up 54 percent (158 segments). Negative remarks saw a slight increase to 9 percent, with 25 statements covering all five security policy areas. This marks a radical change in the UK's discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative, indicating

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<sup>1561</sup> For all coding statistics, see Appendix 6.

<sup>1562</sup> Only two negative statements representing 2 percent in 2016 and three statements representing 5 percent in 2017 have been identified in the British documents.

a stronger emphasis on security concerns, although securitization was not widely embraced by the British elites.

Similar to the previous year, 2019 showed a comprehensive securitization variety, with statements covering all security categories, albeit with minimal intensity in London. These concerns were connected to worries about the escalating situation in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, as well as broader issues regarding China's increasing political influence. Even though the 39 negative statements accounted for only 10 percent of the tone-coded segments, their thematic variety was the highest of all the years under review, involving 54 security-coded aspects and the highest code density. Meanwhile, positive sentiments continued to decline (72 statements constituting 19 percent), with neutral remarks dominating the 2019 dialogue (264 statements, 70 percent). As will be discussed in the following, several statements reveal an underlying helper attitude that corroborates the impression of grave deficits in the BRI's framework. Additionally, there has been increasing focus on alliance issues since 2018, reflecting a transpacific perspective.

By 2020, optimism for the BRI in the UK's national-level political debate seems to have diminished, as no positive statements were identified. Instead, negative remarks dominated for the first time, with only 13 remarks representing 59 percent of all coded statements. On the two securitization scales, this year represents the highest level of medium securitization intensity, which spans four security policy areas representing a substantial variety of securitization. These figures also indicate that the UK's national-level discussion on the BRI has tapered off, which is reflected in the sharp decline from 40 documents in 2019 containing BRI statements to 12 documents in 2020. While a single explanation for this trend cannot be determined, factors such as the absence of re-election of BRI advocates in Westminster after the 2019 general elections, diverted attention due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its relations to Hong Kong, and growing geopolitical reservations help to understand the waning momentum and mounting concerns in the British BRI debate.

### **8.1. 2015-2017: Heralding the Golden Era**

Taking a closer look at the British perception in the official inception year of the BRI, the first thing to notice is an active and positive involvement of the political stakeholders under review than in Germany. In contrast to the three documents collected for

Germany, 13 were found in the British archive. This higher number of documents is due to the fact that the British dataset contains more government reports, joint statements, and speeches, which are circulated among the parliamentary elites in the UK. This weight of government documents can be seen in 2015 when parliamentary debates in the two British Houses of Parliament comprised four documents compared to nine government publications.<sup>1563</sup> The analysis of those documents reveals a considerable consensus between executive and legislative, as both express mainly positive views on the BRI.<sup>1564</sup> Having said that, the discourse remains superficial as the BRI largely appears in individual statements, not in comprehensive debates. Neither a document dedicated to the topic nor a public discussion of the BRI was found in 2015, whereas the UK's leading role in the foundation of the AIIB marks a central milestone of this year.

Concerning the UK's decision to join the AIIB, the government and Members of Parliament (MPs) both from the governing Conservative as well as the oppositional Labour party share an optimistic view. On 2 November 2015, the draft order on the AIIB's immunities was debated in the House of Commons evincing a bipartisan consensus on joining the AIIB as well as strengthening relations between China and the UK.<sup>1565</sup> US concerns over the UK's participation in the AIIB are barely discussed. James Duddridge, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, underlined that the US recognized the AIIB's potential benefits:

“The US was initially sceptical but it would be fair to say that its tone has softened over recent months, particularly after the recent Chinese state visit. The US acknowledged the contribution that this new bank could make. It is very much not a zero-sum arrangement. This will be a beneficial addition to the piece.”<sup>1566</sup>

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<sup>1563</sup> Parliament: 03-24-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol760; 05-28-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol762; 10-29-2015-GBR-HC-PDVol601; 11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015; Government: 11-19-2015-GBR-GO-SP-SajidJavid; 07-15-2015-GBR-GO-PP-ChinaUpdate; 08-12-2015-GBR-GO-A-PhilipHammond; 09-22-2015-GBR-GO-SP-GeorgeOsborne; 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina; 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi; 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-DavidCameron; 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement; 10-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-Chinesestatevisit. Consult appendix 4 and 5 for a complete overview of the collected documents and the document type.

<sup>1564</sup> In 2015, 17 segments were coded positive, four neutral, and zero negative.

<sup>1565</sup> 11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015.

<sup>1566</sup> 11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015: 15 – 5.10pm. Please note that the provided page numbers are according to PDF-version provided for download by the respective websites. The web-version of the debate and other official downloads does not feature page numbers, but are separated by time specifications, which is the reason, why these are added if available in order to transparently and correctly cite these sources.

This way, the softened of US stance on the BRI legitimized the UK's AIIB decisions. Nevertheless, the influence of the US seems rather limited on the UK's political direction, as its position neither on the AIIB nor on the BRI appears in any further documents of this year. Instead, it is repeatedly emphasized that the UK plays a distinctive role as the first major European state to endorse the establishment of the AIIB.<sup>1567</sup> The AIIB is associated with the hope of providing new funding streams for UK companies. The UK, with London as a global financial hub, not only has the benefit but also a responsibility to help integrate China and the AIIB into the global financial system with high standards.<sup>1568</sup> According to former Prime Minister David Cameron, this will channel much-needed infrastructure investment and drive economic growth, ultimately benefiting all countries involved.<sup>1569</sup> The coded statements in the realm of financial integration mirror the role assignment of the UK as analyzed earlier in the Chinese documents, which indicates a convergence of perceptions in the social act of signaling and reacting in the initial phase of the BRI.<sup>1570</sup> In a broader perspective, the statements reveal how British ontological security as core and even superior financial power is strengthened, which constructs a strategic narrative of the UK as China's helper in the AIIB, according to Van Noort and Colley.<sup>1571</sup> Notably, the BRI is directly, however not frequently related to the AIIB in the analyzed statements. Both initiatives are welcomed among the British political elites, whose showed great interest that these funding streams reach their European country. George Kerevan, Scottish National Party (SNP) MP for East Lothian, expressed this interest in an HC debate on the AIIB regulation in November 2015:

“The Chinese Government’s explanation for why they are setting up the new bank ties very much to President Xi’s project of a new silk road to strengthen the infrastructure and transport links between Asia and Europe. That is an excellent idea, but those links must not simply end in Germany; they must also reach the UK. What strategy or vision do the Government have to ensure that the bank plays its part in extending the new silk road to the UK?”<sup>1572</sup>

Similarly, Lord Howell of Guildford, Conservative, commented in a Parliamentary Debate in the House of Lords (HL) on the Queen’s Speech that the BRI will link Asian and

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<sup>1567</sup> 08-12-2015-GBR-GO-A-PhilipHammond: 2; 09-22-2015-GBR-GO-SP-GeorgeOsborne: 5-6; 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement: 4.

<sup>1568</sup> 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2; 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement: 2-4.

<sup>1569</sup> 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-DavidCameron: 3.

<sup>1570</sup> See Chapter 6.1 or the Chinese documents under the identifier 06-29-2015-OD and 05-16-2017-OD.

<sup>1571</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 56.

<sup>1572</sup> 11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015: 6 - 4.39pm.

Western markets. This would bring about a global transformation to which the UK would have to adapt and shape itself in order to guarantee its own living standards and security. Repositioning the UK by supporting the AIIB's foundation is an "excellent move which recognizes the real future, where our interest lies" in Lord Howell of Guildford's opinion.<sup>1573</sup> Lord Howell of Guildford already raised security-related interests in March 2015 in a debate on the EU and Russia. He warns that Russia's President Putin could instrumentalize BRI by to use an eastern back door to evade Western sanctions. Howell's cautionary stance is not directed at the BRI per se but rather its potential repercussions, which is why he advocated for bringing China on board.<sup>1574</sup> This is, nevertheless, the most cautious statement on the BRI's impact in the analyzed British document of 2015.

In 2015, the transformation of global infrastructures through the BRI is primarily perceived as an opportunity for British companies, which the political elites want to support by participating in the AIIB. This is corroborated by then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, who embraced the "huge potential benefits"<sup>1575</sup> for UK companies in the BRI. Prime Minister David Cameron likewise highlights these opportunities as well as the similar development policy thrust of the BRI and the British Northern Powerhouse campaign.<sup>1576</sup> Under the Northern Powerhouse initiative, the British government sought to drive economic development in England's northern cities and reduce regional imbalances with London. After the agenda was launched in 2014, existing projects in the areas of transportation, governance, science, and culture were integrated into it, and new ones were launched.<sup>1577</sup> Parallels can be drawn with the core areas of the BRI, particularly under the policy coordination and infrastructure building of the Five Links. These parallels indicate why these projects are frequently mentioned alongside each other in the UK discourse.<sup>1578</sup> Meanwhile, there is no attempt to dovetail the projects or even subordinate the Northern Powerhouse as a component of the BRI in the analyzed documents. This is confirmed by Zheng, Bouzarovski, Knuth, Panteli,

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<sup>1573</sup> 05-28-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol762: 15 - 12.20pm.

<sup>1574</sup> 03-24-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol760: 8 - 4.21pm.

<sup>1575</sup> 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2.

<sup>1576</sup> 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi: 2.

<sup>1577</sup> Lee 2017: 479-482.

<sup>1578</sup> 09-22-2015-GBR-GO-SP-GeorgeOsborne: 5-6, 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2; 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2, 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi: 2; 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-DavidCameron: 2; 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement: 2.

Schindler, Ward, and Williams that characterize the UK government's attitude toward the BRI as a platform for commercial collaboration, rather than striving for formal forms of collaboration itself.<sup>1579</sup> This is reflected in the cooperation deals that were agreed with Xi Jinping in October 2015 following the first visit by a Chinese president to the UK in over 10 years. These include an MoU between the British satellite telecommunications company Inmarsat and China Transport Telecommunication Information Communication Center worth more than 2 billion pounds for providing satellite service.<sup>1580</sup> This visit by Xi Jinping represents the pinnacle in bilateral relations and marks the beginning of a Golden Era between the two countries. Prime Minister David Cameron warmly welcomes Xi Jinping's visit as a fresh start for Sino-British relations:

“So this visit marks the start of a new era. Some have called it a golden era in relations between Britain and China, an era of stronger economic ties, deeper trade links, closer relations between our peoples and meaningful dialogue on the issues that matter to us both.”<sup>1581</sup>

With this, London makes a 180-degree turn compared to the nearly frozen relations with Beijing since David Cameron met the Dalai Lama in 2012.<sup>1582</sup> The ‘Golden Era’ phrase is used seven times in four 2015 documents, embodying a Kantian culture of anarchy in the sense of Wendt with strong signals of mutual friendship.<sup>1583</sup> The positive perception of the BRI corresponds to the launch of the golden era mirroring Chinese role assignments for the UK as analyzed above. London is yet exercising restraint and prefers sub-national rather than national MoUs. In the geopolitical theater, the approach demonstrates Downing Street's sensitivity in dealing with the special relationship with the US, which was highly critical of the rapprochement between London and Beijing.<sup>1584</sup>

As early as 2015, the BRI was mentioned in the UK in connection with Xinjiang.<sup>1585</sup> On the one hand, it is noticeable that the BRI is viewed positively as a transformation pro-

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<sup>1579</sup> Zheng et al. 2023: 324.

<sup>1580</sup> 10-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-Chinesestatevisit: 2.

<sup>1581</sup> 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi: 3.

<sup>1582</sup> Brown 2016: 6-7; Summers 2016: 63.

<sup>1583</sup> In 2015, the term is used by different politicians, including Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond (08-12-2015-GBR-GO-A-PhilipHammond: 7), Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne (09-22-2015-GBR-GO-SP-GeorgeOsborne: 1, 3), Prime Minister Cameron and even President Xi Jinping, which is an element of reciprocity in the discourse (10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi: 3; 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement: 1). Overall, the term is used 43 times in 23 documents in the whole dataset. Details on the term's shifting use are provided in the text.

<sup>1584</sup> Brown 2016: 46.

<sup>1585</sup> 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2-3; 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2.

gram for the region, which also opens up opportunities for cooperation for British business. This investment focus appears to be born out of a security interest of the PRC, as a strike-hard anti-terrorism campaign was launched at the same time. Accordingly, in line with the official Chinese view, the BRI is seen as a means of addressing insecurity due to economic hardship. In contrast to the Chinese view, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) considers human rights dialogues with the Chinese government to be necessary in order not to lose sight of human security in Xinjiang.<sup>1586</sup> As the issue disappeared from public statement in the dataset, the political elites in fact lost sight of the BRI in Xinjiang and only received renewed attention by late 2018.<sup>1587</sup> This correlates with the news of the human rights violations surrounding the internment camps in Xinjiang, as was similarly observed in the development of the German discourse.<sup>1588</sup>

Under the new banner of the Golden Era, the 2016 and 2017 UK elite discourse continued in an upbeat fashion. Government releases dominated the collected dataset, issuing eagerness to engage in BRI, whereas the parliament remained mostly passive. Neither chamber organized a distinct parliamentary debate on the BRI. Nevertheless, the BRI appears in the context of other parliamentary debates as on the UK's relations with Kazakhstan<sup>1589</sup> or Pakistan<sup>1590</sup> or Brexit<sup>1591</sup>. The latter is the predominant foreign policy issue between the UK's leave referendum in June 2016 and its departure from the EU by the end of January 2020.<sup>1592</sup> It therefore be a facile inference that all foreign policy issues, including the BRI, are subsumed under or even driven by this major theme, which requires closer scrutiny in the following lines.

First of all, regardless of the occasion of the debate or the government publication, a positive perception of the BRI in the UK is prevalent in the discourse and widely shared across all studied parties. The BRI is repeatedly framed as a business opportunity for

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<sup>1586</sup> 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2-3.

<sup>1587</sup> 08-14-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField: 4.

<sup>1588</sup> Summers 2021: 117.

<sup>1589</sup> 01-05-2016-GBR-HC-PDVol604: 9 - 1.54pm; 06-22-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 11 - 12.05pm; 09-05-2017-GBR-GO-SP-AlanDuncan: 6; 05-2017-GBR-GO-SP-AlanDuncan: 6; 12-11-2017-GBR-GO-SP-MarkGarnier: 3

<sup>1590</sup> 01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619: 26 - 1.09pm, 39 - 2.00pm; 04-05-2017-GBR-GO-A-DITroundtable: 1.

<sup>1591</sup> 04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy: 5 - 4.34pm; 12-02-2016-GBR-GO-SP-AlokSharma: 5-6; 01-26-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol778: 24 - 4.26pm; 03-08-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 3 - 7.47pm; 07-18-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 20 - 4.49pm.

<sup>1592</sup> Summers 2021: 101.



UK companies. This perception was already evident in 2015 with the proclamation of the Golden Era and gained momentum in the two subsequent years 2016 and 2017. China's main interest is described as fostering a cohesive economic arena under the BRI's two-pronged strategy of the SREB and MSR, which will unlock economic potentials in Southeast Asia to Central Asia up to Europe.<sup>1593</sup> These opportunities are particularly spelled out for Kazakhstan and Pakistan.<sup>1594</sup> The British government supports the BRI's infrastructure integration plans as it states that "the UK is poised to be a key partner of CPEC"<sup>1595</sup>. Security threats to human rights or terrorism in the region are seen as challenges for the development of economic potential in Southeast and Central Asia and indirectly for the BRI. In this context, the BRI is cited for the first and only time in the documents examined as a regional opportunity for Afghanistan in an HC debate.<sup>1596</sup>

Consequently, these business opportunities are considered to be expanded under third party market cooperation. This is reflected in a speech by Minister for Asia and the Pacific Alok Sharma in Hong Kong, in which he invited UK businesses to join the BRI:

"(...) we have committed to an Alliance to support UK and Chinese companies in infrastructure projects. A key aspect of that is Belt and Road. I know many of you in Hong Kong are already involved in this important initiative. We want to encourage more UK companies to get on board and we will be working with China to identify suitable projects."<sup>1597</sup>

These lines and the rest of his speech hint at central themes in the UK's BRI discourse, particularly the role of "Hong Kong as a hub for Belt and Road"<sup>1598</sup> as Sharma wrote it in a related piece. Although the minister is expressing concern about compliance with the 'One Country, Two Systems'-principle and differing views on human rights, these are not seen as obstacles to cooperation, but as imperatives for dialog with the PRC. Priority is given to commercial relations, with the Minister citing Hinkley Point C as an optimistic example of UK-China energy cooperation.<sup>1599</sup> As the chapter on the state of research illustrated, these aspects of energy cooperation at Hinkley and the UK's special

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<sup>1593</sup> 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 4, 15; 01-05-2016-GBR-HC-PDVol604: 9 - 1.54pm; 04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy: 5 - 4.34pm.

<sup>1594</sup> 01-05-2016-GBR-HC-PDVol604: 9 - 1.54pm; 01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619: 26 - 1.09pm, 39 - 2.00pm; 04-05-2017-GBR-GO-A-DITroundtable: 1.

<sup>1595</sup> 04-05-2017-GBR-GO-A-DITroundtable: 1.

<sup>1596</sup> 04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy: 5.

<sup>1597</sup> 12-02-2016-GBR-GO-SP-AlokSharma: 4.

<sup>1598</sup> 12-02-2016-GBR-GO-A-AlokSharma: 2.

<sup>1599</sup> 12-02-2016-GBR-GO-SP-AlokSharma: 2, 4; 12-02-2016-GBR-GO-A-AlokSharma: 2.

relationship with Hong Kong are prominent areas in order to trace the changing perceptions in the following.

This is apparent, for example, from the UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD) documents. The 8th and 9th EFD in 2016 and 2017 delineated the roadmap for enhancing cooperation and fostering market access between the two countries. Financial services, the internationalization of the RMB, and the BRI were identified as key areas.<sup>1600</sup> Led by the UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer Phillip Hammond and Chinese Vice Premier Ma Kai at the 8th EFD, the two countries adopted the 'UK-China Strategic Plan for Financial Services' for deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership. The plan echoed to "(e)ncourage greater collaboration to support co-financing of infrastructure in the UK, China and third markets, including along the Belt & Road"<sup>1601</sup>. These goals have been reaffirmed at the 9th EFD by Hammond and Ma. The outcomes highlighted the specific role of the city of London as a global financial center partnering on the BRI and appointed Douglas Flint, the former Chairman of the HSBC Group, as the BRI's City Envoy.<sup>1602</sup> Flint's appointment, as well as London's unique role in the global financial services industry and BRI investments, were welcomed at the Hong Kong-London Financial Services Forum shortly after the 9th EFD in December 2017. In this regard, the forum not only reaffirms historical ties but also fosters a sense of unity through their shared roles as international financial centers. It underscores the prospect that London and Hong Kong, with their status as global financial hubs, can jointly address the investment requirements of the BRI.<sup>1603</sup> This establishes the London-Hong Kong financial axis as a strategic opportunity for the BRI.

In a broader view, this construction reinforces the corresponding pillar of British ontological security as a superior financial power. Consequently, these documents reveal not only widespread optimism regarding the BRI but the ongoing converging role attribution epitomized in the city of London's special position for the BRI shared by high representatives from London, Beijing, and Hong Kong. The converging role attribution corroborates the impression of congruence of interests in financial integration along the

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<sup>1600</sup> 11-10-2016-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaDialogue: 1; 12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks: 1-2.

<sup>1601</sup> HM Treasury 2016: 24.

<sup>1602</sup> 12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks: 2.

<sup>1603</sup> 12-18-2017-GBR-GO-R-HongKong-London: 2.

BRI's five connectivity areas. The main interest of the UK in leveraging the BRI as a business opportunity is reflected in the announced financing commitments, with Standard Chartered Bank pledging a minimum of USD 20 billion by 2020 and UK Export Finance affirming support of up to GBP 25 billion to aid UK businesses in BRI countries. According to the summit paper of the 9th EFD these funds could then be directed to projects agreed to be identified within the BRI that would serve as pathfinders for bilateral collaboration.<sup>1604</sup> In the positive reading of Tim Summers, these developments are indications of the UK's desire to engage with the BRI.<sup>1605</sup> In a more cautious reading, no specific project is highlighted as a flagship for BRI collaboration, indicating a certain restraint on actually embarking on deeper cooperation despite an overall optimistic agenda, which is reflected in the history of the future EFD. The EFD marked its tenth edition in 2019. Since then, it has been postponed, with media commentators attributing the delays to strained relations between London and Beijing as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1606</sup> However, the notion that the opportunities-frame is broadly shared during these early Golden Era years is corroborated by the absence of debt management issues in the financial summit documents, particularly in connection with the BRI.

This framing of opportunities during the initial years of the BRI is paralleled by apprehensions regarding the potential loss of participation benefits if the UK misses out on joining. The discourse manifests in two directions: firstly, the fear of missing opportunities to engage in third markets, particularly if political and economic stakeholders exhibit lethargy or sluggishness in their actions. As exemplified by Viscount Waverley's call for proactive measures during the HL debate on March 8, 2017, recalling his remarks at the New Silk Road Forum: "Opportunities abound for UK business interests, but we need to get a move on."<sup>1607</sup>

Secondly, there is a stream of concern warning that the UK may fail to integrate itself into the BRI due to its peripheral location. As early as 2015, this apprehension was articulated by the aforementioned quote from George Kerevan, where he asked the UK

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<sup>1604</sup> 12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks: 2.

<sup>1605</sup> Summers 2021: 115.

<sup>1606</sup> Kleinman 2022.

<sup>1607</sup> 03-08-2017-GBR-HL-PDV01779: 4.

government to ensure that BRI also extends to the UK.<sup>1608</sup> Against this backdrop, the arrival of the first freight train from Yiwu, China, to Barking on January 18, 2017, carried Chinese goods and was also of symbolic value for the UK's economic integration. As it traversed Duisburg on its journey, the train embodied both enduring trade connections with European neighbors, notwithstanding Brexit, and tangible globalization fostered through BRI. Consequently, the arrival of the train garnered attention throughout 2017, marking the materialization of the BRI from a conceptual vision to a tangible reality.<sup>1609</sup> These ideas are encapsulated by a quote from a HL debate on the UK's international relations during the Brexit era, delivered by the crossbencher Lord Alton of Liverpool just a few days after the so-called 'Silk Road' train arrived:

“China is not in a customs union with the EU or a member of the single market, so the freight train that arrived at Barking on 18 January, having crossed seven countries and journeyed for 14 days on the new silk road from the Chinese city of Yiwu, pointed to new opportunities for the UK.”<sup>1610</sup>

In a similar vein, Labour MP Liam Byrne associates the train's arrival with a favorable shift in Asia's geopolitical landscape. During the HC debate on Kashmir, Byrne singles out countries along the route, including India and Pakistan, as the main beneficiaries. As the train runs through these conflict-prone regions, laying down arms is imperative so that the BRI investments do not go up in smoke. These prospects are prompting the UK to explore avenues for diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution among other states. If managed adeptly, this engagement, as asserted by Byrne, promises significant benefits: “If we get this right, there is a tremendous economic prize ahead (...)”<sup>1611</sup>.

Counterstatements to the economic opportunity-frame are scarce in the early years of the British discourse. The few exceptions are largely attributable to the economic security category.<sup>1612</sup> For instance, Lord Howell of Guildford highlights the challenge that the PRC has significantly expanded its economic dominance in supply chains through

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<sup>1608</sup> 11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015: 6 - 4.39pm.

<sup>1609</sup> 01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619: 39 - 2.00pm; 01-26-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol778: 24 - 4.26pm; 05-14-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 3.

<sup>1610</sup> 01-26-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol778: 24 - 4.26pm.

<sup>1611</sup> 01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619: 39 - 2.00pm.

<sup>1612</sup> As outlined above, the 2015 featured no negative speech act, 2016 two (both in 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor), and 2017 three (03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13 - 1.56pm; 07-18-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 20 - 4.49pm; 11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787: 19 - 9.14pm). Neutral remarks are more common, but only constitute a fraction of the positive assessments (34 neutral compared to 89 positive segments from 2015 to 2017).

the BRI.<sup>1613</sup> In a later debate, he points out in a neutral tone that China is in the process of establishing a “a new order of organisations and structures to parallel the western or Atlantic model”<sup>1614</sup>. A single scientific analysis commissioned by the government in 2016 shares these cautious remarks. While the BRI offers investments and access to Chinese value chains, it might undermine local production bases in the target countries due to its economic dominance. To steer clear of pitfalls and harness the advantages, political stakeholders are advised to find an equilibrium between participation and restraint in triangular cooperation.<sup>1615</sup> Moreover, the report asserts that China is establishing new institutions, be it the BRI or the AIIB, primarily out of frustration with the lack of reforms in the existing Western-dominated global system.<sup>1616</sup> In concert with the 2016 report, Lord Howell of Guildford consistently argues for the UK to more vigorously champion cooperation with China in the BRI to address these challenges.<sup>1617</sup> This approach resembles the belief that China would liberalize following the Western model if deeper trade facilitates intercultural exchanges.<sup>1618</sup> It nevertheless appears negatively connoted because the approach is rejected as a defective policy towards China.<sup>1619</sup> While this seems to be an approach widely shared by British actors in these Golden Era years, as evidenced by the positive speech acts, it is not unanimously endorsed. Lord Jonathan Neil Mendelssohn directly contradicts the proposal in the House of Lords: “The noble Lord, Lord Howell, might be better directed to creating a triangular partnership with India into Africa than with China.”<sup>1620</sup> He grounds his proposal on the intensifying competition and expanding technological dependence on Chinese technologies in Africa under the BRI. Although he does not provide details on his recommendation, Lord Mendelssohn clearly opposes the idea of forging closer relations with China. Instead, he advocates for pursuing a power-balancing approach in those third markets.

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<sup>1613</sup> 03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13 - 1.56pm.

<sup>1614</sup> 06-22-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 11 - 12.05pm.

<sup>1615</sup> 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 24-25.

<sup>1616</sup> 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 14. This implies a normative challenge, as it represents a revolutionary and alternative institutional architecture, a concern that US President Obama cautioned against.

<sup>1617</sup> 03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13 - 1.56pm; 06-22-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 11 - 12.05pm.

<sup>1618</sup> Following Huang’s argument (2019: 107-108), this belief resembles a ‘change through trade’-mentality (‘Wandel durch Handel’). This expression is commonly used in the German China discourse to describe the political approach under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Although widely known, the expression is not used in the collected documents for Germany on the BRI.

<sup>1619</sup> 07-01-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19169: 21062; 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 15.

<sup>1620</sup> 11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787: 19 - 9.14pm.

Lord Inglewood expressed a similarly guarded perspective stemming from economic security concerns in another debate on Brexit and trade. He maintains that while the UK government promotes a one-sided view of the BRI's promises, a cautious appraisal is warranted. This concerns economic loopholes "such as dispute resolution procedures, the integrity of business partners and appropriate systems of dealing with issues when after-sales problems arise"<sup>1621</sup>. Although Lord Inglewood does not outright condemn the BRI, he raises potential points of friction that might curtail the frequently promised business opportunities. By and large, the negative and neutrally cautious remarks on the BRI in the first years under review in the UK do not reject cooperation but warn against over-enthusiasm. Instead, a more balanced, rational policy should be taken by the UK government. Considering the potential risks linked to the BRI and factoring in other collaborative partners in target countries is essential. Indicating that the BRI is rather politicized instead of securitized among British political elites, either approach demands an amplification of diplomatic efforts.

Diplomatic engagement took center stage in the 2017 bilateral agenda, coinciding with the 45th anniversary of UK-China ambassadorial relations and the 1st BRF. In February, Alok Sharma, the UK Minister for Asia, undertook a journey to Beijing, strategically timed ahead of the 45th anniversary of UK-China Ambassadorial relations. Joining this diplomatic effort, in March 2017, International Trade Minister Mark Garnier and Maritime Minister John Hayes traveled to China with a delegation of more than 27 UK maritime companies to participate in 'The Golden Era: Sino-UK Maritime Trade and Investment Forum' – a pioneering event in its category. Throughout these engagements, the UK ministers pursued enhanced collaborations in infrastructure and finance within the BRI featuring a predominantly positive rhetoric.<sup>1622</sup> To mark the 45th anniversary of UK-China ambassadorial ties in late March 2017, Minister Sharma hosted an event at Lancaster House gathering over 300 guests, including the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Liu Xiaoming. This set the stage for the Princess Royal's visit to China five months later for ambassadorial anniversary celebrations, which reinforces the impression of the high-level diplomatic importance of this year.<sup>1623</sup>

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<sup>1621</sup> 07-18-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 20 - 4.49pm.

<sup>1622</sup> 02-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaTies: 1; 03-28-2017-GBR-GO-A-maritimetradeinmissionChina: 2.

<sup>1623</sup> Walker 2020: 14-15.

Another milestone in the diplomatic engagement took place in May 2017. Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond travelled to Beijing to deliver a speech at the 1st BRF. Extending a warm welcome to the BRI, the Chancellor notes the BRI's tangible progress in the arrival of the freight train from Yiwu – reaffirming this event as a poignant symbol within the bilateral relations. In his address, Hammond stressed: “The UK can be a natural partner in delivering this infrastructure... supporting the finance, design, and delivery needed to make President Xi’s vision a reality.”<sup>1624</sup> Throughout his remarks, the Chancellor iterated threefold the UK’s position as a natural partner aligning with the country’s commitment to global free trade, infrastructure development, and financing.<sup>1625</sup> All of these recurring themes not only underscore Hammond’s fervent desire to advance British participation in the BRI but also reflect a shared set of fundamental interests within the broader spectrum of UK political elites’ discourse. Similar to Lord Alton cited above, the Chancellor highlighted the UK’s dedication to maintain open trade relations with European neighbors and the world after Brexit. Philip Hammond emerges as a prominent advocate for British cooperation within the BRI. He reaffirmed his cooperative stance on later occasions, such as the Hong Kong Trade Development Council Dinner in September 2017<sup>1626</sup> and the 2nd BRF in 2019.<sup>1627</sup> His predecessor, George Osborne, was considered a key figure for the Golden Era, making him one of the leading proponents of the Sino-British partnership. With the change in government to Theresa May, Osborne was removed from this influential role.<sup>1628</sup> Still, the analysis of Hammond’s engagements indicates that he maintained the cooperative course set by his predecessor George Osborne.

By contrast, Prime Minister May, despite her early visit to China in September 2016 for the G20 summit, did not personally participate in BRF. This suggests a delicate balance

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<sup>1624</sup> 05-14-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 3.

<sup>1625</sup> 05-14-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond. Within the collected dataset this expression of the UK as a “natural partner” for the BRI can be traced back to this speech. It is picked up in the following months and years to underscore the UK’s willingness to cooperate in the BRI 16 times between 2017 and 2019, for example by Hammond himself at the 2nd BRF (04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2). This expression literally naturalizes the partnership between the UK and China, despite all cultural and political differences. The UK is characterized as a crucial partner, even though, as noted, it occupies a peripheral geographic and (development) politically distinct position compared to the Asian BRI targets. By 2020, the term disappeared from the collected documents indicating the negative shift in bilateral relations that will be outlined below.

<sup>1626</sup> 09-20-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 3.

<sup>1627</sup> 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2.

<sup>1628</sup> Summers et al. 2022: 174.

between engagement with China and the United States, coupled with a certain degree of reservation regarding the BRI.<sup>1629</sup> This reservation became evident when, despite media speculation, May did not sign a BRI MoU or a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) during her China visit in early 2018.<sup>1630</sup> The year 2017 marks the zenith of the Golden Era in Sino-British relations, featuring optimism and a willingness to cooperate. Except for the individual cautious remarks outlined above, security references are virtually absent in these years. Regarding the entrepreneurial merits of the BRI in accordance with the discourse strand that the BRI addresses security issues, only isolated references are found in the speech acts analyzed. In sum, the British political elites' discourse on the BRI in 2016 and 2017 can be characterized as predominantly desecuritized, which is shifting in the following year.

## **8.2. 2018: A Natural Partner with Reservations**

The year 2018 indeed marks a turning point on the BRI in the UK. While the overall tone of the coded BRI statements remains neutral to positive, negative statements soared. Negative statements appear in all security categories under review, although they only make up for less than one in ten tone-coded segments in this year. The British debate addresses all security categories under review, which means it was comprehensively securitized, albeit with marginal intensity. That being said, it is crucial to reiterate special caution concerning the mere statistics of the qualitative content analysis with regard to an outlier of this particular year. The 2018 key document is a think tank study on “The impact of BRI investment in infrastructure on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals” by K4D services circulated on the official government's repository. K4D stands for knowledge, evidence, and learning for development and consists of a consortium of UK development research institutes. This report was purposefully prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners with the goal of informing and influencing policies.<sup>1631</sup> As the title of this document suggests, the report undertakes an in-depth analysis of the BRI, thus providing a total of 151 tone segments out of 291 for this year.<sup>1632</sup> As the report provides more

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<sup>1629</sup> Leoni 2022: 318; Summers 2021: 108-109.

<sup>1630</sup> Summers 2021: 112.

<sup>1631</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 2.

<sup>1632</sup> It contains 14 negative, 103 neutral, and 34 positive segments on the BRI. The negative segments feature 10 economic security, 7 ecologic security and 5 human security related statements.



than half of the security codes (22 out of 39), the public security debate among political elites in the UK has been much more limited than the raw numbers suggest. Even by excluding this outlier, a significant surge in the volume of documents and BRI-related statements is evident. Contrasting this to the predominant positive and neutral remarks, the attempted securitization by certain parliamentary and government stakeholders had not yet become predominant in the discourse. Instead, the main idea of the UK being a natural partner for the BRI in the West was cemented as the dominant narrative.

One key event that stands out in this context is Prime Minister Theresa May's state visit to China from 29 January to 01 February 2018.<sup>1633</sup> Together with a business delegation of around 50 people, including International Trade Secretary Liam Fox, Prime Minister May met President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing. As a result of this trip, commercial agreements worth over £9 billion were signed. These ranged from the automotive and financial sectors to sensitive technologies in the form of satellite systems.<sup>1634</sup> All parties welcomed the deals as symbolic acts of the Golden Era of UK-China relations, in which business interests are a key driver.<sup>1635</sup> These positive developments were announced at a joint press conference by Prime Minister May and Premier Li. It contained some landmark statements by which May modified the UK's previous BRI approach. As the Prime Minister remarked during the conference,

“We've welcomed the opportunities provided by the Belt and Road Initiative to further prosperity and sustainable development across Asia and the wider world, and as with the Asian infrastructure investment bank, the UK is a natural partner for the Belt and Road initiative with our unrivalled City of London expertise. And as I've discussed with Premier Li – we've discussed how the UK and China will continue to work together to identify how best we can cooperate on the Belt and Road initiative across the region and ensure it meets international standards.”<sup>1636</sup>

First, May's statement stresses the UK's continuous support for BRI. Similar to the previously cited speech by Philip Hammond's speech at the first BRF Forum, she labels the UK a natural partner for the BRI. Juxtaposing the tone of both statements, Hammond highlighted the Sino-British partnership in an enthusiastic fashion without restrictions,

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<sup>1633</sup> Walker 2020: 14.

<sup>1634</sup> 01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang: 4; 02-01-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi: 2; 02-05-2018-GBR-GO-PR-LiamFoxChina: 1.

<sup>1635</sup> 01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang: 3.

<sup>1636</sup> 01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang: 4.

whereas Theresa May seems to be more reserved although overall optimistic.<sup>1637</sup> Similarly, Lord Price responded for the Department for International Trade (DIT) to a written question from Parliament in July 2017 that the UK as a natural partner on the BRI “will work proactively to maximise opportunities for UK exports and investments related to BRI.”<sup>1638</sup> What both statements have in common with Theresa May’s quote is that the city of London is reaffirmed as the core of the UK’s BRI engagement. Throughout the dataset, this meme<sup>1639</sup> of the city of London remains at the forefront of UK’s interest in global financial connectivity elevated through the BRI. While this point of the partnership remains the priority, the most striking modification by May is her emphasis on consideration of and compliance with international standards and norms. This could serve as an indicator of why, according to Leoni’s analysis, May was perceived less fervent by Beijing than her predecessor, albeit she continued to use the rhetoric of the Golden Era. He views May’s continued but shifted Golden Era rhetoric as less about her political preferences and more about her institutional sensitivity, which was not least shaped by the political shifts in Washington and the South China Sea.<sup>1640</sup>

These aspects resonated strongly with Downing Street’s subsequent rhetoric on the BRI, as they only appear in relation to the BRI in the documents collected after May’s trip to China. Ever since, the necessity of BRI projects to conform with international standards has been repeated in different versions. For example, in his speech at the UK-China Senior Leadership Forum in Beijing in April 2018, David Lidington refers precisely to Theresa May’s stance on the UK’s natural partnership. He restates the cooperation opportunities in the financial sector and “the importance of international standards in order for the Initiative to reach its full potential in delivering benefits to all.”<sup>1641</sup> More precisely, Lidington highlights the role of Douglas Flint as BRI Special Envoy – who was al-

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<sup>1637</sup> 05-14-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 3.

<sup>1638</sup> 07-12-2017-GBR-HL-WA745: 1.

<sup>1639</sup> According to Breuer and Johnston (2019: 429-433), memes are discrete, widely shared images or textual descriptions of the Self or Other that gain their meaning in relation to each other in a social context. They are sub-narratives that constitute identifiable, short components of larger master narratives, as Breuer and Johnston explain in their article on the ‘rules-based order’-meme.

<sup>1640</sup> Leoni 2022: 318. May’s time in office saw the election of Donald Trump as US President and the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in favor of the Philippines against the PRC in the South China Sea. Both examples set the stage for growing wariness towards China - driven by Washington’s rhetoric on the one hand and informed by China’s actions following its non-recognition of the court ruling on the other.

<sup>1641</sup> 04-11-2018-GBR-GO-SP-DavidLidington: 5.

ready identified before as a key player and remains an element of the BRI discourse from 2017 to 2019. In most documents, his appointment is mostly celebrated without further details.<sup>1642</sup> Some documents state that Flint should play a coordinating role in strengthening trilateral cooperation between UK companies, China, and third-party BRI partners, particularly through and in London.<sup>1643</sup> As the Special Envoy, Flint embodies the successful integration of the UK into the BRI in the financial sector and is a symbol of prestige. In August 2018, Mark Field, Foreign & Commonwealth Office Minister for Asia and the Pacific, underscores Flint's pivotal role in his speech in Jakarta. The Minister explains that the Special Envoy is dedicated to promoting the UK's offer under the BRI to meet Asia's infrastructure needs and ensure that the investments are "the right ones and meet international standards"<sup>1644</sup>. The consideration of standards is thus institutionalized and literally naturalized in the constituent duties of the British coordination actors in 2018, in that it is closely linked to the claims of being a 'natural partner'.

A pattern is emerging that these statements were not only used for diplomatic publicity purposes. Comparable assertions about opportunities arising from the UK's natural partnership for the BRI were made for a domestic audience by Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox in an article originally published in *The Telegraph* in June 2018.<sup>1645</sup> In the same month, Secretary Fox reaffirmed his view at the Centre for Policy Studies UK-China conference, branding the UK "a natural partner in this endeavour – a Western anchor for the BRI."<sup>1646</sup> At both events, Fox highlighted that it is up to the UK to ensure the highest possible standards for achieving cost-effective, legal, ethical, and sustainable BRI projects. This strengthens the impression that there is a serious commitment to supporting the BRI, which has been slowly changing since 2018 with regard to publicly communicated concerns.

Accordingly, the documents contain several positively coded segments on the UK's willingness to cooperate on the BRI that consolidate the previously observed narrative

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<sup>1642</sup> 07-12-2018-GBR-HL-WA9529: 1; 06-27-2018-GBR-GO-A-ChinaUK: 2; 04-18-2018-GBR-HL-WA7069: 1; 04-11-2018-GBR-GO-SP-DavidLidington: 5; 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 3; 04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina: 2.

<sup>1643</sup> 12-18-2017-GBR-GO-R-HongKong-London: 2; 12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks: 2; 08-21-2018-GBR-GO-PP-ExportStrategy: 12.

<sup>1644</sup> 08-14-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField: 5.

<sup>1645</sup> 06-19-2018-GBR-GO-A-FoxUKCHinatraderelations: 2.

<sup>1646</sup> 06-20-2018-GBR-GO-SP-LiamFox: 4.

of the BRI as a business opportunity for British companies. These are yet increasingly combined with or followed by remarks on standards – often employing a more tepid tone (coded neutral). Serving as one major example for this, Prime Minister May directly addressed the issue in her personal encounter with President Xi. During this meeting, they are said to have discussed “the importance of international standards and transparency to ensure the initiative’s success.”<sup>1647</sup> Van Noort and Colley interpret these offers of support for maintaining standards as a self-attribution of the British actors as ‘China’s helper’.<sup>1648</sup> While May’s words only indirectly hint at this mentality, other documents from the dataset confirm this observation more directly.<sup>1649</sup> For example, Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond and International Trade Minister Mark Garnier speak of helping China to implement the BRI on the basis of the UK’s legal and financial expertise.<sup>1650</sup> In addition, Minister of Trade and Export Promotion Baroness Rona Fairhead’s opinion article on the occasion of the Silk Road Exposition in Xi’an in May 2018, where the UK was the country of honor, reinforces the narrative of the BRI as an opportunity for commerce and development. To deliver BRI projects in a bankable, legal, and sustainable way, Baroness Fairhead writes “UK companies, technology and services can support its development and help it achieve its ambitions.”<sup>1651</sup> According to Van Noort and Colley, the ‘China helper’-role strengthens British ontological security by indicating a sense of superiority over China.<sup>1652</sup> Taking this a step further, it can be argued that the supporter role is based on Othering, involving a patronizing attitude. This automatically raises the question of whether and to what extent Chinese actors are willing to adhere to the respective standards or rules favored by the British side for the BRI. Consequently, there are two sides to the coin: The offer of active assistance to realize perceived opportunities is increasingly accompanied by a specific code of conduct hinting at areas of contention. This interpretation can be backed by a report on a telephone conversation between the two leaders in April 2018. Notably, the wording on

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<sup>1647</sup> 02-01-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi: 1.

<sup>1648</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 56.

<sup>1649</sup> The records reveal that this ‘helping’ role has recurrently surfaced in British discourses and was officially endorsed by the government. As of 2020, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in response to an inquiry in the House of Commons, expressed the UK’s commitment “to help ensure that projects are delivered in line with the highest economic, environmental, social and financial standards in order to deliver sustainable development outcomes and deliver opportunities for UK and international businesses” (04-28-2020-GBR-HC-WA41169: 1).

<sup>1650</sup> 06-27-2018-GBR-GO-A-ChinaUK: 2; 03-28-2017-GBR-GO-A-maritimetradeChina: 2.

<sup>1651</sup> 05-15-2018-GBR-GO-A-ChinaBeltRoadUKOpportunities: 2.

<sup>1652</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 56.

international standards is almost identical, although points of friction are addressed more explicitly than before:

“They agreed that the UK and China would continue to work together to identify how best we can cooperate on the Belt and Road initiative across the region and ensure it meets international standards. The Prime Minister also noted the need to recognise and respect the international law of the sea, in the context of adherence to the wider rules-based international system.”<sup>1653</sup>

Very similar or even identical phrases are used in later written answers to parliamentary questions about the government’s strategy toward the BRI by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field.<sup>1654</sup> What is striking, apart from the recurring emphasis on aligning the BRI with international standards, is the identical repetition of the phrase to identify “how best”<sup>1655</sup> to cooperate or engage with the BRI. Later, the question was raised by Labour MP Faisal Rashid in an HC debate on the UK’s China policy in May 2019, which was the last recorded appearance of this wording:

“The key question for UK trade policy towards China is how best to engage with the belt and road initiative, which is China’s signature foreign policy. (...) If Britain is to take a lead as an upholder of the multilateral, rule-based system, we need to be asking ourselves that question. Estimates of China’s intended investment in the BRI range from \$1 trillion to \$8 trillion; it is a project on an unprecedented scale, yet UK awareness and understanding of it are very limited.”<sup>1656</sup>

As Rashid’s statement as well as missing concrete reporting on best cooperation practices suggest, little progress in finding an answer was made. Leaving the issue unresolved and the self-assigned role as a helper unfulfilled may ultimately contribute to explaining the UK’s waning interest in furthering public high-level engagement on the BRI. In addition, the synopsis of May’s and Rashid’s quotes indicates that the willingness to cooperate in the BRI was increasingly influenced by normative interests revolving around the multilateral rules-based global order.

This disillusioned judgment is somewhat surprising considering the efforts the British government made to promote UK companies’ involvement in BRI countries, projects,

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<sup>1653</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi: 2.

<sup>1654</sup> 04-18-2018-GBR-HL-WA7069: 1; 07-12-2018-GBR-HL-WA9529: 1; 12-12-2018-GBR-HC-WA201602: 1.

<sup>1655</sup> Used in: 01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang: 4; 02-01-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi: 1; 04-18-2018-GBR-HL-WA7069: 1; 04-19-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi: 2; 07-12-2018-GBR-HL-WA9529: 1.

<sup>1656</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDV01659: 5 - 4.46pm.

and markets. For instance, International Trade Secretary Fox continued to promote a £25 billion funding scheme announced at the 9th EFD in 2017 by the Department for International Trade for UK exporters and buyers of UK goods and services along the BRI.<sup>1657</sup> In addition, the government launched a special Belt and Road website for the City of London. The website was promoted in the press releases following the February 2018 state visit by May and Fox in order “help create awareness about the Initiative and how UK firms can play a role”<sup>1658</sup>. However, little information is available on the website ([www.beltandroad.london](http://www.beltandroad.london)).<sup>1659</sup>

There are still several additional UK government initiatives for enhancing BRI participation. What stands out as a key event, the UK’s role as a country of honor at the May 2018 Silk Road Exposition was promoted in several releases on the government’s website. During the exposition, the UK hosted several events, such as a UK-China Belt and Road Infrastructure Roundtable and the UK-China Belt and Road Higher Education event. In addition, the launch of the ‘Be Yourself: Pledge for Progress’ campaign at the Silk Road Expo underscores attention for human security concerns. The campaign focuses on the question of how gender equality can be implemented, discussed by British and Chinese companies at the launch event.<sup>1660</sup>

Connected to the issue of standardization and compliance, the UK also launched a ‘Legal Services are GREAT’ campaign intending to promote the UK’s legal system and the participation of British legal professionals in the BRI.<sup>1661</sup> This campaign was announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice, Lucy Frazer. In the HC debate on legal services after leaving the EU, Frazer emphasized that the UK aims to remain a “leading player”<sup>1662</sup> in the future and “cement the UK’s reputation as the world’s pre-eminent legal centre”<sup>1663</sup>. This demonstrates a determination to actively engage as a norm shaper with China. The debate once again underlines the ties between the legislative and executive branches in the UK, where Brexit is a driver of external engagement.

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<sup>1657</sup> 01-02-2018-GBR-GO-PR-InternationalTradeChina: 2.

<sup>1658</sup> 02-05-2018-GBR-GO-PR-LiamFoxChina: 3.

<sup>1659</sup> The website seems to have been operated between 2017 and 2020. It lacks any transparent contact information and specific guidelines for companies, suggesting that the project has fallen by the wayside.

<sup>1660</sup> 05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-SRIE: 2-3; 05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-PledgeProgress: 2; 05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-SRIEReport: 3

<sup>1661</sup> 05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-SRIE: 4.

<sup>1662</sup> 03-28-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol638: 8 - 11.17am.

<sup>1663</sup> 03-28-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol638: 8 - 11.17am.

These statements on legal cooperation hence bear out a sense of superiority. For example: “UK legal professionals can help advice on cross border transactions, giving foreign businesses confidence to invest in the Belt and Road Initiative.”<sup>1664</sup> The choice of words is reminiscent of the helper attitude described above. Beyond that, cooperation in the legal area can increase the appeal of the BRI and legitimize the project through the sound reputation of the British legal system. This has a desecuritizing effect, as the trust and commitment of British legal professionals reduce uncertainties among companies, target countries, and the UK itself. The soft power of the UK would, therefore, have a positive effect on the BRI, adding to the potential that legality generates legitimacy. This underlines the willingness to deepen the UK-China ties in the BRI through various channels, as is evident in the opening speech to the Silk Road International Expo by Baroness Fairhead who called the fair “a great symbol of our growing ties – the Golden Era, Two Point 0”<sup>1665</sup>.

The hope of cooperating and benefiting from the BRI championed by the UK government can be demonstrated by more activities and statements. In June 2018, Foreign Office Minister Mark Field launched the Global Infrastructure Program that is based on the UK Government’s £1.2 billion Prosperity Fund for middle income countries. In his words: “Working with China, the Prosperity Fund is being used to help promote more sustainable investment in infrastructure projects that meet international standards, in ODA-eligible countries that are part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative.”<sup>1666</sup> While his quote clearly connects to the ‘China helper’-role, Minister Field explains that these investments have already resulted in commercial returns for the UK worth over £48 million and further projected potential of up to £1.6 billion. Therefore, these investments are based on a British win-win-idea, the “twin aim of reducing poverty and delivering business opportunities for international and UK companies.”<sup>1667</sup> Without specifying what projects are meant or connecting them explicitly to the BRI, these figures are hardly verifiable.

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<sup>1664</sup> 05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-SRIE: 4.

<sup>1665</sup> 05-11-2018-GBR-GO-SP-Fairhead: 3.

<sup>1666</sup> 06-20-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField: 2.

<sup>1667</sup> 06-20-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField: 3.

Still, the primary idea of the BRI as a business opportunity for UK companies is promoted, which is even more robustly facilitated by the Department for Business & Trade and the Department for International Trade (DIT). In their joint guidance paper for commercial relations with Pakistan, the departments state that CPEC not only brings about huge opportunities for development and connectivity but contributes to regional security in general.<sup>1668</sup> This aligns with the above-described discourse strand that the BRI alleviates security issues. The guidance paper reinforces the April 2017 DIT statement that the UK can act as a key partner for the CPEC.<sup>1669</sup> The paper promotes UK companies' involvement in the areas of infrastructure development services, financial and legal services, as well as delivery of contracts.<sup>1670</sup> Although there was no specific parliamentary debate on the CPEC in 2018, Viscount Waverley demanded in a September 2018 HL debate on trade that UK actors should reach out to local actors in Pakistan and other BRI countries in order to promote infrastructure development with the UK's capabilities. The crossbencher highlights that the BRI has been recognized by multilateral institutions such as the UN, the G20, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, underscoring its global reach. Given China's growing influence worldwide, he views it as urgent for British stakeholders to engage with local BRI partners through cooperation agreements. This is key to advancing development and propelling economic growth and progress in cooperation with China. Viscount Waverly thus advocates for an active role in shaping the BRI for the UK. In his line of argument, this involvement becomes even more imperative given the changing geopolitical circumstances of the US-China trade war, Brexit, and shifts in global power dynamics. In light of this, Viscount Waverley seems to be in line with the DIT's optimistic promotion of British CPEC involvement, although he seems to favor even more concerted efforts.<sup>1671</sup> This is consistent with his earlier demands in a 2017 HL debate on UK exports, when Waverley pressed for more action for seizing the BRI opportunities.<sup>1672</sup>

A particular field of action is connected to the UK's relations with Hong Kong. Several meetings and roundtables were held in Hong Kong or with its representatives corrob-

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<sup>1668</sup> 08-16-2018-GBR-GO-PP-PakistanTradeExportGuide: 3, 6.

<sup>1669</sup> 04-05-2017-GBR-GO-A-DITroundtable: 1.

<sup>1670</sup> 08-16-2018-GBR-GO-PP-PakistanTradeExportGuide: 6.

<sup>1671</sup> 09-11-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792: 39 - 5.41pm.

<sup>1672</sup> 03-08-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 3 - 7.47pm.



rating the vital relations that were already highlighted in the analysis of the previous years. Although major protests broke out about a year later, the issue of eroding basic law and democracy in Hong Kong already appeared in the House of Commons at the end of January 2018. In the debate, the Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field reiterated the pivotal role of Hong Kong for the BRI and argues:

“Maintaining confidence in one country, two systems and the rule of law is crucial for both Hong Kong’s own interests and China’s, including the city’s role as a financing hub for the belt and road initiative.”<sup>1673</sup>

On the same page, a joint statement by the UK and Hong Kong on trade collaboration published in March 2018, promotes Hong Kong’s unique advantages of the One Country, Two Systems-principle and BRI hub. Four areas of collaboration between the UK and Hong Kong on the BRI are designated with regards to standards of procurement and project management, financial cooperation, agency cooperation and collaboration, as well as education.<sup>1674</sup> Actors such as President Xi Jinping or agencies from Beijing are notably absent in the document, which highlights the indispensable role in financing the BRI exclusively dedicated to Hong Kong. By contrast, a June 2018 document on Baroness Fairhead leading a British business delegation at the Belt and Road Summit in Hong Kong included both reporting on large scale collaboration with and in Hong Kong as well as the BRI being enshrined into the CCP’s Party Constitution.<sup>1675</sup> Although all pertinent 2018 documents highlight the BRI as a substantial opportunity for both the UK and Hong Kong, apprehensions regarding Beijing’s handling of the One Country, Two Systems-principle manifest through diplomatic reminders stressing the principle’s role in safeguarding Hong Kong’s overall success.<sup>1676</sup>

So far, the discourse elements described for 2018 spotlight the prevalent optimism for intensifying cooperation with China in BRI-projects, with some more implicit points of contention concerning standards voiced. Nevertheless, it’s not all sunshine and roses on the BRI, which is evinced by a booming number of negative statements that can be categorized in all security categories under review as outlined in the beginning of this section. Even without the K4D-report that contains all statements in the ecologic dimen-

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<sup>1673</sup> 01-23-2018-GBR-HC-PDVOL635: 17- 5.49pm.

<sup>1674</sup> 03-22-2018-GBR-GO-PP-UKandHongKong: 1-3.

<sup>1675</sup> 06-28-2018-GBR-GO-A-UKbusinesses: 1-2.

<sup>1676</sup> 09-28-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MelStride: 2, 4.

sion, two-thirds of the economic concerns and half of those belonging to human security, there are still more security-related statements found in the British documents than in all previous years combined.<sup>1677</sup>

When interpreting the bigger picture of these statements, the prevailing concern can be summarized as follows: The BRI appears to be too big *not* to fail.<sup>1678</sup> The adapted saying expresses that the number of projects, involved countries and investments are too big to handle. As a result, the BRI is destined to have a negative effect, i.e., is destined to fail. To provide one example from a K4D-report to facilitate this:

“Nevertheless, the sheer scale and magnitude of the BRI is daunting and challenging, raising concerns over its financial viability and the economic, financial, environmental, socio-cultural, governance, corporate and political impact on the BRI partners and the wider global development project.”<sup>1679</sup>

The quote emphasizes that although economic security concerns are paramount, different security areas are affected, which is similarly reflected in the numerous statements on the “largesse”<sup>1680</sup> of the BRI. In an HC debate under the headline “Global Britain and the International Rules-based Order” in September 2018, Julia Lopez (Conservative) talks about her observations of the “colossal scale of Chinese investment in east African ports and roads”<sup>1681</sup>. Her choice of words reminds of Lord Howell of Guildford’s warning about the “colossally expanded dominance of China in the supply chain nexus”<sup>1682</sup> in a March 2017 HL debate, which indicates an unfolding narrative. Lopez claims that the investments have been welcomed for upgrading trade, but the loan conditions have sparked concerns in the region and beyond. The advertised non-conditionality of Chinese loans under the ‘no strings attached’-formula has slowly turned out to be a false promise. Lopez does not elaborate on this but points to the chance that the UK itself could act as an alternative lender.<sup>1683</sup> In the same debate, Tom Tugendhat (Conserva-

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<sup>1677</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG. The report alone contains 22 out of 39 security-related codes in 2018. From 2015 to 2017, we only coded a total of seven security segments in the documents.

<sup>1678</sup> Alluding to US Congressman Stewart McKinney’s colloquial term during 1984 hearings on the US Continental Illinois bailout, the adapted version conveys that systemic hazards derive from the BRI’s sheer size. Read Mishkin (2006: 989-990) for more information on the original context.

<sup>1679</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 21.

<sup>1680</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 6.

<sup>1681</sup> 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 25 - 4.11pm.

<sup>1682</sup> 03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13 - 1.56pm.

<sup>1683</sup> 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 25 - 4.11pm.

tive) warned against a “new form of economic colonialism”<sup>1684</sup> spreading throughout Africa and Asia. Although he avoids talking about the BRI, he is clearly referring to it by using the example of the Sri Lankan Hambantota port for (Chinese) power exploitation by indebting another nation. These statements imply that China intends some kind of failure in or by the BRI target countries, which is consistent with Chellaney’s debt trap argument.<sup>1685</sup>

On an earlier occasion, Conservative Peer Baroness Lilian Neville-Jones argued on a similar line in a debate on the national security situation in April 2018. The debate followed the National Security Capability Review, which was published in the previous month. The Review sticks to the UK’s special relationship with the US and NATO and reaffirms the global comprehensive strategic partnership with China.<sup>1686</sup> The nature of this partnership was questioned by Baroness Neville-Jones, who flagged concerns about the expansion of Chinese power by indebting other countries via the BRI, which is also affecting Europe. She urged to shift political attention from an excessive focus on China’s market opportunities to a more robust Western strategy to counter Chinese influence and secure technological might. With these demands, the Baroness sharply objected to the Review and issues a strong warning: “China is a politico-military-economic challenge”<sup>1687</sup>. Lord West of Spithead, Peer of the Labour Party, indicating a bipartisan agreement, also warned against military expansion by China’s BRI in the East and South China Seas, which might manifest in a Chinese military base in Vanuatu.<sup>1688</sup> In a kindred spirit, Crossbencher Lord Stirrup sensed some schizophrenia in the Review. He asked, how to balance the engagement with China and the defense of the international rules-based system as nothing on this was written in the government’s Review.<sup>1689</sup> Equally concerned about the rules-based international order, Baroness Arminka Helic warned against China as a “long-term strategic challenge”<sup>1690</sup>. According to the Conservative Peer, the BRI is establishing permanent infrastructures with massive investments in multiple countries. It expands China’s cultural ties, military and cyber capa-

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<sup>1684</sup> 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 5 - 3.08pm.

<sup>1685</sup> Chellaney 2017.

<sup>1686</sup> HM Government 2018: 33.

<sup>1687</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 20 - 12.47pm.

<sup>1688</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 35- 1.50pm.

<sup>1689</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 12 - 12.16pm.

<sup>1690</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 26 - 1.14pm.

bilities, so that a timely discussion is required to address “the security challenges that we and our allies face.”<sup>1691</sup>

Following the same pattern, Lord Howell of Guildford raises concerns about China’s growing intrusive power around the globe in a June 2018 HL debate on the upcoming NATO summit in July. Similar to Lord West of Spithead, he uses the example of large-scale BRI investments in Vanuatu to illustrate China’s power ascent and penetration in the region, sparking concerns in NATO partners such as Australia. Addressing these concerns and China’s military build-up in the South China Sea, Lord Howell of Guildford warns: “This may take us well beyond NATO, I know, but that is where we have to be alert and focus if we want to stay safe and protect our nation and our people.”<sup>1692</sup> Speaking in the vocabulary of framing research of Heidbrink and Becker’s typology, Lord Howell of Guildford statement constitutes a warning judgment that fosters a sense of securitization.<sup>1693</sup>

These concerns are aggravated by general uncertainties about the UK’s most important security ally, the United States of America, and its policy towards China. Lord Howell of Guildford is not the only person who asked how to deal with US President Donald Trump being an erratic character stoking international tensions.<sup>1694</sup> In the same debate, Crossbencher Lord Peter Ricketts concluded that the confrontation between the US and China will be the most pressing issue to be considered in the UK’s national security strategy in the near future. NATO is noticeably affected by Trump’s ‘America first’-Agenda and pivot to Asia altering the dynamic in the alliance:

“Leaving the European Union clearly changes one element of that strategy, and the inevitable US move in the focus of its national security towards Asia alters the relationship with Washington. That is no surprise, as the defining national security issue of the next 50 years will be US competition with China; the surprise has been President Trump’s retreat from multilateralism and the hesitations about endorsing NATO Article 5, which produced the other interesting comment of the last year, which was Chancellor Merkel at the G7 saying, ‘We Europeans truly have to take our fate in our own hands’. For a Federal German Chancellor to show that degree of concern about NATO is worrying.”<sup>1695</sup>

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<sup>1691</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 26 - 1.14pm.

<sup>1692</sup> 06-26-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792: 7 - 3.44pm.

<sup>1693</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 315.

<sup>1694</sup> 06-26-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792: 5 - 3.44pm.

<sup>1695</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 43 - 2.23pm.

It is worth considering the quote at this length as Lord Rickett collates various issues impacting on the UK's security calculations, with Brexit again validated as a key issue, transatlantic relations and uncertainty due to Trump's presidency, as well as internal NATO controversies. With an element of irony, Lord Rickett not only comments negatively on Germany's commitment to international defense in NATO, but renders the US-China power competition even more urgent. Although he does not directly judge on the BRI, his statement reveals the international waters that the UK needs to navigate that affect all its foreign relations.

Due to the UK's special relationship with the US in traditional military realms surrounding NATO, the US constitutes the linchpin of all British foreign security debates. Despite these MEPs voicing the importance of the US and its relation to China, this great power competition was not directly mentioned in connection to the BRI. Neither in those nor in any other document of this year is this link established, although the great power competition is affecting security relations worldwide. At this juncture, it is necessary to recall the international context outlined above. Leoni observed that Theresa May's less enthusiastic stance towards Beijing coincided with Trump's FOIP agenda and the later AUKUS pact.<sup>1696</sup> The maritime issues voiced by Trump's Indo-Pacific agenda since late 2017 partly align with the British parliamentary debates regarding Chinese activities in the South China Sea and the UK's partnership with Australia. Although the UK formally sought membership in FOIP only after Brexit and AUKUS was established in late 2021, these parliamentary debates may provide early indications of sharing some of the US concerns.<sup>1697</sup> As the FOIP agenda is perceived, not least, as a response to the BRI, corresponding rhetoric may provide relevant contextual information on the substantive downward shift in UK-China relations evident in subsequent years. Bringing these various threads together, there are early indications in the quoted statements from both Houses of Parliament that portray the BRI as a hostile strategy in the traditional military security context, posing a threat to both the UK and its allies. Nevertheless, the securitization of the BRI in 2018 in the military security dimension can, at best, be classified as secondary, as it is not elevated to an issue of direct NATO relevance or military counterforce.

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<sup>1696</sup> Leoni 2022: 319-320.

<sup>1697</sup> Hall 2022: 40; Ulatowski 2022: 401.

However, there are additional security dimensions directly mentioned as perceived challenges the BRI poses for Europe and the UK. In her testimony at an HC public hearing on a cross-border taxation bill, chief executive of the British Ceramic Confederation, Laura Cohen called for anti-dumping policies in order to counter Chinese subsidies and state interference in the manufacturing industry. She indicates that China is implementing the BRI “to actively conquer markets such as Europe”<sup>1698</sup> with massive investments and subsidies. In a HL debate on the EU withdrawal bill just one week later, Independent Peer Lord Peter Truscott warned against China overtaking African and European markets, particularly by acquiring companies in the high-tech industry. These acquisitions would add to China’s dangerous cyber capacities. As Lord Truscott puts it, the BRI is one component of the PRC’s overall strategy to expand its geopolitical sphere of influence with projects from the East and South China Seas across Africa and Europe to the UK itself. He strongly rejects Chinese involvement in the Hinkley Point C and Bradwell B nuclear power plants with the words: “If it succeeds in doing so, the UK can forget any notion of energy security.”<sup>1699</sup> Both statements highlight deep-seated mistrust of China’s economic expansion, which concerns the mere functioning of local, international, and global markets. By linking it to other security dimensions, such as cyber and geopolitical-military considerations, Beijing’s economic leverage is stylized as a question of survival for the UK.

With regard to ecological security, there are also warnings that the global expansion of the BRI will have negative consequences. The K4D study warns in several passages that the BRI carries significant environmental risk due to the scale of investments, governance problems, and weak implementation of eco-environmental safeguards.<sup>1700</sup> Once again, the link between different security dimensions is evident in the think tank document, with economic issues revolving around tendering, debt, and implementation concerns compromising areas of environmental and human security. Environmental damage itself jeopardizes human security and also manifests in this dimension through corruption risks, elite capture, and missing social provisions in BRI projects. These concerns are reported to be shared by international organizations such as the EU, OECD and the

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<sup>1698</sup> 01-23-2018-GBR-HC-PD: 39-40 - 4.09pm.

<sup>1699</sup> 01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788: 95 - 9.19pm.

<sup>1700</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 5, 9, 12, 21, 23.

World Bank. The organization does not outright reject the BRI as posing a threat to eco-environmental livelihoods, but calls to address its risks of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.<sup>1701</sup> The consistent use of the concept of ‘risk’ in the K4D study limits securitization, as environmental damage is not perceived to be intended by the BRI and China is not presented as a harmful adversary.<sup>1702</sup> While this report limits the securitization with a tone of academic soberness, it elucidates specific security concerns under the broad headline of international norms and rules at stake with the BRI.

Within the human security dimensions, an HC debate on the Rohingya crisis in late December 2018 adds a different perspective on China and the BRI.<sup>1703</sup> Violence reportedly peaked in mid-2018. Labour representative Helen Goodman expressed her concern about China’s role in this crisis. She fears that China would veto any resolution on the Rohingya crisis in the UNSC. In her view, this veto would be based on Beijing’s interest in implementing the BRI in Myanmar, particularly the port in Rakhine – the flashpoint of the Rohingya crisis. China’s refusal to interfere in the internal affairs of other states in the UN Security Council is being used as a shield against international inspections of its treatment of Muslim Uyghurs, according to Goodman.<sup>1704</sup> Translating these statements into the security discourse threads, the BRI is both challenged by human security crisis in its implementation as well as fueling human security issues by prioritizing its implementation. This raises the question of how the UK should deal with these challenges, which Helen Goodman has previously addressed in a written question to the government. Her inquiry asked about the UK’s involvement in the BRI and its effect in countries such as Malaysia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. The written answer was published prior to the Rohingya debate in December 2018. On behalf of the government, Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field expressed the UK’s ongoing willingness to cooperate on the BRI and revealed that no third country was addressed by the latest UK-China Strategic Dialogue in July 2018.<sup>1705</sup> This indirectly confirms Goodman’s concern that

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<sup>1701</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 12, 23.

<sup>1702</sup> See Section 2.1.4 for the risk concept in contrast to threat.

<sup>1703</sup> Since 2017, people from the Rohingya community in Myanmar have increasingly fled to Bangladesh as they have been attacked by an alliance of Myanmar’s military forces and fundamentalists. In the 19th century, Britain occupied Myanmar for 60 years, highlighting the historical interest in the country. The colonial rule at that time, which favored minorities, is considered one of the causes of the recurring attacks against the Rohingya (Faye 2021: 1-2; 6).

<sup>1704</sup> 12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651: 41 - 3.07pm.

<sup>1705</sup> 12-12-2018-GBR-HC-WA201602: 1.

critical human security issues are being sidelined from government meetings by Chinese counterparts as interference in internal affairs. Indeed, China (and Russia) repeatedly vetoed against respective resolutions in the UNSC condemning violence against the Rohingya in the past.<sup>1706</sup>

Labour MP Mike Grapes also questions China's difficult role in the UN. He describes China's actions even more harshly than Goodman as viewing "neighbouring countries as a strategic asset"<sup>1707</sup> in favor of the BRI's expansion. This statement conveys concern about global governance in human security affairs, which is harmed by China prioritizing the BRI. In response to the representatives, Minister Mark Field spoke for the government in the House of Commons on this matter. He avoids discussing the BRI but acknowledges the concerns of the MPs regarding China's challenging role in the UNSC. Beijing's behavior gives the impression that it may not only be motivated by economic reasons but also by a non-interference strategy. With regard to bringing about a solution to the Rohingya crisis and future challenges, Field favors a cooperative approach that continues the efforts to engage China on the need for accountability in the UNSC and other diplomatic channels instead of choosing a path of confrontation.<sup>1708</sup> The debate demonstrates a significant degree of bipartisan consensus concerning Beijing's strategic calculus, whereas the government displays a more diplomatic attitude in line with its previous approach and constitutional role. In a broader interpretation, the British discourse suggests a narrative of Beijing as an irresponsible stakeholder pursuing its own interests with the BRI.<sup>1709</sup> This can also be inferred from negative comments on Beijing's expansionist approach in the economic realm and recurrent remarks on compliance with international norms, standards, or social safeguards.

The K4D study takes a much more nuanced look at the Chinese perspective on the BRI and efforts within China to counteract the criticisms and problems of the BRI. Within China, the BRI faces concerns about its feasibility, socio-environmental impact and fi-

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<sup>1706</sup> Faye 2021: 5.

<sup>1707</sup> 12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651: 47 - 3.27pm.

<sup>1708</sup> 12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651: 47-48 - 3.27pm.

<sup>1709</sup> However, concerning the Rohingya crisis, there is only one direct reference to the BRI in the German documents collected. Martin Patzelt, a Christian Democrat member of the German Bundestag, expressed somewhat more optimism to the impact of Beijing's self-interest: Although China's engagement in Bangladesh is primarily driven by Beijing's interest in the BRI, this could also foster its constructive engagement for peace in the region (04-20-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1927: 2493).



nancial largesse. Domestic criticism is mounting that BRI loans are not being repaid, projects are being suspended or canceled, and money is flowing outwards while China itself is struggling with development problems. By addressing these domestic concerns, Chinese measures alleviate some international criticism. It is yet the only document in the corpus that provides information about the March 2018 NDRC 11 guidelines that contained stricter investment regulations. It also reports on efforts of Chinese banks to standardize risk assessments for BRI projects as well as on new guidelines as predecessors of the Green BRI.<sup>1710</sup> From this, a further facet could be interpreted along the discourse strand that the BRI creates security issues, which is that BRI-related security problems abroad have repercussions for security at home.

Since there is no trace of these topics in other documents in the data set, a signaling gap becomes apparent. This signaling gap consists of two levels: One is about lost signals from Chinese actors towards international partners, especially in government and parliament, and the other is about the signaling chain within the UK itself. The former is reflected in the fact that the BRI's repercussions are discussed in the UK for British security but not with regard to its ramifications in China – except in the single K4D report. There was a window of opportunity for cooperation with China to manage these ramifications because of overlapping interests, especially in terms of financing and standards. Missing action indicates that these opportunities were difficult to identify and seize, which might be due to an international signal gap between China and the UK.

The latter signaling chain appears particularly insufficient as another All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Belt and Road Initiative and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was founded by Labour MP Faisal Rashid in September 2018 in addition to the existing All-Party Parliamentary China Group.<sup>1711</sup> These groups are informal bodies in the parliament with limited impact. They reflect shared interests between individual MEPs and provide opportunities to engage with non-parliamentary individuals and organizations.<sup>1712</sup> Neither one was able to cast the outlined Chinese views on the BRI and related efforts in the analyzed parliamentary debates. In the case of the BRI group, its

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<sup>1710</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 11-12.

<sup>1711</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 23.

<sup>1712</sup> House of Commons 2023: 7.

purpose was described in the Register of All-Party Parliamentary Groups in October 2019 as follows:

“To help British parliamentarians gain a greater understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, and provide a platform for UK business to engage in BRI and CPEC projects and explore any opportunities. This will be achieved by organising networking and evidence sessions, and delegations, and by enabling high-level interaction between UK businesses and Chinese/Pakistan governments.”<sup>1713</sup>

This motivation of the BRI group is reflected in Rashid’s statements in HC debates on Pakistan, who expresses his disappointment at the UK’s lack of awareness and understanding of the project as cited above.<sup>1714</sup> Little has been published about the BRI Group. In accordance with APPG rules, the group ceased to exist on the dissolution of Parliament for the 2019 general election in November, as it was listed in October 2019 at the latest.<sup>1715</sup> No one continued to reinstate the APPG after its founder and chairman, Faisal Rashid, was not re-elected.<sup>1716</sup> The UK’s domestic signaling gap up to 2018 is evident in the missing reproduction of scholarly assessments in the parliamentary and government statements, despite specialized parliamentary groups declaring interest in the BRI.

Before turning to the following year, these various pieces of the puzzle shall be put together to form a broader interpretation of this year’s discursive patterns. The ‘too big not to fail’-theme that appears in various negative comments about the BRI in the 2018 UK documents encompasses all security categories: the military challenge in the Asia-Pacific, financial stability, market dominance, environmental degradation, cyber security, and human security issues shedding light on the extensive securitization attempts. While UK government actors are addressing normative divisions, they also express optimism for the continuation and deepening of BRI cooperation. These do not only limit securitization but largely reject the attempts, which take three forms: First, the largely desecuritized cooperation statements do not react to the claims but recast impact as mu-

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<sup>1713</sup> UK Parliament 2019.

<sup>1714</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 5 - 4.46pm.

<sup>1715</sup> UK Parliament 2019; House of Commons 2023: 7.

<sup>1716</sup> In October 2019, eight MEPs were registered for the Belt and Road Initiative and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Group: Faisal Rashid (Labour; Chair & Registered Contact); all following are listed as Vice Chairs: Giles Watling (Conservative); Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat), Catherine West, Matt Western, Mohammad Yasin, Lord Hoyle, Emma Little Pengelly (Democratic Unionist Party) (UK Parliament 2019).

tually beneficial. Especially around London as a financial hub, cooperation offers peaked. Bencivelli and Tonelli view this behavior as favoring mutual opportunisms supported by the UK's self-interested pragmatism.<sup>1717</sup> This is connected to the second form: Points of concern are rearticulated by promoting British expertise in legal issues, project management, and other areas. Corresponding statements follow a pattern that Van Noort and Colley call a strategic narrative to bolster the UK's ontological security by positioning itself as a 'China helper'<sup>1718</sup>. Third, some topics are not associated with the BRI at all. Due to the limits of data, it cannot be discerned whether this is a conscious or subconscious strategy adding to desecuritization. This was exemplified by the Rohingya debate, where Minister Field did not address Mike Gape's question involving the BRI.<sup>1719</sup> His written answer to Helen Goodmans was also silent on the BRI's impact in Myanmar and other countries.<sup>1720</sup> Despite trackable statements about the military security implications of the BRI, there has been no discussion of how the UK should address the issue in relation to its own defense policy or NATO. On the contrary, the National Security Capability Review referred to China as a strategic partner without even mentioning the BRI.<sup>1721</sup> These three observations parallel the three forms of desecuritization, recasting, rearticulation, and silencing, according to Lene Hansen.<sup>1722</sup> Downing Streets sticks to the prevailing Golden Era meme as Liam Fox declared: "The Golden Era of UK-China relations is alive and well. In fact, it is only just beginning."<sup>1723</sup> Nevertheless, the 2018 documents indicate some imperfections beneath the slogan of the Golden Era, which was not unanimously endorsed by all British political elites. Although the negative statements make up only a small part of the discourse on the BRI, it seems like the diplomatic pot is slowly coming to a boil, with security issues popping up in all categories like small bubbles indicating a rising temperature.

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<sup>1717</sup> Bencivelli and Tonelli 2020: 84, 86.

<sup>1718</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 56.

<sup>1719</sup> 12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651: 41 - 3.07pm.

<sup>1720</sup> 12-12-2018-GBR-HC-WA201602: 1.

<sup>1721</sup> HM Government 2018: 33.

<sup>1722</sup> Hansen 2012: 529.

<sup>1723</sup> 06-20-2018-GBR-GO-SP-LiamFox: 5.

### 8.3. 2019: In Search for a Balanced China Strategy

The year 2019 marked the year in which the political mood in the UK came to a head in relation to the BRI. With the second-highest number of British publications collected and the highest number of coded segments, this year featured the highest code density on the BRI, indicating the most intense public debate. In addition, the absolute number of security-related statements peaked. The 54 coded segments span across all five security categories, highlighting extensive and complex securitization dynamics among UK parliamentary elites. Nevertheless, overall securitization remained at a low level, with negative statements accounting for around a tenth of all coded BRI tone segments. Similar to the previous reporting year, some key documents can be identified that assign a large number of codes, which once again illustrates some bias of the statistical figures in the QCA and the need for qualitative assessments.<sup>1724</sup> The UK BRI discourse is being shaped by some key events this year: The second BRF with a focus on the environmental and digital branches of the BRI, mass protests flaring up in Hong Kong, ongoing debates about the treatment of Uyghurs, US-China tensions coming to a head over 5G, and the 10th and final edition of the EFD. All of these areas are linked in a parliamentary debate about the strategic direction of UK-China relations, spearheaded by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC).

The FAC published its report “China and the Rules-Based International System” on April 4, 2019, and held a debate in the House of Commons on the same day.<sup>1725</sup> As the title of the report suggests, it focuses not only on the BRI, but opts for a comprehensive assessment of China’s international position. On 67 pages, the report offers a panoramic view of key issues: China’s global and domestic politics, fields of strategic action including the BRI, the South China Sea, and Taiwan; China’s approach to global governance and human rights, an extensive assessment of Hong Kong, cyberspace and critical

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<sup>1724</sup> There are four documents in the dataset that contribute to almost three quarters of the tone-coded segments of 2019 (272 out of 375): The two 2019 K4D-reports focusing on the DBR contain 152 tone-coded segments (03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 20 negative, 10 positive; 78 neutral; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 0 negative, 19 positive, 25 neutral). The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Report on UK-China relations includes 53 tone segments (04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 8 negative, 2 positive, 43 neutral). In the document, key findings are repeated verbatim on pages 52-53 as a conclusion. These passages have not been coded in order to avoid overestimating the figures. Finally, the International Trade Committee protocol for oral evidence on 5th June 2019 in the House of Commons contains 67 tone-coded segments (06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 1 negative, 14 positive, 52 neutral).

<sup>1725</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657.

infrastructures, and the future of UK-China relations. The BRI even has its own sub-chapter under China's strategic outlook. In short, the report highlights global investment needs for infrastructure that are addressed by the BRI with the UK partnering in the AIIB despite US opposition. It strives for a factual tone, explaining the evolution of the BRI and weighing up the opportunities and negative effects. The potential for sustainable development is emphasized, as are the negative effects already observed and the security concerns of allied countries such as the USA and India. All security dimensions are addressed, with the exception of the cyber category.<sup>1726</sup> In addition to the risk of over-indebtedness, the undermining of international standards and environmental risks, social costs such as forced displacement for infrastructure projects are also addressed. It warns that the BRI could exacerbate fragile situations by disregarding local conflict dynamics. This would lead to increasing militarization in target countries in order to protect BRI projects from social protests or separatists. From a strategic-military perspective, the BRI is seen as geopolitically motivated to hedge against US supremacy. Building new infrastructures would increase China's influence and maneuverability in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. New hard power platforms, such as ports, are built, which ultimately increase China's power projection worldwide. Within the report, the concern of a 'String of Pearls' is voiced, which is followed by a warning that Chinese control over ports would bolster its intervention capabilities abroad. Moreover, BRI target states may align with Beijing politically and in the United Nations due to self-interest and increased coercive leverage under the BRI.<sup>1727</sup> Therefore, the FAC warns that "the Belt and Road Initiative, in the form it is currently being pursued, raises concerns regarding UK interest"<sup>1728</sup>.

In order to alleviate these concerns, the FAC proposes to "help China"<sup>1729</sup> by providing legal and financial services for meeting higher standards – which reproduces the previously observed 'China helper' attitude. By highlighting the AIIB as a positive example for achieving this goal, the UK's self-perception as a global financial hub is further reinforced as well as its own economic pragmatist approach towards Beijing in contrast to

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<sup>1726</sup> The report does not link cyber security to the BRI, but it clearly warns against malicious activities from China in the cyberspace and critical views on 5G technology provided by Huawei in Chapter 6.

<sup>1727</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 14-18.

<sup>1728</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 19.

<sup>1729</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18.

Washington. Given the identified weaknesses and risks of the BRI, the FAC urges the Government not to prioritize economic gain over the UK's strategic interests, values, and national security. Signing an MoU on the BRI is rejected for these reasons, as it would be tantamount to a blank cheque. In this respect, Downing Street should not follow the example of Italy, which was the first G7 country to sign a BRI MoU in March 2019. BRI cooperation should instead be pursued on a strict case-by-case basis.<sup>1730</sup> A few months after this debate, the question of the UK's official BRI membership resurfaced when the DIT, in response to a question about the prospects of an MoU, replied that the "UK has no plans to formally join the BRI"<sup>1731</sup>. Even though there have been fewer serious efforts towards an MoU than rumors, an answer from the government on a Commons inquiry confirms that the FAC's rejection of an MoU and project-based cooperation in the BRI has prevailed in the political discourse.

In addition to that, the FAC calls in its report upon the FCO issue "health warnings"<sup>1732</sup> to other government units and British companies. These warnings shall be based on the strategic context of BRI and its potential repercussions. However, there is no indication that the proposal has been implemented. Still, recommending health warnings based on national security and other security implications reveals a wide-ranging subliminal securitization of the BRI that was spreading among some MPs. As the FAC encourages project-based BRI cooperation, it strikes a balance between cooperation and security-related strategic restraint. Similarly, Summers evaluates the report as cautious and carefully balanced.<sup>1733</sup>

Involving the BRI and beyond, the FAC calls on the UK government to develop a new, more realistic China strategy. The 'Golden Era' label is called into question, as it would reflect an unwillingness to face up to the ambiguous reality of UK-China relations covering up current contradictions.<sup>1734</sup> A new UK-China strategy is deemed necessary to incorporate the different facets of China as a "viable partner for the UK on some issues,

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<sup>1730</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18-19.

<sup>1731</sup> 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 1.

<sup>1732</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 19.

<sup>1733</sup> Summers 2021: 118. Furthermore, Summers also noted a significantly less favorable tone towards China in the UK in 2019.

<sup>1734</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 59-60.

but an active challenger on others”<sup>1735</sup>. Not only is the choice of words reminiscent of the EU’s China triad of partner, competitor, and rival published in March 2019, but the joint communication is even quoted directly.<sup>1736</sup> According to the FAC, cooperation with allies in the EU and beyond with the Five Eyes<sup>1737</sup> should, therefore, continue after Brexit in order to increase its own diplomatic weight.<sup>1738</sup>

These issues and conflicting views are reflected in the relevant HC debate on the FAC report and in other parliamentary debates on China. The FAC’s key points have been summarized in the Commons debate by Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the committee. Reacting to Tugendhat’s presentation on the report Labour MP Chris Bryant expressed concern about the treatment of Uyghurs as well as Italy’s MoU with China. Without specifying his concerns, Bryant warns: “With that, we are beginning to see all the possible dangers of the belt and road initiative that he pointed to coming into the European Union.”<sup>1739</sup> Although Italy’s decision could not be comprehensively assessed in the report before its publication, Tugendhat confirms the political-normative concern. In his view, the signing of the MoU is part of a Chinese strategy “to divide alliances and seek to break up groups. In this case, that is to split Italy from the rest of the European Union.”<sup>1740</sup> Similar concerns, which Rogelja and Tsimonis classify as part of the China Threat pillar under the sanctity of (EU) unity, were also expressed in Germany, as analyzed above.<sup>1741</sup> Although this was the only overtly negative reference to the Italian MoU in 2019, other documents reveal that the Italian MoU raised questions for the UK about its handling and assessment of the BRI. For example, shortly after the announcement of the Italian BRI MoU, the UK government only briefly answered a parliamentary inquiry that it had diplomatically exchanged views on the decision and that cooperation with Italy on China would continue.<sup>1742</sup> Neither the content of the talks nor the strategic assessment were disclosed in the written statement, highlighting the sensitivity of the issue. On a later occasion during a hearing before the House of Commons International Trade Committee in May 2019, a China expert witness emphasized that Italy’s

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<sup>1735</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 1.

<sup>1736</sup> European Commission 2019: 1, 5.

<sup>1737</sup> Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 374.

<sup>1738</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 46-47.

<sup>1739</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 4 - 1.57pm.

<sup>1740</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 4 - 1.57pm.

<sup>1741</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 119.

<sup>1742</sup> 03-20-2019-GBR-HC-WA234652: 1.

support, as well as that of Greece, Pakistan and Djibouti, is of strategic importance for China's energy supply and trade supply. The BRI is instrumental for China to offset US maritime dominance, including a potential blockade of the Strait of Malacca.<sup>1743</sup> This is in line with the FAC's assessment of the expanding hard power presence and places the Italian MoU in a larger geopolitical context. However, these little and scattered discourse positions on Italy underline the UK's overall speechlessness regarding a strategic approach to the BRI in the European context. This is evident even in the HC debate on the FAC report. The BRI was only addressed by Tugendhat in his speech, Bryant and Labor MP Khalid Mahmood, who all pointed out the implications for Europe.<sup>1744</sup>

Despite the parliamentary opposition to a government-level UK-BRI MoU, sub-national and business-led MoUs have been signed by UK actors. These include a Departmental Memorandum of Understanding signed at the 10th EFD between the UK's DIT and China's main BRI coordinating body, the NDRC. In its written response to the current state of the UK's BRI engagement, the UK government described the MoU as a technical agreement to facilitate business-to-business cooperation.<sup>1745</sup> The official joint statement of the 10th EFD was hardly more enthusiastic, welcoming the signing but not declaring it a major success. Instead, it emphasized that this cooperation should be pursued "in line with G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment and the Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative"<sup>1746</sup>, again raising the issue of debt and standards management but refraining from outright criticism. In addition, both sides welcomed a memorandum of cooperation between China's EximBank and the UK Export Finance to support both countries' exports to third-party markets. They further agreed to cooperate on joint debt financing of private infrastructures in Africa and Asia.<sup>1747</sup> These and other parts of the EFD joint statement demonstrate that UK stakeholders are very active in promoting sub-national BRI cooperation, focusing on legal and financial services in third markets. It indicates China's willingness to address criticism with targeted cooperation initiatives, including incorporating debt management, environmental and social standards. Both parties declare

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<sup>1743</sup> 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 11 - 12.

<sup>1744</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 3-4, 7 - 1.57pm.

<sup>1745</sup> 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 2.

<sup>1746</sup> 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 17.

<sup>1747</sup> 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 18-19.



to maintain the spirit of the Golden Era of UK-China relations and acknowledge the generally positive progress of the BRI.<sup>1748</sup> While this lends legitimacy to the BRI, the tone of the statements is more sober than in previous years, which, in line with the parliamentary rejection of a national MoU, reveals the limits of engagement.

What is particularly striking about the timing of the EFD on 17 June 2019 is that the joint declaration made no statements on Hong Kong as a financial hub. This coincides with the period of mounting violence from protests in Hong Kong, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tiananmen Square, as well as numerous parliamentary debates on these subjects in the UK.<sup>1749</sup> While this may lead to the question of whether any mention of Hong Kong was deliberately avoided in the joint statement, Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field told the House of Commons on 18 June 2019 that the case had been robustly raised during the EFD by the British side. He stressed that Hong Kong's special status had just been raised in the context of the BRI:

“Without Hong Kong, the ambitions that China has for the belt and road initiative, and other bits of its infrastructure planning for the future, will be much more difficult to achieve. That is very much the case that we make to our Chinese counterparts—that having this special status for Hong Kong is in China's interests as much as Hong Kong's.”<sup>1750</sup>

Compared to other Hong Kong statements directly related to the BRI, this view is the most pronounced in the British discourse. Rather than embarking on a course of securitization, Minister Field argued at several occasions that it is in Beijing's self-interest to respect the 'One Country, Two Systems'-principle and loosen its grip on Hong Kong. In his view, the common law system, which Hong Kong inherited from the former British rule, ensures confidence of foreign BRI investors alongside the citizens' freedoms.<sup>1751</sup> The Minister's arguments are in line with the discourse strand that the BRI is challenged by security issues – security issues that may be exacerbated by Beijing itself. Moreover, they give legitimacy to the UK's former rule over Hong Kong and its persistent interest in the city. This underpins its ontological security and self-image of a legal global power, defender of the rules-based international order and financial cooperation hub for the BRI.

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<sup>1748</sup> 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 1, 16.

<sup>1749</sup> Summers 2022: 277; Summers 2021: 118.

<sup>1750</sup> 06-18-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662: 7.

<sup>1751</sup> 04-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol658: 7 - 12.44pm; 06-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 6 - 4.09pm; 06-13-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 5 - 12.24pm.

Minister Field appears to be the only one to make this connection between the BRI and Hong Kong's protests in the documents. Some actors completely sidestep the ravaging protests and Hong Kong, despite its financial function highlighted on prior occasions. For example, at the height of the protests in June 2019, former Economic Secretary to the Treasury John Glen spoke optimistically about the prospects for the internationalization of the RMB with the help of the UK as a natural economic partner "to help deliver the Belt and Road Initiative."<sup>1752</sup> In the month before, Glen had also emphasized this role as a natural partner, highlighting London as the "leading financial services partner for China"<sup>1753</sup> and not even mentioning Hong Kong as the leading financial center in the region. This is remarkable as the Lord Mayor of the City of London, Peter Estlin, endorsed the cooperation between the two cities under the BRI and RMB offshore trading during his visit to Hong Kong at the end of February.<sup>1754</sup> In this case, the deteriorating situation in Hong Kong is missing in the statements, which constructs optimism for cooperation in a diplomatic theater.

At an oral hearing on the BRI of experts before the HC in June 2019, these economic hopes of British actors were emphasized even more explicitly with figures. Representative Legal Matters at Baker McKenzie, Peter Lu, explained to the International Trade Committee that his law firm had already collected around 25 million dollars in legal fees through the BRI. He saw even greater potential for cooperation, which Henry Tillman of Grisons Peak Services also confirmed in the context of his Chinese outbound investment database. This witness testified that over USD 40 billion of BRI loans have already been securitized (in the banking sense) via Hong Kong. Like Peter Lu, Tillman is in favor of stronger cooperation with Beijing and Hong Kong under the BRI so that London does not lose its position as a world-class financial and trading center: "The longer we wait, the faster Hong Kong Powers on."<sup>1755</sup> Again, the situation in Hong Kong is absent from the debate, whereas cooperation opportunities are highlighted and evinced by positive testimonies from legal and financial enterprises.

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<sup>1752</sup> 06-21-2019-GBR-GO-SP-JohnGlen: 2.

<sup>1753</sup> 05-20-2019-GBR-GO-SP-JohnGlen: 6.

<sup>1754</sup> 02-19-2019-GBR-GO-A-EstlinHK: 3.

<sup>1755</sup> 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 8-9, 17.

Nevertheless, the collected debates on Hong Kong reflect extensive parliamentary criticism in the UK focusing on tightening control and increasing violence against protesters. The FAC's China report summarizes the critique that ultimately only 'One Country, One System' would remain in Hong Kong in contrast to the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.<sup>1756</sup> The deteriorating legal status in Hong Kong is linked to the broader issue of the deteriorating human rights record in China with regard to the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. For example, Conservative MP Leo Docherty pointed out that any cooperation in the BRI must take into account the political calculations of the CCP, which justifies its actions in Hong Kong and towards religious minorities such as the Uyghurs with the absolute primacy of the CCP's control. He views the BRI itself as geared towards supporting the CCP, which is why cooperation opportunities and limits, such as critical infrastructure projects in the UK, ought to be more clearly delineated.<sup>1757</sup>

At the beginning of 2019, both Houses of the British Parliament put the human rights situation in Xinjiang on their respective agendas. Human rights abuses in Tibet and the mass detention of Uyghurs in so-called 're-education camps' were sharply criticized in both Houses. In relation to the BRI, the argument echoed the debate in Hong Kong that the BRI is challenged by security issues exacerbated by Beijing's own actions. In the HC debate in January, Conservative MP Richard Graham condemned the Chinese government's treatment of the Uyghurs, saying that these actions "will affect China's belt and road initiative across central Asia, which is predominantly Muslim in religion"<sup>1758</sup>. The neutral tone is noticeable, as the BRI itself is not portrayed as harmful but is endangered by the undue actions of 'China' in the sense of the CCP government. Labour Peer Lord West of Spithead argued in the same vein, calling on the British government to show its Chinese counterpart that the oppressive treatment of religious minorities is at odds with the spirit of the BRI, which aims to open up central Asia to connectivity.<sup>1759</sup>

In another debate in February, Crossbencher Peer Lord Alton of Liverpool more directly called for the UK government to table China's violation of human rights in the UNSC. Still, he remains neutral in relation to the BRI by asking Downing Street to "raise with

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<sup>1756</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 39.

<sup>1757</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 3 - 4.31pm.

<sup>1758</sup> 01-29-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol653: 13 - 3.07pm.

<sup>1759</sup> 02-25-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol796: 4 - 2.37pm.

China the danger to its whole belt and road initiative, which is in jeopardy if many countries with large Muslim populations decide to follow Turkey's lead and start imposing sanctions, preventing the development of those capital projects"<sup>1760</sup>. As the vice-chairman of the APPG on Uyghurs and patron of the British NGO Hong Kong Watch, Lord Alton of Liverpool was active in seeking the parliamentary arena to call on the UK government to act. On the occasion of the Queen's Speech in October, Lord Alton of Liverpool again raised the issue of human rights violations in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong. He now explicitly warns of the human security consequences of the BRI, which are not only recognizable in domestic politics but are also enforced on the international stage, such as in the United Nations. Economically deprived BRI target countries are particularly at risk, as Lord Alton of Liverpool explains: "Simultaneously, aggressive propaganda campaigns are promoted overseas, and poor countries are forced into compliance as the price for economic aid through the belt and road initiative."<sup>1761</sup> This indicates a negative shift with regard to the consequences of BRI in this thematic cluster coinciding with increased protests in Hong Kong in the second half of the year.

Alongside Lord Alton of Liverpool, Liberal Democrat Peer Lord David Chidgey warned in another HL debate in October that Beijing's forceful actions in Hong Kong and silencing of critical voices should be seen "as part of the broader picture of Chinese foreign policy"<sup>1762</sup>. As its main foreign policy project, the BRI is described as building not only massive infrastructure to transport goods, but also expands Beijing's military presence and political influence globally: "It smacks of imperialism on a global scale not seen since the 18th and 19th centuries."<sup>1763</sup> Lord Chidgey creates a threatening scenario against the BRI, weaving the takeover of ports in Sri Lanka and Djibouti, the military concerns of the US and Australia on China in the Indo-Pacific, the switching of diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing by the Solomon Islands and Kiribati around the human rights violations in Hong Kong. This underlines how different security issues, especially around human rights violations, are more linked and associated with a more securitized stance toward the BRI. As the quoted passages underline, this pattern intensifies in the second half of the year. With regard to the significance of these statements

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<sup>1760</sup> 02-11-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol795: 3 - 2.36pm.

<sup>1761</sup> 10-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 22 - 4.37pm.

<sup>1762</sup> 10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 15 - 3.24pm.

<sup>1763</sup> 10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 15 - 3.24pm.

on the BRI, it must be qualified that they only appear in these isolated instances in relation to the overall discourse on human rights violations in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, these arguments indicate the export of domestic violence on the international level, involving competing visions of global order.

In terms of content, these statements conform with the previously noted warnings about Chinese neocolonialism facilitated by the BRI. Lord Chidgey was not the only one to warn in this direction in 2019. In an HC debate on the UK's China policy, Peter Grant (SNP) warned that the BRI could lead to economic overdependence on China, so that target countries "almost become satellites or colonies"<sup>1764</sup>. These economic risks, alongside human rights issues, pose potential threats to the UK's security. According to Grant, these threats should not be ignored by the UK government in its pursuit of favorable trade terms with China.<sup>1765</sup>

"China is buying Africa"<sup>1766</sup> – with these words, Lord Andrew Robathan urged defense attention to global investment patterns and clarified that China is not currently considered an enemy. However, he did reference the Latin saying 'Si vis pacem, para bellum' (if you want peace, prepare for war). This indeed suggests a potential for conflict due to Beijing's growing political and military assets.<sup>1767</sup> In the same vein, Tory MP Stephen Kerr warned in a development policy debate that the BRI gains political influence and access to natural resources of target countries that could pose a challenge, particularly in Africa. He points out that the BRI terms often include the fact that China not only provides the capital but also the workers. This limits the development potential of the projects in the target countries. On the one hand, this is reminiscent of the concern observed in Germany that China will gain twice with the BRI instead of realizing the win-win principle in mutually beneficial projects. On the other hand, Kerr's statement raises the question of whether and how British players will be involved in the BRI.<sup>1768</sup> Likewise, Conservative MP Robert Neill reports in the Commons that at a legal conference on the BRI, he caught from the participants that the BRI and trade with China "comes with strings attached, and perhaps a lack of transparency about access to the relevant

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<sup>1764</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 18 - 5.30pm.

<sup>1765</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 18 - 5.30pm.

<sup>1766</sup> 09-25-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol799: 27 - 6.47pm.

<sup>1767</sup> 09-25-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol799: 27 - 6.47pm.

<sup>1768</sup> 07-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662: 38 - 6.36pm.

sectors that would frankly not be acceptable in UK terms.”<sup>1769</sup> The threats to economic security interests expressed in these statements form a counter-draft to the dominant discourse on the BRI as a business opportunity.

In hardly any other thematic cluster are such contradictory perceptions as visible on the Digital Belt and Road. In the run-up to the 2nd BRF, the two K4D reports were published in March 2019 on the potential for sustainable development of the DBAR. Both reports share the view that the UK should explore ways to collaborate in the DBAR. Developing countries are in need of investments in digital infrastructures and services of all kinds, be it satellite systems, fiber-optical cables, or communication technology. The reports highlight that the provision of technologies may foster social and economic development within the countries and integrate them into the global markets.<sup>1770</sup> Upgrading digital infrastructures by building Smart Cities may contribute to alleviating security issues such as criminal activities, health issues (clean water, sanitation, health services), or food security.<sup>1771</sup>

Adverse consequences of the DBAR and security concerns by foreign actors are, however, only assessed by the K4D study by Kevin Hernandez. The report covers all dimensions of security except the military, which illustrates the complexity of the security aspects apart from the most obvious dimension of cyber security. Indeed, human security concerns are mentioned most frequently in the document.<sup>1772</sup> Instead of fostering a more just society, as argued by the other K4D report, the DBAR bears the risk of disempowering citizens, increasing inequalities, and exacerbating labor conditions<sup>1773</sup> Providing surveillance technologies, for example, in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, may both help the government to combat crimes such as robberies and shootings as well as help to control citizens, curtail freedom of speech, and prosecute dissenting voices.

This may also affect cyber security, as Chinese companies are suspected of assisting the Chinese government with state intelligence-gathering missions under the Cyber Security

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<sup>1769</sup> 02-06-2019-GBR-HC-PDV01654: 12 - 10.05am.

<sup>1770</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 21, 34; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 1; 4.

<sup>1771</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 29-30, 32.

<sup>1772</sup> The 20 negative statements in the document (03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad) include 3 segments on economic security, 5 on ecologic security, 13 on human security, and 5 on cyber security.

<sup>1773</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 2, 13-14, 33-34; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 4.

Law. In addition, data from the Chinese systems would be used to improve the software without citizen consent from the target countries, including the facial recognition software algorithm's ability to recognize darker skin tones.<sup>1774</sup> Even among British parliamentarians who are open to cooperation in the BRI, this technology provokes security concerns. This is evinced by a securitized statement from Julia Lopez, recognizing the need for action in connection with the BRI after a visit to Huawei's Shenzhen facility: "I was rather alarmed by how some of the facial recognition technology was deployed, which woke me up to some of the issues that we will have to handle"<sup>1775</sup>.

As leading technology companies, Huawei and ZTE are at the center of attention. They often construct and maintain digital networks in DBAR countries providing them access to an abundance of data and critical infrastructures. Yet the report paints a differentiated picture: Western companies would also sell surveillance technologies to authoritarian states, which is why politicians are called upon to collaborate for jointly regulating these adverse effects.<sup>1776</sup> Other negative effects would also not be exclusive to DBAR: The production of digital technologies requires natural resources that are often mined under poor working conditions, including child labor. A push for digital expansion would also increase the risk of this exploitation. This, in turn, entails environmental risks: the mining of raw materials, the production and use of digital infrastructures increase energy consumption, and chemical and electronic waste.<sup>1777</sup>

In terms of marginalization, the analysis brings together both the demand and the supply side, as these risks also depend on how high the digital literacy of the population is. The poorest of the poor lack access to digital services through network coverage, the costs of technologies as well as necessary skills to benefit from digital technologies. The DBAR thus reinforces social and economic disadvantages in the countries. The responsibility of Western providers, who are unable to offer cost-effective alternatives or even operate in fragile target countries due to the entrepreneurial risk, strengthens the position of Chinese providers that are subsidized by the Chinese government. Accordingly, the report cautions against viewing digital infrastructures as a cure-all for development issues

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<sup>1774</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 14-15, 29.

<sup>1775</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 16 - 5.25pm.

<sup>1776</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 14-15, 29.

<sup>1777</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 2, 6, 32.

and promoting a ‘digital by default’-strategy. Instead, traditional donors like the UK should assess the opportunities and risks of direct involvement in DBAR projects and act as international knowledge brokers.<sup>1778</sup> All these recommendations highlight the contrasting effects and perceptions of the (digital) Silk Road: it has the potential to both address and exacerbate security risks.

It is noticeable that cyber security is not addressed more often in the parliamentary debates. Although the issue of 5G and a cyber-attack on the UK by a Chinese hacking group, as identified in December 2018, were frequently addressed in the parliamentary debates, they are rarely related to the BRI.<sup>1779</sup> Particularly, the FAC report dedicates its own sub-section to the issue of cyber security and critical national infrastructure without connecting to the BRI. The Committee notes grave concerns about the UK’s plans to include Huawei in its 5G infrastructures as the UK’s Five Eyes allies have either banned or considered banning it.<sup>1780</sup> These concerns were also voiced in relation to the BRI, but without securitizing it. For instance, Labour Peer Anthony Giddens underscores that any infrastructure project involves a digital component, which intertwines with geopolitics as evident in US-China tensions on Huawei. While Lord Giddens acknowledges the positive effects of the DBAR, he asks the audience in the debate on UK foreign policy in a shifting world order to keep an eye on the associated geopolitical tensions, which also extend to Europe.<sup>1781</sup>

Geopolitics were also discussed during the International Trade Committee’s BRI oral evidence session. The witnesses were interviewed about their views on great power tensions between Washington and Beijing and the UK’s Huawei policy for BRI cooperation with China. The mere raising of these questions indicates concerns among the UK’s parliamentary elites, but they also imply interest in furthering BRI cooperation. In response, Dr. Yu Jie believes that the UK’s Huawei policy will not strengthen the long-term cooperation between the London and Beijing, as even the meeting between Cameron and the Dalai Lama in 2012 did not have such a lasting effect.<sup>1782</sup> With regards to

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<sup>1778</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 2, 17, 32-34.

<sup>1779</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 22-23 - 5.37pm; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 42.

<sup>1780</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 42.

<sup>1781</sup> 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 52 - 9.10pm.

<sup>1782</sup> 6-05-2019-GBR-HCCom2243: 6-7, 14.



geopolitics, he argues to shift attention to the BRI target countries' interests, thereby recasting the 5G issue in economic rather than security terms:

“Perhaps in this part of the world, when we come to talk about 5G, the debate has always been about politics and about security; whereas if you look at southeast Asia, the choice of having 5G is about economics, because the Huawei technology is significantly cheaper than the competitors within the market.”<sup>1783</sup>

His statements reject securitized notions on the Huawei issue, which is further supported by other witnesses sharing their own positive cooperation experiences in telecommunications. Overall, the British statements present mixed perceptions of Huawei, the DBAR, and 5G, which is strikingly different from the staunch opposition of the US. The tenor in the UK up to 2019 seems to be moving in a common direction, which can be summarized in the following words of Lord Howell of Guildford: “Unlike America, we do not see high-tech China as the number one enemy, although we obviously have to be cautious.”<sup>1784</sup>

From a panoramic viewpoint, the 2019 UK documents indicate augmented wariness despite continued emphasis on the Golden Era. Positive statements like Chancellor Philip Hammond's commitment to leveraging the Golden Era of UK-China relations are often accompanied by expressions of local concerns, fair cooperation terms, transparency, environmental standards, and managing debt.<sup>1785</sup> These concerns are communicated in a constructive matter using a neutral tone - similar to the German discourse. Furthermore, the UK discourse reflects mounting tensions in several issues such as Uyghur treatment, protests in Hong Kong, and the US-China trade war. This is evinced by extended securitization across all categories. In spite of the peak number of securitized segments recorded for this year, the overall British BRI discourse appears to be losing its sway in the political arena at the end of the year. This coincides with domestic political upheaval. Theresa May resigned as Prime Minister in July 2019 after prolonged struggles with the Brexit deal and the general election took place. Her successor, Boris Johnson, did not voice his views on the BRI in the collected documents. However, the literature suggests that he welcomed the BRI upon taking office.<sup>1786</sup> Therefore, the main theme of 2019 seems to be the search for a rebalanced China strategy based on a realistic assessment of

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<sup>1783</sup> 6-05-2019-GBR-HCCom2243. 14.

<sup>1784</sup> 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 2 - 5.50pm.

<sup>1785</sup> 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2-3.

<sup>1786</sup> Ashbee 2024: 2.

strategic interests, values, and national security as called for in the FAC's report.<sup>1787</sup> The UK seems to have moved on from the Golden Era to redefine its way in a more challenging global landscape. This trend is echoed by Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, who remarked:

„We are entering a period of greater strategic competition, and engaging with China is vital for the preservation and evolution of existing structures. However, we do and will continue to challenge it when we disagree with, for instance, its approach to freedom of navigation in the South China sea. (...) Striking a balance— there will, inevitably, always be a balance, but striking the right balance in our relationship—will be more important than ever.“<sup>1788</sup>

#### **8.4. 2020: Conversation Winding Down**

The year 2020 marks a turning point for the UK's BRI conversation both in quantity and in quality. The first thing to notice is that the number of political documents and debates in which the BRI is mentioned plummeted from 40 in 2019 to 12 in 2020. The papers contain rather scattered remarks on the BRI, which is reflected in the likewise decreased code density (1,83 in 2020 compared to 9,38 in 2019). As for the quality of the discourse, positive remarks have completely vanished from the documents. Instead, negative comments for the first time over the period of observation have been the most prominent. The previously neutral statements section does now contain the second highest number of segments. These shrinking numbers are remarkable: Negative comments ebbed down from 39 to 13 segments, neutral statements from 264 to 9 from 2019 to 2020 respectively – it appears that the UK's discourse almost tapered completely off. Certainly, the restrictions of a ravaging COVID-19 pandemic shook international relations as a whole, its impact on foreign policy debates is hard to gauge. In the repository collected for the UK, the pandemic was not mentioned once in direct relation to the BRI. References to the pandemic are yet found in the broader context of BRI statements. Moreover, the issue of Brexit<sup>1789</sup>, which was one of the most constant contextual factors in the reviewed documents, completely vanished in the statements. Brexit can thus not be deemed a primary determinant shaping the security perceptions on the BRI this year. Instead, national security concerns with regard to foreign investments, the cyberspace and Hong Kong have been the cornerstones of the UK's BRI debate. These

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<sup>1787</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 60-61.

<sup>1788</sup> 06-13-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 6 - 12.24pm.

<sup>1789</sup> The UK officially departed from the EU in January 2020 by ratifying the withdrawal agreement (Summers 2021: 101).

observations find support in Summers' study on Brexit's influence on the British China policy.<sup>1790</sup>

From the very beginning of the year onwards, when the BRI was first mentioned in an HC debate on the agenda of Global Britain, issues of cyber security and critical infrastructures revolved around China's growing technological penetration around the globe, epitomized by Huawei. Bob Seely warns that Huawei as "an arm of the Chinese state"<sup>1791</sup> has evolved into the main technology provider in several countries and is targeting the UK and Europe. This is viewed as a part of Beijing's strategic agenda to gain dominance in the cyberspace by the DBAR. According to the Tory, this "presents significant problems and threats"<sup>1792</sup> to the UK in several aspects. Seely cites cyber security experts that the involvement of Huawei in 5G networks may create vulnerabilities that may infect the whole network regardless of where the technology is incorporated. In a different direction, he argues that Huawei is reported to support oppressive surveillance in Xinjiang. Human security records of a company should thus be considered in the UK's political and economic decision-making abroad. He furthermore cites allegations of sloppy coding and disguised unsafe functions in Huawei's source code against the claims of high-quality Chinese technology and given reassurances. These arguments create a securitized impression of the company representing the DBAR and, ultimately, the Chinese government as a whole. Although Seely is the only person who remarks on the BRI in this debate, other MPs also flag potential problems with Huawei related to his reasoning. Aggressive subsidies for Huawei would lead to dumping prices that would undercut Western technology producers.<sup>1793</sup> This elevates the concern about authoritarian penetration as companies such as Huawei are legally compelled to provide intelligence information to Chinese authorities.<sup>1794</sup> As a consequence, the security threat posed to the UK by the DBAR with Huawei as an instrument is mainly due to the authoritarian nature of the Chinese government. These lines of argument presented here can be divided into three areas. The first line of argument concerns the security threat to the UK itself. Secondly, security threats are created in other BRI target countries. Third-

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<sup>1790</sup> Summers 2021: 122-123.

<sup>1791</sup> 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 67 - 3.52pm.

<sup>1792</sup> 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 67 - 3.52pm.

<sup>1793</sup> 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 5 - 12.27pm.

<sup>1794</sup> 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 30 - 1.42pm.

ly, security issues in China are created by BRI actors, such as Huawei, contributing to a grim outlook. These interconnected lines of argument can also be detected in other papers of the year and even transcend the cyber security debate surrounding Huawei.

Tracking these three argumentative lines, in June 2020, the House of Lords debated the Telecommunications Infrastructure Leasehold Property Bill. On this occasion, Lord Alton of Liverpool proposed an amendment to the bill that seeks include the digital supply chain in telecommunications infrastructures for reviews on human rights abuses. This should prevent operators and vendors from breaching human rights and would thus exclude companies suspected of human rights violations in UK telecommunication infrastructures. As the vice-chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, Lord Alton of Liverpool, justifies stricter laws on the grounds of China's human rights violations, Huawei's operations in the region as well as the companies' non-transparent data use.<sup>1795</sup> These arguments were echoed by John Edward Hollister Montagu, 11th Earl of Sandwich, who described Huawei as a high-risk vendor that the UK should regulate more strictly. According to The Earl of Sandwich: "The basic aim is to secure China's penetration and economic control of central Asia, northern Xinjiang being the key crossing point for the belt and road initiative."<sup>1796</sup> To this end, the CCP would use mass imprisonment and brainwashing against the Uyghurs, for which it uses Huawei as an instrument. Similar arguments have been put forward in other parliamentary debates in favor of stricter regulation of Huawei in particular or UK critical infrastructure in general.<sup>1797</sup> The arguments without reference to the BRI reveal that the impression of a challenge from China looms larger than the BRI, while those on the BRI often indicate a stronger threat scenario than in previous years, as will be shown below.

Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood outlined the threat scenario he sees in the DBAR explicitly in a debate on the Telecommunications Security Bill in June. In his eyes, cyberspace forms "a new virtual theatre of war"<sup>1798</sup> in which a conflict between the USA and China in the sense of the Thucydides Trap might occur. The DBAR is part of a dangerous, geopolitical authoritarian agenda. With this, Beijing expanded its economic power,

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<sup>1795</sup> 06-29-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 15-16 - 5.00pm

<sup>1796</sup> 06-29-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 47 - 7.00pm.

<sup>1797</sup> 11-17-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol684: 63-64 - 5.19 pm.; 67 – 68 - 5.31pm.

<sup>1798</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm.

undermining international accountability, rules, and norms. Ellwood claims examples of this in Beijing's actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang as well as BRI countries deprived of autonomy by being ensnared in long-term treaties as part of China's authoritarian sphere of influence. As Chair of the Defence Committee, Ellwood calls for greater co-operation within NATO, the Five Eyes, and the West as a whole to provide safe alternatives to Chinese offers. The discussion about Huawei in telecoms and the (digital) BRI is seen as part of a larger security challenge that combines economic, military, cyber, and human security concerns. If the UK and the West fail to act swiftly as a collective, Ellwood believes international relations will slide into a new Cold War.<sup>1799</sup> In this respect, he says clearly: "China now is a geopolitical threat. We require a turning point—another Sputnik moment, where we no longer pretend and we do not just legislate on high-risk vendors, but hold the regime behind the state-owned companies to account."<sup>1800</sup> This marks a shift towards securitization on high-tech China in stark contrast to Lord Howell of Guildford's statement quoted in the previous section.

This sentiment is mirrored in a speech by Chief of Defence Staff General Sir Nick Carter in December 2020. In his view, the DBAR could emerge as the most pivotal component of the BRI, because it bolsters Beijing's position in the global cyber power competition. General Carter refers to the competition for dominance in cyberspace as the 'Digital Great Game', drawing a comparison to the 19th-century geopolitical rivalry between the British and Russian Empires in Central Asia. The use of Chinese technologies, such as Huawei, by non-rich countries could widen the digital divide to the West, which has heavily regulated or banned them. As a result, DBAR target countries come under Beijing's sphere of influence and even totalitarian surveillance. In another arena of the Digital Great Game, China is described as expanding its influence by shaping norms in the United Nations and international standard-setting bodies. General Sir Carter thus outlines a comprehensive threat scenario. To tackle the security challenges posed by China, he is supporting the demands of the NATO Reflection Group of October 2020 calling for more resources devoted to the alliance.<sup>1801</sup> Both speeches by Ellwood and Carter indicate that cyber and human security threats associated with the

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<sup>1799</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 37-38 - 8.18pm.

<sup>1800</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm.

<sup>1801</sup> 12-17-2020-GBR-GO-SP-NickCarter: 2, 5-6.

DBAR have military implications. These implications arise primarily from the perception of a great power competition between the allied USA and the authoritarian China.

In fact, most other utterances coded in the British 2020 documents stress the BRI as a tool for China to increase its power and advance its national interests abroad. Both negative remarks, which forewarn about the adverse impacts of the BRI's bolstered influence, and more diplomatically neutral assertions with undertones of criticism or unease illustrate this phenomenon. An illustrative instance in the cautionary alerts regarding the perceived debt-trap diplomacy tactics associated with the BRI. Labour Peer Stephen Kinnock, during HC deliberations on the National Security and Investment Bill, noted how such tactics serve to suppress criticism:

“We must also recognise the broader agenda with things such as China’s belt and road initiative, which is about creating debt-trap diplomacy. It is about building influence by entering other economies in such a major way that those economies effectively become dependent on the Chinese state. Of course, that comes with lots of strings attached, and it is part of the deal that those countries are not able or permitted to speak out when the Chinese state behaves in ways that we would not find acceptable.”<sup>1802</sup>

During a HL debate on China and supply chains, Lord Robathan cautioned that Beijing is leveraging the BRI to extend its influence and suppress dissent among other nations, such as disregarding WTO rules. He further underscored the impact on the Five Eyes ally Australia, which faced sanctions from Beijing for calling for investigations into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic in China.<sup>1803</sup> Echoing concerns regarding China’s debt-trap tactics through the BRI and other adversarial behaviors, Tobias Ellwood once more took the stage in a debate on Hong Kong. He urged the UK government to act more robustly on China by strengthening cooperation with the United States “to address the growing long-term threat that China poses.”<sup>1804</sup> His commentary indicates concerns stemming from economic security challenges, especially addressing unsustainable debt intentionally generated through the BRI. Such dependencies create concerns that Beijing uses them as leverage to stifle criticism and weaken the UK’s military alliances.

Other parliamentarians from both Chambers more subtly conveyed concerns about the BRI. Stewart Malcolm McDonald (SNP) and Lord Peter Bowness (Conservative) both

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<sup>1802</sup> 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD: 47 - 4.30pm.

<sup>1803</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 -11.18pm.

<sup>1804</sup> 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6 - 4.52pm.

draw attention to the potential of the BRI to weaken the formation of international political coalitions concerning China. Particularly, Bowness highlighted this concern as part of an effort to exert moral pressure on China regarding Hong Kong.<sup>1805</sup> The UK struggled to gain support outside of the Western camp to condemn the passing of the Hong Kong national security law in June 2020. This was seen as a breach of the UK-China joint declaration in 1984. As Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Dominic Raab told to Commons.<sup>1806</sup> Westminster thus expressed frustration over the realization that the UK had limited influence on Beijing's Hong Kong policies, which is also related to the dependencies and national interests in the BRI.<sup>1807</sup> While one group of parliamentarians, such as Kinnock, Robathan, and Ellwood, openly criticizes the negative consequences of the BRI, the other group, including figures like Bowness and McDonald, employs a rather neutral tone while refraining from condemning the initiative. These statements do not explicitly securitize the BRI itself but point to its oblique repercussions in a broader geopolitical landscape. Nevertheless, both groups share a common denominator, which could reinterpret the discourse line 'the BRI is creating security threats' into the formula: The BRI impedes efforts to address security issues.

Government representatives could also be classified into this second group adopting an ambiguous stance on the BRI in 2020. One noticeable aspect is the absence of explicit positive endorsements at higher levels in their statements. The dearth of statements and speeches addressing the BRI might not solely stem from the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions but could also signal more reserved attitudes within the Johnson administration. Reacting to the concerns raised by Bowness and other MPs, Lord Gerald Grimstone of Boscobel<sup>1808</sup>, replied that the government would not overlook problems within the BRI but intends to engage with China constructively:

“We recognise that some countries have had a difficult experience with BRI projects, including regarding debt sustainability, transparency and negative local impacts. We are much engaged in dialogue with China to make sure that all investments of that sort benefit the world rather than just China.”<sup>1809</sup>

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<sup>1805</sup> 06-02-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol676: 7 - 11.41am; 06-02-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol676: 7 - 11.41am; 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 7 - 3.43pm.

<sup>1806</sup> 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 2 - 3.35pm.

<sup>1807</sup> Summers 2022: 282.

<sup>1808</sup> Minister of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for International Trade.

<sup>1809</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 -11.18pm.

The minister, Lord Grimstone, reaffirmed these difficult issues and added environmental and social impact as key areas in which the UK government is focused to “help ensure”<sup>1810</sup> standards within the BRI. In contrast to former ministerial statements, he does not refer to the UK as a natural partner in the BRI but opts for an approach based on “mutual respect while having our eyes wide open”<sup>1811</sup>. Minister for Asia Nigel Adams echoed these key areas for ensuring standards in his written response to an HC inquiry regarding UK government financial support for projects under the BRI. In line with the China-helper attitude, the consistent use of the phrase ‘to help ensure’ in both ministerial statements indicates an official line of rhetoric for the government to diplomatically express discontent while staying involved in the BRI. Minister Adam yet remarked on the absence of a formal definition for what constitutes a BRI project, suggesting a degree of uncertainty. Notably, he emphasized that since 2012-13, the UK government has abstained from directly funding Chinese-led infrastructure projects in Asia, Eurasia, and Africa.<sup>1812</sup> This reflects a deliberate distancing from the BRI and a political restraint that even the more enthusiastic previous governments seemed to adhere to.

Summing up the UK’s 2020 BRI debate, the shift in tone and plummeting attention is evident in the government as well as both parliamentary houses. The BRI is no longer being welcomed in any of the statements. Instead, the BRI has transitioned into a regulatory imperative, as it is primarily cited in legislative discussions spanning telecommunications, investment, and national security bills. This aligns with McCourt’s research. He notes a reorientation from the favorable BRI frame of economic opportunities to one of national security, potentially linked to Beijing’s handling of Hong Kong.<sup>1813</sup> While Hong Kong featured prominently in the analyzed papers, our dataset demonstrates the convergence of concerns linked to the BRI from different security fields. These issues range from the UK’s supply chains to human rights violations in Xinjiang to military alliance calculations and cyber security and integrate into the overarching national security framework. Summers et al. link this to the formation of two more critical parliamentary groups, the China Research Group and the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China,

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<sup>1810</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18pm.

<sup>1811</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 -11.18pm.

<sup>1812</sup> 04-28-2020-GBR-HC-WA41169: 1.

<sup>1813</sup> McCourt 2021: 643.



in 2020 that advocated stricter policies on China.<sup>1814</sup> On the other hand, more BRI-friendly parliamentary groups, such as the CPEC APPG, dissolved with the latest general elections. These developments appear to be influenced by the impression of geopolitical systemic competition, in which the UK stakeholders increasingly side with the USA. Despite some remaining cautious voices, the ‘Golden Era’ policies of earlier governments are now sometimes being rejected as naïve or even disastrous.<sup>1815</sup> Barely five years after its proclamation, the Golden Era has already been consigned to the annals of history.

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<sup>1814</sup> Summers et al. 2022: 184, 187.

<sup>1815</sup> 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 5 - 3.43pm.; 11-17-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol684: 54 - 4.44pm.

## 9. Cross-Category Securitization Comparison of BRI Perceptions in Germany and the UK

So far, the longitudinal analysis of the BRI's securitization in Germany and the UK has uncovered country-specific trends. Some cross-country comparisons have already surfaced, so this chapter endeavors to bring them together and to unveil major similarities and differences. In doing so, it will become apparent that the conventional one-dimensional portrayal of securitization as either present or absent is insufficient. Instead, a multidimensional framework based on the five categories of the extended security concept shall be promoted. These categories in addition to the tone-based categories facilitate a tracing of specific issues over time and across discourse locations, yielding a more finely granulated account on major and minor security concerns. Through the coding of national-level political publications from the parliamentary and governmental sources in search for securitized BRI perceptions, a remarkable volume of optimistic and diplomatically measured accounts has been documented. By combining these accounts with the negative securitizing speech acts, the analytical approach uncovers the concomitant existence of securitization and desecuritization, thus further innovating the traditional securitization analysis.

In order to facilitate a cross-country comparison of BRI discourses among parliamentary elites, negative, securitized statements were analyzed on a semantic basis and categorized into five problem areas of military, economic, ecologic, human and cyber security.<sup>1816</sup> First, we recorded almost twice as many security-coded segments for Germany (239 segments) than for the UK (114 segments). This is remarkable as we have collected the same number of documents for both countries, which included around 35 percent more statements as coded by tone for the UK (816 segments) than for Germany (605 segments). This discrepancy is visualized in the following figure.

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<sup>1816</sup> All figures are provided in the tables in Appendix 6. An overview of major trends over time was provided as an introduction to Part III for granting some orientation in the following country analyses.

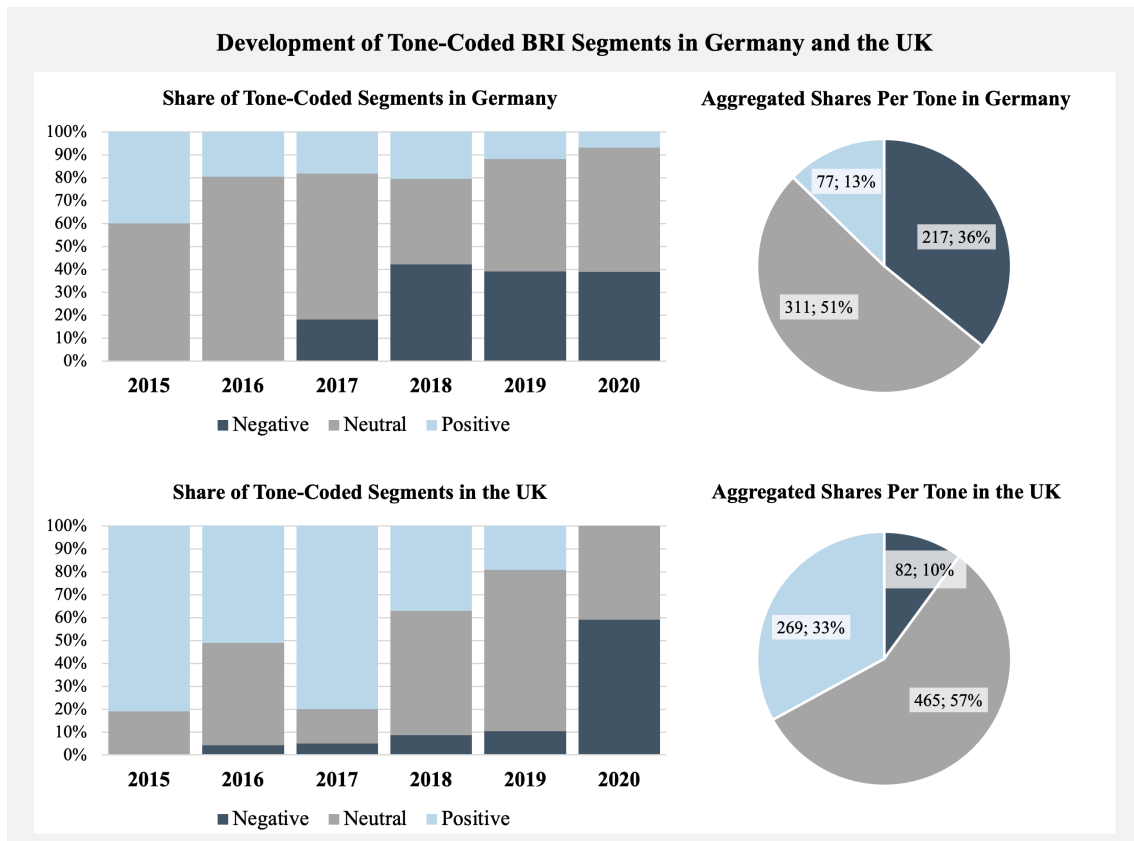


Figure 7: Development of Tone-Coded Segments in Germany and the UK. Source: Own Illustration.

The figure highlights that the UK's BRI statements lean much more to a neutral and positive tone than the German ones. Aggregating the numbers of all years of observation, the final measurement obtained a total number of 217 negative (36 percent), 311 neutral (51 percent) and 77 positive (13 percent) segments for Germany compared to 82 negative (10 percent), 465 neutral (57 percent) and 269 positive (33 percent) remarks coded in UK publications. Therefore, in neither of the two European democracies did securitization prevail in the national-level political elites' perceptions. In terms of our scale of securitization intensity, Germany yields on an overall low level and the UK on a marginal level. On an interpretative level, this might be related to the aforementioned German communication culture that is much more explicit in terms of providing direct negative feedback in comparison to the UK.<sup>1817</sup> These cultural communication traits, as exposed by Erin Meyer, have been taken into account while coding the negative passages. The Westminster elites still demonstrate a much more optimistic view of the BRI

<sup>1817</sup> Meyer 2014: 67-69.

than their Berlin counterparts as evinced in positive statements. Account for the communication culture does yet not explain that Westminster's support experienced a significant U-turn in 2020, shifting sharply towards negativity. This year, the BRI discourse experienced a general decline in attention, withering away on the national level in London. In contrast, Berlin maintained a more consistent stance of skepticism and measured criticism from the previous year, although positive perceptions also diminished since 2018. By disaggregating the counts, it becomes evident that the intensity of securitized comments saw a more pronounced downward trend in the UK, expanding from the marginal level to the upper end of the medium level, compared to Germany. In Berlin, intensity increased between 2015 and 2018, which correlates with a general increase in attention to the topic in the number of publications collected. 2018 marked the peak of securitization intensity at the medium level, but not of the public debate about the BRI in Berlin. This reached its peak in 2019. The intensity of securitization of this and the following year is characterized by an even higher number of negative statements in absolute terms, which settled at the level of the upper end of the low intensity in relative terms. Comparing the topics raised as security issues provides a more nuanced understanding of these securitization patterns.

By regarding the aggregate number of security issues, it seems that the BRI's securitization is comprehensive in both European democracies under review. Both feature securitized statements in all five security categories on an aggregate count of all years under review, suggesting an inclusive securitization that operates across sectors as coined by Buzan and Wæver.<sup>1818</sup> However, as explained in the previous chapters, the degree of securitization intensity in both countries varies greatly over time. This requires a further dissection of the development as even in those years that featured a comprehensive securitization across all security areas, this securitization was unevenly distributed between the categories. Across all categories, we find the same ranking of the three most pronounced security categories in Germany and the UK, which are in descending order: economic, human, and ecologic. These three categories not only dominate the documents but also constitute a discursive cluster, often co-occurring within paragraphs. This is evident from the code map generated using MAXQDA (see Appendix 7), which illustrates the proximity of the codes in terms of their application in the documents. The

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<sup>1818</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 258.

map reveals that economic, human, and ecological security form a tight cluster in both countries, whereas military and cyber security show little co-occurrence, especially in Germany. As we delve into the content of these security clusters in the upcoming sections, it becomes clear that the proximity of these codes indicates overlapping concerns or argumentative patterns.<sup>1819</sup> For instance, concerns such as the creation of economic leverage through the BRI are in some utterances accompanied by both economic arguments, such as possible market distortions and human security concerns related to political alignment. Such strings of argument are least common in cyber security because they appear the least associated with other codes in the code map. This could be related to its generally low occurrence in the documents as illustrated in the code map and Appendix 6: Cyber security statements were almost absent in Germany but ranked a little higher in the UK than military codes. While military security statements were more frequently recorded in Germany than in the UK, it is essential to recognize that this observation is based on absolute measures. In relative terms, military statements constitute a higher proportion of coded segments in the UK (9.6 percent) compared to Germany (7.1 percent). Cognizant of the previous studies by Buzan and Wæver, it becomes apparent that simply tallying the number of sectors fails to offer a comprehensive understanding of the completeness of securitizations within said sectors.<sup>1820</sup> Particularly, the almost non-existent count of only two cyber security segments out of 239 coded security statements in Germany suggests that the quality of securitization in this sector remains incomplete as opposed to 109 economic security segments.

As noted before, these quantities are influenced by thematically specialized publications – especially scientific reports for the parliament – in both countries. Still, they provide insights into the main and less pronounced perceptions. In the following, the analysis delves into the primary security concerns across categories, shedding light on their prevalence across countries. This offers qualitative insights into cross-country and cross-category themes inducing securitized perceptions. In order to present a sophisticated evaluation, positive and neutral accounts are highlighted as well, offering insights into competing or supportive narratives that may influence the discourse towards securitization or desecuritization. The analysis commences by prioritizing the categories

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<sup>1819</sup> Kuckartz and Rädiker 2019: 160-161; 250-252.

<sup>1820</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 258.

based on their prevalence in the discourse, beginning with economic security, followed by human security, and military, ecological, and cyber security in a combined chapter. This structured approach ensures that crucial elements from various categories are integrated, facilitating a focused view of cross-category securitization.

### **9.1. Economic Security: The BRI as a Double-Edged Sword**

The concept of economic security dates back to the 1970s oil crises, where the vulnerabilities arising from a state or society's reliance on vital resources were acknowledged.<sup>1821</sup> In a modern version, similar concerns about essential supply chains for the functioning of societies and states are at the forefront of security concerns linked to the BRI in Germany and the UK. The fact that economic security is paramount in both countries is underscored by the dominance of this category in both countries and by its appearance as the first concern in the collected documents. The earliest mention in the UK dates back to 2016, followed by Germany the subsequent year.<sup>1822</sup> In both cases, the creation of economic dependencies of developing BRI target countries is described as a detrimental effect. This could impact both target societies and international markets, carrying potential secondary ramifications for German or UK interests. Expanded Chinese company presence may outmatch local producers, curbing local economic development and prompting protective measures.<sup>1823</sup> From a different angle, local development perspectives are traded for economic dependence and political alignment with China, underscoring an inherent risk of fostering long-term reliance as an integral and politically orchestrated part of the BRI.<sup>1824</sup> This underscores (geo)political consequences at an early stage of the review period and a shared concern about negative path dependencies that could hinder market access by expanding Chinese supply chain dominance for German and UK enterprises. Although these impacts can occur anywhere the BRI is implemented, Africa and Asia are highlighted as regions of concern in both Germany and the UK. This suggests that economic security concerns are predominantly perceived to arise from BRI targeting third-party developing markets rather than targeting domestic territory. From the early years onwards, this focus is visible and later includes other regions such as Latin America and fellow European countries such as

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<sup>1821</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 10.

<sup>1822</sup> 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 22; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2.

<sup>1823</sup> 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 22.

<sup>1824</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2.

Greece, Italy, or other China-CEEC members.<sup>1825</sup> At its core, these statements describe a competition issue about perceived market distortion constituting a challenge for both local and international competitors. This market distortion is attributed in particular to the fact that the Chinese companies are state-sponsored. In both countries, these subsidies are called “unfair”<sup>1826</sup>. Again, this constitutes a systemic order conflict that exists between liberal market economies such as Germany or the UK and heavily state-controlled economies in China, which is exacerbated by the BRI promoting the Chinese model as an alternative in the target countries.<sup>1827</sup>

Taking a closer look at the international themes associated with this perceived undue Chinese expansion, the idea of luring the BRI target countries emerges as a connotation.<sup>1828</sup> In both countries, the concept of intentionally creating a debt trap is explicitly mentioned in the documents. In the exact wording, the term ‘debt trap’ appears more frequently in the German parliamentary documents than in the British ones. In parallel with the UK, concerns regarding escalating debt burdens surfaced in German documents in 2018. This is most likely related to the influence of Chellaney’s 2017 seminal publication, as evinced by its citation on the debate of Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port by the Parliamentary Scientific Service as early as 2018.<sup>1829</sup> Although some reports seriously questioned or even dismissed the evidence for this term, they perpetuated the debt trap narrative by treating it as a serious concern without suggesting avenues for cooperation for Germany in addressing these issues.<sup>1830</sup>

In the UK, explicit warnings against the perceived pursuit of a debt-trap diplomacy were raised in only two parliamentary debates in 2020 – interestingly from MPs from both Labour and Conservative parties.<sup>1831</sup> In addition to the literal reference, there are plenty

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<sup>1825</sup> The following list contains only a snapshot of the sources, where Africa or Asia is mentioned with regards to economic security, as a comprehensive list exceeds the space of this footnote: 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 251; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 60; 03-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19149: 18645; 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 1; 11-13-2019-DEU-BT-WD12019: 5; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 25; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 25; 11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787: 19; 03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13.

<sup>1826</sup> 04-21-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1918673: 2; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 21.

<sup>1827</sup> 08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 1.

<sup>1828</sup> Chellaney 2017.

<sup>1829</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 18-19.

<sup>1830</sup> 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 15; 6-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 24-26; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 19.

<sup>1831</sup> 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD: 47 - 4.30pm; 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6.

more indirect references to the broader issue of debt as a security issue created by the BRI as it was raised several times in Westminster.<sup>1832</sup> Most prominently, the FAC report of 2019, representing a cross-partisan agreement, raises concerns regarding UK interests in the current form of the BRI. It criticizes the over-indebtedness of BRI target countries to China, warning that this could grant Beijing coercive leverage and undermine the development and political stability of those countries.<sup>1833</sup> The parliamentary statements addressing the issue have all been negative, pointing to a distress of economic security and an impact on the UK's interests. This is remarkably different from the speaking pattern of the government, usually employing a constructive (neutrally coded) attitude offering to help ensure debt sustainability standards across the BRI. These were subsequently coupled with new international cooperation mechanisms such as the 2019 G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment and the Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>1834</sup> While the UK government uses the phrase 'debt sustainability'<sup>1835</sup> in the quoted documents, non-governmental MPs consistently indirectly and literally warned against 'unsustainable debt'<sup>1836</sup>. These are combined with a conciliatory, desecuritized tone by the former and security warnings by the latter. This reveals a specific example of how speech acts are employed to foster securitization or desecuritization by what Oswald called semantic framing.<sup>1837</sup> Both agree on the challenge of high debt levels, but while the former desecuritized or re-frames it for reasoning cooperation, the latter securitizes it as a malicious practice calling to limit or halt BRI cooperation.

In Berlin, the government is likewise concerned about the fact that Chinese banks provide loans without a sufficient examination of debt sustainability<sup>1838</sup>. A similarly clear

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<sup>1832</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 21 - 5.37pm, 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 25; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 5 - 3.08pm; 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 20 - 12.47pm.

<sup>1833</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18.

<sup>1834</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18pm; 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 17, 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 24; 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2; 04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina: 1; 04-01-2019-GBR-HL-WA14946: 1.

<sup>1835</sup> 04-01-2019-GBR-HL-WA14946: 1, 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 - 11.18pm.

<sup>1836</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 3 - 1.57pm; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18.

<sup>1837</sup> Oswald 2019: 96.

<sup>1838</sup> In German, debt sustainability is usually translated with 'Schuldentragfähigkeit,' which does not carry the German word for sustainability ('Nachhaltigkeit') in it but more literally expresses the ability of a creditor to carry the burden of debt. This is a specific example of why comparing discourses in different languages requires an in-depth understanding of those languages and communication cultures to



speaking pattern as in the UK cannot be observed in Germany, although the data yields that the liberal opposition party FDP issued the most frequent and sharpest warnings regarding the potential of a BRI-induced debt trap. These warnings encompass growing political influence, the potential for resource appropriation, and the rise of corruption in the target countries.<sup>1839</sup> In contrast, the German government displays a low-key behavior in the collected documents, as it hardly comments on questions about a perceived debt trap. In two notable instances, the Berlin government emphasized its own efforts to press Beijing for improved debt management and advocated for enhanced debt mechanisms during its G20 presidency back in 2017. This mirrors the stance of the British government, albeit with a slightly more skeptical tone and less frequent expression.<sup>1840</sup>

After the 2nd BRF, the German government has reacted comparably to the UK government in welcoming President Xi Jinping's dedication to striving for better debt management and compliance with international standards in the environmental area. In both countries, these speech acts indicate that challenges were indeed perceived, while both governments refrained from securitizing them.<sup>1841</sup> In this context and in related statements about the neglect of financing or debt standards, ecological security factors like environmental protection standards and human security concerns such as labor rights are closely intertwined in the argumentative chain. This way, they form a cohesive cluster of interconnected security concerns. As mentioned before, these are often, yet not exclusively, communicated in a neutral, constructive tone by the respective governments. This underscores a commitment to confine the challenges posed by the BRI within the realm of politicization. However, the recurrent nature of these statements raises the question whether the constructive posture serves as a political façade for underlying security anxieties. This sparks another question on how to scientifically assess a phenomenon that could be labeled veiled securitization.

Variations in national-level political discourses between Germany and the UK are more apparent regarding the issue of the BRI's adverse impacts on Europe and the European

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assess the meaning and effect of the words in action. It also hints at limitations to directly juxtapose those word clusters and their use for (de)securitization.

<sup>1839</sup> 09-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922471: 3; 11-13-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924279: 2; 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707: 4; 05-21-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910387: 1-2.

<sup>1840</sup> 11-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195477: 4; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 60.

<sup>1841</sup> 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 3-4; 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2.

Union. Germany exhibits predominantly negative evaluations of China's economic expansion in Central and Eastern European countries and the 16+1 or 17+1 format. Economic security concerns are manifold, ranging from escalating debt levels of European target countries to vulnerabilities in debt-prone Southern Europe, disregard for EU regulations, lack of public tendering, and political exploitation of economic dependencies associated with the BRI. These are some of the major concerns articulated by all studied stakeholder groups at the national level in Germany, including the government, opposition parties, the Scientific Service, and invited experts.<sup>1842</sup> These economic security concerns appearing in relation to the European Union in Germany form a conceptual cluster of normative concerns that are related to the political unity and cohesion within the EU coded under human security. The argumentative chain contains that European BRI countries, especially those within the China-CEEC initiative, undermine European economic regulations, which would exacerbate political fragility by endorsing strategic corruption. China is not depicted as a benevolent economic partner. Instead, it is perceived as attempting to sow internal divisions within the EU by using its BRI funds to incentivize or pressure European countries. Particularly vulnerable are nations that appear to be leaning towards authoritarianism or that have been plagued by economic deprivation, including, among others, Hungary, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Poland. This is both implicitly and explicitly called a 'divide and rule' strategy, alluding to a Roman war strategy. Accordingly, the BRI scheme, as an economical means, is used to divide the European Union in a common positioning towards China, which entails economic, human security, or even military consequences. In order to counter these challenges, a common European response is demanded by several actors, particularly a common response to the BRI.<sup>1843</sup> These observations resonate with Rogelja and Tsionis' identification of a discursive pillar at the European level that emphasizes the 'sanctity of unity'. By characterizing engagement within the China-CEEC framework as emblematic of disunity, these alerts endorse a homogenous portrayal of the EU as a uni-

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<sup>1842</sup> 04-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1995: 11495, 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 1-2; 03-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19149: 18645; 05-13-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1971: 22; 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 251; 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707: 1; 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707: 2; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 44; 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 5; 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 6

<sup>1843</sup> 03-21-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1922: 1899; 06-27-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs192996: 1; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 9, 11-12; 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 6-7; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 2; 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20438; 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9; 04-21-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1918673: 2.

vocal actor, disregarding the diverse array of foreign relations member states maintain with China.<sup>1844</sup>

Concerns and calls for action directed towards the EU are more prevalent in Germany compared to the UK.<sup>1845</sup> Nevertheless, similar cautions are raised in the UK against the alleged strategy to assertively penetrate the European market or sow division within the EU, exemplified by BRI agreements such as those signed by Italy.<sup>1846</sup> One possible interpretation is that in Germany, economic security is closely tied to the European market and its common regulatory structure, which forms the foundation for the country's export-oriented economy. Consequently, perceived political divisions and market distortions caused by external factors like China impinge upon key areas of Germany's ontological security, shaping its identity as a key ally within Europe, a formidable regulatory force, and a trading power.<sup>1847</sup> Conversely, the UK appears preoccupied with shaping its economic future outside the EU, as indicated by the prevalence of Brexit-related statements in the documents. While some British political elites advocate for a "western strategy"<sup>1848</sup> the EU is not depicted as a forum for constructing such a collective response, in contrast to Germany's perspective. This is especially conspicuous due to the complete omission of the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy and the EU-China Connectivity Platform from the UK BRI segments. Both of which were considered as potential yet immature avenues for fostering a collective response in Germany.<sup>1849</sup> The British considerations regarding Western responses to the BRI are primarily associated with its key Five Eyes security allies. Notably, Australia is singled out for experiencing economic coercion from Beijing, which highlights a connection between economic and military security concerns.<sup>1850</sup> In Germany, the United States and Australia are also characterized as countries that demonstrate opposition or concern about the diverse security im-

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<sup>1844</sup> Rogelja und Tsimonis 2020: 119-123.

<sup>1845</sup> It is not possible at this point to provide a definitive frequency count with MAXQDA, as the references to the European Union vary widely, use a plethora of abbreviations (e.g., EU, 16+1, 17+1, China-CEEC) and often address individual member states or projects.

<sup>1846</sup> 01-23-2018-GBR-HC-PD: 40 - 4.09pm; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 4 - 1.57pm.

<sup>1847</sup> Hilz 2017: 148-149, 153.

<sup>1848</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 20 - 12.47pm.

<sup>1849</sup> 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707: 2-3; 03-22-2019-ENU-BT-WD03219: 2; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58; 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20438.

<sup>1850</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18am; 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 - 11.18pm; 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm.

plications of the BRI.<sup>1851</sup> Unlike in the UK, joint action or common security concerns are not pronounced, indicating the differing political preferences of the two advanced industrialized democracies.

Regarding the desecuritized, more optimistic ideas countering the securitizing attempts outlined above, the differences between London and Berlin become even clearer. While there have been several economic security risks voiced most prominently by parliamentary representatives in the UK, the government has demonstrated high hopes to advance and deepen economic ties. As outlined above, the positive remarks outnumber the aggregate of negative statements by more than three times in the UK. These positive statements are mostly concerned with the BRI as a business opportunity for the UK in trilateral cooperation mechanisms or in terms of supporting Chinese BRI actors or international organizations with their service to the BRI. Particularly in the early phase of the analyzed BRI publications, these argumentative patterns have been clearly at the forefront and center around the government-led narratives of the Golden Era of UK-China relations and the UK as a natural partner for China.<sup>1852</sup> These hopes have been regularly tied to London's key strength as a global financial hub. This finds its Chinese counterpart in Hong Kong, to which the UK has historical ties. Both aspects are commonly regarded as key pillars of the UK's ontological security, which provides a possible explanation of why the BRI's securitization was limited up to 2019 in the UK.<sup>1853</sup> Finding its positive relationship increasingly under pressure with Beijing's forceful management of Hong Kong's protests, in addition to opposition by the UK's key security allies, the optimistic outlook has been drained out of the public sphere. As the US' opposition toward the BRI was already shifting in a negative direction two years earlier, around mid-2017, according to Wuthnow, its concerns may be interpreted as a necessary but not sufficient condition to cause the UK's BRI securitization.<sup>1854</sup> Nevertheless, when coupled with perceived threats to key pillars of the UK's ontological security, this

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<sup>1851</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 4; 01-28-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916820: 1; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16-17.

<sup>1852</sup> 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi: 3; 11-15-2016-GBR-GO-SP-GregHands: 2; 03-28-2017-GBR-GO-A-maritimetradeMissionChina: 2; 12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks: 1; 01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang: 4. While numerous examples exist in the collected documents, the cited sources here serve as illustrative evidence for the assertion. For a comprehensive understanding, readers are encouraged to consult the relevant chapters on the UK's BRI debates.

<sup>1853</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 109, 111.

<sup>1854</sup> Wuthnow 2018.

factor seems to have amplified the abandonment of BRI cooperation initiatives. This was reflected in the drastic suspension of the UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD) mechanism after 2019. According to the analyzed documents, the EFD appears to be one of the major events for the UK government to signal its willingness to cooperate in the BRI and drive the internationalization of the RMB.<sup>1855</sup> As the latest written answer by the Conservative government in 2022 suggests, no date was agreed to continue the EFD, whereas the government remains staunch in its rejection of China's human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.<sup>1856</sup>

Germany exhibits a similar downward trajectory in positive BRI statements. Although not as prominent as in the UK, the analyzed documents also include hopes placed upon the BRI as a business opportunity for German firms.<sup>1857</sup> These business opportunities are recurrently deliberated in a pattern that directly juxtaposes potential benefits against concerns. In one argumentative cluster, positive prospects for German business participation and modernized European infrastructures are highlighted alongside perceived challenges such as undermining EU tender regulations.<sup>1858</sup> Similar argumentative patterns are found in terms of positive economic development effects of Chinese investments in Africa or across Asia, which are immediately contrasted in the publications with concerns about one-sided economic dependencies, unsustainable debt, or disregard for environmental standards or labor rights.<sup>1859</sup> Overall, the German documents exhibit far fewer instances of exclusively optimistic perspectives on BRI participation and business opportunities compared to their British counterparts. Towards the end of 2019, it became apparent that these expectations have not been met, resulting in disillusionment among some BRI target countries, especially within the 17+1 framework. Legal disputes with the EU, substantial project delays, and limited investment returns were cited as key issues encountered over the last years.<sup>1860</sup> Normative and human security concerns in Germany rocketed around the same time – similar to the UK. These devel-

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<sup>1855</sup> 04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina: 1; 12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks: 1-2; 11-10-2016-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaDialogue: 1.

<sup>1856</sup> Penn 2022; Kleinmann 2022.

<sup>1857</sup> 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 4.

<sup>1858</sup> 01-17-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197107: 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 10; 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 6.

<sup>1859</sup> 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 10; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 2; 08-13-2018-DEU-BT-WD09618: 17.

<sup>1860</sup> 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 6-7.

opments coincide with a diminishing emphasis on the already nuanced business and development prospects associated with the BRI. Securitized and desecuritized arguments are presented in direct opposition in several German parliamentary documents, reflecting a cautious stance characterized by skeptical endorsement or balanced criticism. This is also in contrast to the UK's more enthusiastic advocacy for business engagement before 2020, that yet also saw a more drastic negative shift.

Taking a closer look at more aspects of this negative shift, desecuritization fostered by the perception of the BRI as a business opportunity suffered a setback following the UK's general election in 2019. For instance, Labour MP Faisal Rashid was not reelected to the House of Commons and the CPEC APPG was dissolved. This represented a notable loss in the advocacy of the pragmatic voices seeking to explore the BRI's chances and challenges for engagement.<sup>1861</sup> Therefore, the decline in discourse in 2020, accentuating economic security challenges and the dearth of pragmatic, neutral, or optimistic expressions in the UK, may also be influenced by structural factors. Similarly, as observed before, the late 2017 German parliamentary elections saw the liberal FDP and right-wing AfD surpassing the 5-percent threshold of votes required to be included as a party in the Bundestag.<sup>1862</sup> Both parties have been found highly active in using their right of parliamentary inquiry towards the governing coalition of the SPD and Christian Union parties (CDU and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria).<sup>1863</sup> The collected data suggests that the parliamentary elections in Germany fostered attention to the BRI, with the emergence of two previously unrepresented parties now actively engaging with the issue, as reflected in the higher numbers of parliamentary documents obtained in the post-2017 election period. Particularly the liberal FDP frequently issued economic security concerns related to the BRI, pointing to the issue of market distortion, potential political exploitation of economic dependencies and unfair investment conditions in Europe, Africa and beyond.<sup>1864</sup> This further underscores the need to investigate how structural changes in institutional composition, governed by regular terms of office, reflect changes in the representation of (de)securitizing actors.

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<sup>1861</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 4 - 4.46pm; House of Commons 2023: 7.

<sup>1862</sup> Deutscher Bundestag 2021.

<sup>1863</sup> See Chapter 7.2 on the shifting German BRI discourse since 2018.

<sup>1864</sup> 11-13-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924279: 1-2; 09-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922471: 3; 04-21-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1918673: 2.

With regards to economic security, the previous aspects are the most prevalent in the collected documents, whereas issues pertaining to the vital resources of energy supply receive less emphasis in terms of economic security. The scientific literature as well as the Chinese BRI documents indicates two major factors that could shape the BRI's impact on energy security in the countries under review: Russia's substantial role as a global energy supplier, particularly with close connections to Germany, and China's involvement in the UK's civil nuclear energy infrastructure.<sup>1865</sup> While both topics are mentioned in the documents, they receive only sporadic attention in the public discourse of both countries concerning the impacts of the BRI. Quite paradoxically, these infrequent and isolated references stress the significant potential of these issues. Statements regarding Russia emphasize its involvement in the Polar Silk Road, its EEU integration project, and the construction of energy pipelines to China under the BRI. Moscow's geopolitical position enables it to influence the future of energy resources in the Arctic and maritime trade routes between China and Europe traversing this region. Both Russia and China are attributed aspirations to shape the global order in their favor and assert their roles as world leaders. Conversely, Moscow is portrayed as a junior partner in the BRI, with limited progress in aligning the BRI with the EEU. This paints a picture of underlying frictions based on the perceived power disparity between the countries as evinced by obstacles for Russia to achieve its envisioned Eurasian economic integration.<sup>1866</sup> While these references acknowledge the global implications of Russia's involvement in the BRI, many merely mention Russia as part of the envisioned BRI transit corridor without elaboration.<sup>1867</sup> Generally, these scattered remarks on Russia's relation to the BRI have been derived more from German than British documents, although both contribute similarly to the outlined scenario.<sup>1868</sup> This stands in contrast to the more explicit numerous expressions about Russia's aggressive international behavior in both coun-

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<sup>1865</sup> Pamilih 2022; Nick Pay and Buszta 2022: 381-382; Malik 2020: 9, 12.

<sup>1866</sup> 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 12-15; 09-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1913193: 3; 12-16-2019-DEU-BT-WD13419: 12-13; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 1-2; 05-11-2016-DEU-BT-WD03016: 1, 11; 03-24-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol760: 8 - 4.21pm; 12-07-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs187016: 46-47.

<sup>1867</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 15; 12-07-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs187016: 46-47.

<sup>1868</sup> As evinced by the previously cited sources. For instance, both German State Secretary Ederer and British experts have similarly pointed out the geostrategic challenges inherent in the relationship between Russia and China, while also noting potential divisions between these two powers (06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 12-15; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 1-2).

tries' documents.<sup>1869</sup> The scant evidence raises the question of whether the implications of the BRI for energy security represent concealed securitization. This question arises from the German Federal Government's refusal in 2019 to respond to a parliamentary inquiry by the LEFT party regarding the status of bilateral government consultations on the BRI, including the Polar Silk Road, citing confidentiality:

“The talks between the German government and the Chinese government cover a variety of topics including the Chinese infrastructure initiative ‘Belt and Road Initiative’. These talks are confidential, which is why the German government does not provide any information on their content.”<sup>1870</sup>

The connection between the BRI and the UK's civil nuclear infrastructure remains even more elusive. The analysis revealed that UK stakeholders in both parliament and government do not categorize the UK-China nuclear partnership as a BRI initiative. This discrepancy on the UK's civil nuclear infrastructure unveils a striking example of asymmetric signaling and receiving as well as a perception gap regarding the BRI's implications for energy infrastructures as part of economic security.

In the Chinese documents, involvement in nuclear power infrastructures in the UK is positively regarded as third-party cooperation projects between China, France and the UK under a “1+1+1>3 all win” formula.<sup>1871</sup> By contrast, in British documents, neither the Chinese formula nor France's third-party cooperation role is found, underscoring a certain signaling gap. In fact, China's involvement in projects such as the Hinkley nuclear power station or Bradwell B is not directly associated with the BRI. The BRI is yet mentioned in the same documents, where the UK government welcomed civil nuclear cooperation with China as a landmark deal for upgrading the energy supply in the early years under review.<sup>1872</sup> Subsequent documents adopt a more reserved tone, though they still emphasize bilateral civil nuclear energy cooperation as mutually beneficial without

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<sup>1869</sup> See for example, the UK's National Security Capability Review of 2018. China occurs only three times in the whole Review without being designated as a threat, whereas Russia is included 14 times and highlighted as an aggressive force and threat to the UK (HM Government 2018: 6.). The BRI is not even mentioned once.

<sup>1870</sup> Own translation. Original: “Die Gespräche zwischen der Bundesregierung und der chinesischen Regierung behandeln eine Vielzahl von Themen einschließlich die chinesische Infrastrukturinitiative ‘Belt and Road Initiative’. Diese Gespräche sind vertraulich, weshalb die Bundesregierung zu den Inhalten grundsätzlich keine Angaben macht” (11-20-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1915326: 30).

<sup>1871</sup> 04-22-2019-OD: 40; 01-11-2018-BD: Paragraph 13.

<sup>1872</sup> 12-18-2017-GBR-GO-A-EnergyDialogue: 1; 11-15-2016-GBR-GO-SP-GregHands: 3; 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi: 2; 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement: 2; 10-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-Chinesestatevisit: 1.



linking it to the BRI.<sup>1873</sup> By 2018, a notable downturn emerged in the British documents. China's involvement in the UK's nuclear power stations faced parliamentary opposition. On different occasions, parliamentary representatives expressed concerns about the UK's national energy security when Chinese actors are involved. They also questioned China's motives in seeking credibility and global influence through partnerships with the UK.<sup>1874</sup> The collected documents do not provide further details on this, but broader literature confirms that China planned to construct around 30 nuclear power plants in BRI countries by 2030. In this context, the UK's regulatory approval of the Hualong One is reported to serve as a compelling selling point for this plan.<sup>1875</sup> In Germany, there is no mention of Chinese involvement in the UK's civil nuclear infrastructure in the BRI statements. Additionally, there is no discussion of nuclear energy projects for any other BRI countries. While German parliamentary elites remain silent on this issue, China's overall nuclear power is recognized as part of the country's global power projection.<sup>1876</sup> This example highlights a significant communication gap among the three countries under review, despite a general agreement on the sensitive issue of energy supply in this category of economic security.

To conclude, the economic security category emerges as a comprehensive source of BRI-related security concerns, featuring prominently in both countries' documents. Not only is it the most frequently discussed security category, but it also exhibits significant qualitative interconnections with other security domains, which has a reinforcing effect on the signaled concerns. While some nuances exist in the specific emphases on economic security between Germany and UK, they converge on the shared apprehension regarding the potential exploitation of economic influence in Europe and other BRI target nations. The juxtaposition of numerous economic security concerns with optimistic narratives surrounding business opportunities underscores the intricate and multifaceted dynamics of the BRI. Conversely, an optimistic narrative regarding BRI's economic opportunities is discernible, particularly within the UK context. This duality characterizes the initiative as a double-edged sword, a sentiment echoed by political elites in both

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<sup>1873</sup> 6-17-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 24.

<sup>1874</sup> 01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788: 95 - 9.19pm; 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 16 - 5.25pm; 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 2 - 11.18am.

<sup>1875</sup> Pamilih 2022.

<sup>1876</sup> 07-01-2020-ENG-BT-BTPP19169: 21085.

countries who emphasize the necessity of prudent management and adaption to maximize its benefits. However, by 2020, this positive outlook had waned in both countries, with the UK experiencing a complete cessation. This trend coincides, at least partially, with the escalation of human security concerns, as explored in the subsequent section.

## **9.2. Human Security: BRI as a Poison, not a Gift**

The human security category emerges as the second most prominent concern in both Germany and the UK throughout the observation period. In both countries, human security concerns were introduced in 2018 and gained momentum in 2019 – with only one exception in the UK in 2016. This increase correlates with the increasing documentation of repercussions linked to the BRI in developing countries, briefly outlined as part of the debt trap and economic leverage narratives in the preceding chapter. Moreover, international attention on the situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang surged around 2018, contributing to heightened human security concerns. Additionally, the Hong Kong protests in the subsequent year further accentuated these apprehensions, as evident in the collected data. Binding these strands together, the BRI serves as a projection screen for a narrative of China as a revisionist violator of human rights. In this broader notion of security, the BRI gives rise to conflicts over the interpretation of human security as a concept of political order in the sense of the protection of fundamental human rights, as well as related political and technical norms, rules, and procedures.<sup>1877</sup>

By reviewing the documents, competing positive and negative narratives can be identified in both Germany and the UK concerning the developmental impact of the BRI. In a positive view, national-level stakeholders in both countries stress that higher financial investments are needed in developing countries across the globe in order to spur social and economic progress. In this regard, the BRI is described optimistically as connecting Europe with Asia, Africa, and South America. This offers opportunities for upgrading living conditions, enabling social exchange, access to public services, and creating new education tracks, including scholarship programs. Some of these optimistic accounts also seem to have a self-critical inclination by stating that Chinese investments now reach

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<sup>1877</sup> Daase 2010: 8.

formerly neglected areas.<sup>1878</sup> The UK seems to be more active in engaging in specific people-to-people programs as it promoted the Young Ambassadors Skills Belt and Road at the UK pavilion during the 2019 Beijing Expo.<sup>1879</sup> German programs in this domain, if they indeed exist, are not promoted in the analyzed documents, suggesting an overlooked cooperation facet in the discourse within the national-level political sphere.

In the UK, this positive view further legitimizes its participation in the AIIB, which would address Asia's infrastructure needs that foster social and economic transformation.<sup>1880</sup> German documents deal much less with the AIIB despite Germany's role as a founding member of the institution, which might be explained with the UK's self-understanding as a global financial powerhouse as the previous case study revealed. This is evinced by statements of leading government figures like David Cameron, Philip Hammond and George Osborne highlighting the UK's first-mover role in Europe to join the AIIB.<sup>1881</sup> Nevertheless, government actors in both countries highlighted the multilateral nature of the AIIB, which addresses concerns voiced at home and in Washington that the AIIB fosters a revolutionary and alternative approach to development.<sup>1882</sup> This way, domestic and international criticism against the AIIB is dismissed, leading to the bank being effectively desecuritized. Both the German and UK government position themselves as guardians of development and international financing norms, seeking to uphold them through their AIIB involvement. This is exemplified statements made by the German government in 2019 and 2020, asserting that the AIIB complies with international standards as a multilateral institution, whereas the BRI as a Chinese-led initiative does not comply to these standards of transparency and sustainability.<sup>1883</sup> This assertion understates the inherent link between AIIB and the BRI, possibly serving to legitimize Germany's formal membership in the former. In the UK, by contrast, the link

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<sup>1878</sup> 03-22-2018-GBR-GO-PP-UKandHongKong: 3; 04-09-2018-GBR-GO-PR-Asia-UK: 2; 05-15-2018-GBR-GO-A-ChinaBeltRoadUKOpportunities: 2; 11-27-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol632: 33-34 – 6.55pm; 03-29-2017-GBR-GO-A-UKShowcases: 2.

<sup>1879</sup> 07-31-2019-GBR-GO-PR-BeijingExpo: 1.

<sup>1880</sup> 10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement: 4.

<sup>1881</sup> 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-DavidCameron: 3; 10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi, S. 2; 08-12-2015-GBR-GO-A-PhilipHammond: 2; 09-22-2015-GBR-GO-SP-GeorgeOsborne: 5-6.

<sup>1882</sup> 12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2; 07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440: 4; 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 20-21; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 15.

<sup>1883</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 27; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 29.

is clearly emphasized by calling the AIIB a “Chinese vehicle to invest in the new silk road”<sup>1884</sup>.

While the AIIB is closely associated with the BRI, the cross-party Foreign Affairs Committee in the UK parliament perceives it as a supplementary entity rather than a replacement or competitor to established institutions. However, the AIIB is construed as only a minor component of financing the BRI. Other Chinese-led banks such as the China Development Bank or the Exim Bank are noted by the FAC for their non-compliance to the comparable standards as the AIIB and tend to push Western donors out of BRI projects.<sup>1885</sup> Interpreting this, both nations subtly engage in an act of Othering, characterizing the AIIB as a reputable, multilateral institution aligned with international standards due to the support of Germany and the UK, while concurrently downgrading the BRI and other Chinese-led institutions. This dichotomy adds to the desecuritization of the former and contributes to the securitization of the latter by attaching the label of disrespecting norms and standards to the BRI. Moreover, this may be interpreted as safeguarding both European democracies’ ontological security as being loyal to the international rules-based order.<sup>1886</sup>

More indications for this interpretation are found in the numerous statements stressing that the BRI will realize its potential to foster prosperity and sustainable development if “it meets international standards”<sup>1887</sup>. By stipulating this as a precondition, the BRI emerges as a two-sided coin that can only land on the right side, if those standards are applied that have been established in consensus in an internationally recognized body, like the UN. This introduces conflicts of interests and political interpretations into the BRI, where even shared terminology between China and nations such as Germany and the UK may be subject to disparate interpretations, as outlined by Bandurski et al. in their *Decoding China Dictionary*.<sup>1888</sup> This pertains especially to human rights concerns, as previously underscored, along with discrepancies in project management protocols and labor rights practices across the countries. In both Germany and the UK, the gov-

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<sup>1884</sup> 10-29-2015-GBR-GO-HC-PDVol601: 20.

<sup>1885</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 15.

<sup>1886</sup> 07-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662: 36 - 6.36pm.

<sup>1887</sup> 01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang: 4.

<sup>1888</sup> Bandurski, et al. 2021: 3-5. Please refer to Chapter 5 and 6 for the Chinese perspective on some of the fundamental principles and potential normative divisions.

ernments expressed their discontent mainly through diplomatic utterances, adopting a neutral tone to advance dialogues on norms and standards with their Chinese counterparts.<sup>1889</sup> The German government explicitly formulated its opinion in 2018, stating that the assurance of sustainability standards in the BRI's planning and implementation remains insufficient.<sup>1890</sup> The 2nd BRF results were then received favorably by both governments: They appreciated China's commitments to better align the BRI with international standards declared by President Xi.<sup>1891</sup> Nevertheless, these expectations have not materialized, as evinced by the German government's response to a parliamentary inquiry in June 2020, stating that no tangible steps have been taken to fulfill the pledges made during the 2019 forum.<sup>1892</sup> Similarly, the UK government's stance on the BRI evolved into a more reserved position, most notably after the 2nd BRF, emphasizing its role in helping China uphold international standards.<sup>1893</sup> This approach further underscores the BRI's incapacity to meet these standards. Complementing this, a British expert hearing candidly noted that Chinese officials brushed aside any criticism voiced at the 2nd BRF, a situation resembling a rhetorical "whack-a-mole"<sup>1894</sup>.

Accordingly, parliamentary representatives outside the government in both countries have often taken a more critical stance. This is evident on diverse occasions in parliamentary debates, hearings, and written inquiries to the governments.<sup>1895</sup> Critical aspects are manifold. Instances of skepticism arise regarding the BRI and AIIB, viewing them as tools aimed at advancing a Chinese interpretation of human rights centered on the 'right to development'. This recontextualization of human rights is observed to dismiss external critiques of the CPC's human rights infringements and challenges the concept of the universality of all human rights.<sup>1896</sup> Through its global expansion, the BRI proliferates these undesirable norms, subverting any consensus on human rights as individual rights inherent to all people and democratic governance. This criticism is voiced in both

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<sup>1889</sup> 02-01-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi: 1.

<sup>1890</sup> 12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2.

<sup>1891</sup> 05-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910041: 39; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 3-4; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765: 47; 04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina: 1; 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2.

<sup>1892</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58.

<sup>1893</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVVol804: 3 - 11.18pm; 04-28-2020-GBR-HC-WA41169: 1; 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 1.

<sup>1894</sup> 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 14.

<sup>1895</sup> 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910777: 4.

<sup>1896</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs1917125: 18.

countries regarding China's conduct on the international stage as in the UN, in BRI target countries, and within its own borders.<sup>1897</sup>

These three domains appear interconnected in the analyzed documents: China is exerting influence within the United Nations, replacing human rights characteristics with its own ideas, such as the 'community with shared future for mankind'<sup>1898</sup>. The BRI is perceived to propagate these concepts and ultimately an alternative vision for the international order in its statutes across the globe. This includes the assertion of each state's right to pursue its own human rights development path, implying non-interference in other governments' domestic treatment of their populations.<sup>1899</sup> Linked to this is the refutation of the promise that the BRI comes with 'no strings attached', expressed in both German and UK documents. It is claimed that the 'strings attached' to the BRI do obligate recipients to refrain from speaking out on Chinese human rights violations and to generally subordinate themselves politically to Beijing.<sup>1900</sup> This applies to essentially all target regions, especially those nations in Europe, Africa, Asia, or South America that are already leaning towards authoritarianism. Accordingly, these arguments are used not only to warn against the BRI, but to justify greater attention of political ramifications by adopting measures such as stricter investment review mechanisms in the UK, Germany, and the EU.<sup>1901</sup> Especially in Germany, these statements also aggravate concerns over divisions in the European Union, as discussed in the previous section.<sup>1902</sup> An example provided for this claim is Greece's blocking of a joint statement by the EU at the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2017. This action was interpreted as a pro-Chinese stance perceived to be motivated by economic interests due to China's invest-

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<sup>1897</sup> 12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651: 47 - 3.27pm.

<sup>1898</sup> See Chapter 5 for more details on this and other Chinese concepts and norms connected to the BRI.

<sup>1899</sup> 11-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD09420: 17; 06-17-2020-DEU-Adrs191796: 35; 06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759: 12; 06-11-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1919883: 5; 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 14-16.

<sup>1900</sup> 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD: 47 - 4.30pm; 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 12; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 10-12; 03-21-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1989: 10504; 02-06-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol654: 12 - 10.05am; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 25 - 4.11pm.

<sup>1901</sup> 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD: 47 - 4.30pm; 09-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922471: 2; 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 262; 05-13-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1971: 22; 04-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1995: 11495; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 6.

<sup>1902</sup> A comprehensive assessment of this is provided in 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 10-12. In the UK, a similar concern was expressed by Labour MP Chris Bryant warning that China splits political alliances such as the EU with Italy's BRI MoU in 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 4 - 1.57pm.

ments in the Port of Piraeus.<sup>1903</sup> Accordingly, in those cases, where the BRI is perceived to reinforce economic dependencies and political alignment, concerns regarding human and economic security become intertwined, mutually reinforcing each other.

To foster political alignment and promote its alternative human rights narrative, Chinese actors are further described as projecting their narratives by expanding propaganda and acquiring foreign media in BRI target states.<sup>1904</sup> While the German government demonstrates a diplomatic stance on the issue, a written response conveys its concern that the dependencies created under the BRI may influence the target countries' positions and voting behavior in the UN, particularly in the Human Rights Council.<sup>1905</sup> A German expert statement correspondingly reported that China is encouraging positive assessments by BRI target countries in international supervision councils.<sup>1906</sup> In the UK, similar concerns were voiced regarding the BRI's use to foster political alignment in the UN, as smaller recipient states carry equal weight in votes compared to larger or more industrialized countries.<sup>1907</sup> Additionally, China has expanded its own presence in UN departments and agencies, as highlighted by Lord Alton of Liverpool, further suppressing citizen rights and international criticism.<sup>1908</sup> These statements enhance the shared securitized impression of the BRI as a tool for leveraging economic power to silence human rights criticism and tilt the global order toward a more authoritarian paradigm.

The concerns about the disregard of development norms and adverse impact of the BRI in target countries and in international bodies forming the backbone of the rules-based global order are often intertwined with discussions about human rights violations in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. On both fronts, a negative shift can be observed: Initially, during the early years of the BRI, optimistic or diplomatically neutral stances were common. These were only observed in UK documents that portrayed Xinjiang as a pivotal transit area potentially benefitting from BRI investments. Both of these 2015 documents stress the political fragility and violence in Xinjiang, which Beijing seeks to tackle with a dual approach of economic incentives and higher social spending and a ro-

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<sup>1903</sup> 08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540: 262; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191748: 16.

<sup>1904</sup> 06-05-2019-U-BT-ÖA-1935: 18; 10-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 22 - 4.37pm.

<sup>1905</sup> 06-25-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920411: 8.

<sup>1906</sup> 06-17-2020-DEU-Adrs191796: 36.

<sup>1907</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 17.

<sup>1908</sup> 10-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 22 - 4.37pm; 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD, S. 47 - 4.30pm.

bust ‘strike hard’ campaign against terrorism.<sup>1909</sup> Shifting to the second issue, Hong Kong is depicted as vital financial partner for the UK and a central hub for BRI collaboration, uniquely positioned to both contribute to and reap the benefits of the initiative. Numerous cooperation platforms, events and seminars involving British and Hong Kong representatives document the aspirations for joint green BRI financing and the internationalization of the RMB, especially up to 2018.<sup>1910</sup> However, as global attention intensified on the human rights situation in both regions, particularly from 2018 for Xinjiang and 2019 for Hong Kong, a more critical tone emerged. Coinciding with increasing reports about the detention of Uyghurs and mass protests in Hong Kong, German national-level political elites started to express their concerns in relation to the BRI in the collected documents. While the concerns linked to the BRI were more explicitly emphasized in Germany in relation to Xinjiang, discussions about Hong Kong were more prevalent in the UK.<sup>1911</sup> For Germany, this is related to public records of parliamentary hearings and related expert testimonies, as observed in the case study.<sup>1912</sup> On the other side of the English Channel, the UK’s heightened attention to Hong Kong stems from its historic ties and their roles as financial hubs, evident in regular high-level exchange forums and debates in Westminster.<sup>1913</sup>

Upon closer examination of both countries’ securitized statements, a shared interpretation emerges, underscoring that human rights violations in China, whether they happen

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<sup>1909</sup> 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2-3; 07-15-2015-GBR-GO-PP-ChinaUpdate: 2. The term ‘strike hard’ campaign was echoed in a public hearing in Germany. This highlights similar perceptions in Germany and the UK regarding perceived fragility in Xinjiang and Beijing’s adoption of more assertive policies to address it, albeit emerging later in the German discourse (11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 8).

<sup>1910</sup> 03-22-2018-GBR-GO-PP-UKandHongKong: 2; 12-18-2017-GBR-GO-R-HongKong-London: 1-3; 04-21-2016-GBR-GO-SP-WilsonQueen: 3

<sup>1911</sup> In 2015, only the two documents cited contained statements regarding the BRI and Xinjiang. There were no documents collected for 2016 and 2017 that linked Xinjiang to the BRI in Germany and the UK. From 2018 to 2020, the dataset included seven British and eight German documents, with two negative remarks from the former and ten from the latter country. Regarding Hong Kong, the disparity is more pronounced: No German document retrieved contained statements on the BRI and Hong Kong. Although no documents in the UK highlighted this relation in 2015, the issues have been co-occurring every year since 2016. Overall, the BRI and Hong Kong were extensively discussed in 31 documents in the UK, encompassing 42 utterances across the whole range of tones. In contrast, only seven documents were collected for Germany, containing seven statements (three neutral and four negative). These figures only provide a rough overview and should be approached cautiously. MAXQDA automatically tallies co-occurrences, which includes side notes on topics or on event venues, such as those in Hong Kong. Implicit remarks, which avoid direct mention of Hong Kong or Xinjiang and instead resort to diplomatic allusions, are not captured by the program’s automatic co-occurrence counts.

<sup>1912</sup> As discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>1913</sup> As discussed in Chapter 8.



in Xinjiang or Hong Kong, are perceived as direct and indirect challenges for Germany and the UK. The argumentative pattern can be summarized as follows: While some optimistic viewpoints suggest Xinjiang could benefit from its position as a key region for the BRI, this argument is also turned around, warning that the CCP's harsh measures against Uyghurs are deemed necessary and legitimate to ensure the smooth operation of the BRI in the region.<sup>1914</sup> Following this trail of thought, while the BRI projects in these regions are not described as directly violating human rights, the Chinese government's heightened political control and suppression are deemed directed to ensure the success of the initiative.<sup>1915</sup> Such actions are cautioned to backfire on the success of the BRI. While the British political elites strongly condemn Beijing's actions in both Xinjiang and Hong Kong, some are also calling upon Beijing's own stake in the BRI to change course. In several debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, both opposition and government party members point out that the BRI is being hampered by Beijing's damaged reputation due to the human rights breaches in these areas. This would reinforce mistrust of Beijing and ultimately undermine the willingness of other states' willingness to cooperate.<sup>1916</sup> The absence of this perspective in the analyzed German debates may be attributed to the UK's historically entrenched interests in safeguarding Hong Kong's autonomous status, a stance frequently emphasized in the cited documents. At first glance, this portrays a desecuritized outlook on the BRI and a readiness to collaborate for its success. However, these cautious remarks underscore a reevaluation of the BRI challenged by security issues compounded by Beijing's perceived misconduct. This shifts the focus of securitization towards the regime, which is also deemed responsible for undermining a global human rights consensus as discussed before.

In both Germany and the UK, the ongoing challenge of securing international condemnation for China's actions is similarly evident in discussions regarding Hong Kong and Xinjiang, often attributed to Beijing's perceived economic leverage. For instance,

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<sup>1914</sup> 06-29-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 47 - 7.00pm; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191749: 8-9; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 19.

<sup>1915</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191752: 4.

<sup>1916</sup> 06-18-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662: 7 - 2.04pm; 06-13-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 5 - 12.24p; 06-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 6 - 4.09pm; 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 34-35 - 8.01pm; 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 5 - 4.46pm; 04-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol658: 15 - 12.44pm; 02-11-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol795: 3 - 2.36pm; 01-29-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol653: 13-14 - 3.07pm.

Greece, Hungary and Italy are cited as refraining from calling upon these human rights aspects due to their interest in the BRI.<sup>1917</sup> These divisions are not only perceived as stemming from economic interests, but also criticized as deliberately orchestrated by China, which is leading to the erosion of democratic values by authoritarian actors from within and outside the EU.<sup>1918</sup> As highlighted in both case studies on Germany and the UK, Beijing's repressive policies in both Xinjiang and Hongkong, that are even mentioned in some cases in tandem, feed the narrative that China is exporting its human rights issues through the BRI, which poses a direct threat to "our democracy here at home"<sup>1919</sup>. Therefore, German and British stakeholders frame China itself as a challenge to the liberal Western order, for which it builds new dependencies through the BRI, making countries compliant and silencing critical voices. This contributes to the securitized impression that the BRI is a geopolitical instrument of China's increasing assertiveness.<sup>1920</sup> In a broader interpretation, this perception spurs shared concerns about a systematic rivalry among European national-level political elites that have been most prominently summarized in the European Commission's "EU-China – A strategic outlook" document of March 2019. This paper defines China as a partner, economic competitor and systematic rival promoting alternative models of governance. This triad has been found in European China debates ever since. This high-level EU document corroborates the findings of interconnected human security concerns over Xinjiang and Hong Kong, as these are mentioned in the very same paragraph. Here, the EU Commission notes with concern the deteriorating human rights situation in Xinjiang and calls on China to respect Hong Kong's autonomy.<sup>1921</sup>

Accordingly, the argumentative patterns on the BRI in the debates about Hong Kong and Xinjiang mirror to a significant degree the previously analyzed concerns connected to development paradigms and disregard of international standards as they feed into the overarching concerns about a systemic challenge. Former British Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, reinforces this interpretation. He highlighted the imperative to

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<sup>1917</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18am; 10-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 22 - 4.37pm; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 44

<sup>1918</sup> 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751: 15.

<sup>1919</sup> Own translation. Original: "Das birgt Gefahr, dass eben das chinesische System auch unsere Demokratie hierzulande gefährdet." (11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9).

<sup>1920</sup> 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20424; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 2; 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6 - 4.52pm; 11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939.

<sup>1921</sup> European Commission 2019: 1-2.

strike a balance between engaging China and speaking out against violations of international law and human rights amidst “a period of greater strategic competition”<sup>1922</sup>. Other high-level stakeholders, including Chair of the Defence Committee Tobias Ellwood, expressed even stronger apprehensions, warning that the repressive actions in Hong Kong, the treatment of Uyghurs and the BRI are indicative of a geopolitical authoritarian agenda. In his view, Beijing’s agenda will inevitably lead to a clash with the West and “another cold war”<sup>1923</sup>. This sentiment is echoed in statements from both countries characterizing the BRI as a component of China’s broader foreign policy picture, labeled as “imperialism”<sup>1924</sup> or a new form of “colonialism”<sup>1925</sup>, which spans from the domestic sphere of Xinjiang to Hong Kong around the globe.

These perspectives reflect an underlying Othering tendency in the studied negative remarks on the BRI in the human security category based on a dichotomy between democratic and authoritarian systems. This was similarly observed by Rogelja and Tsimonis in their analysis of European discourses of the China threat. According to their study, the normative incongruence channels the democratic identity of European stakeholders towards a threat construction against Chinese actors and policies (such as the BRI) as enablers of a hostile political order.<sup>1926</sup> These perspectives, revolving around the concern that the BRI is exporting China’s domestic violence, link back to the liberal peace assumptions discussed before. In this view, domestic authoritarianism equates to external aggression.<sup>1927</sup> These liberal peace assumptions notably mirror the securitized statements in Germany and the UK underscoring a shared belief system in line with the broader China threat discourse.

Furthermore, they imply a risk of a so-called clash of civilizations between Western and non-Western cultures, as coined by Samuel Huntington. Huntington’s argument also addresses internal assimilation policies by Han Chinese elites, which is mostly overlooked in the broader debates about an international clash of Western and non-Western

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<sup>1922</sup> 06-13-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 6 - 12.24pm.

<sup>1923</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm.

<sup>1924</sup> 10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 15 - 3.24pm; 03-21-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1989: 10504.

<sup>1925</sup> 03-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19149: 18644; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 5 - 3.08pm.

<sup>1926</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 104; 123.

<sup>1927</sup> Gu 2018: 124-125.

civilizations.<sup>1928</sup> The latter international dimension was echoed by several authors ever since, who fear a normative rivalry between the United States and the Western European sphere on one side and a (non-Western) Chinese-dominated political bloc on the other, as summarized by Enrico Fels.<sup>1929</sup> This great power rivalry could ultimately lead to a Thucydides Trap, as raised by Ellwood in the House of Commons, posing an urgent question for countries such as Germany or the UK.<sup>1930</sup> As elaborated in this chapter, this securitized vision is also related to the BRI, framed as a geopolitical tool of a rising, increasingly assertive China aimed at enhancing its economic leverage and disseminating rivaling or even revisionist norms and standards.

Overall, this section highlights that the BRI was widely discussed as an economic instrument for normative revisionism with distinct Chinese characteristics. This fosters a threat narrative wherein the PRC seeks to reshape the global political order in a manner that challenges fundamental norms and principles upheld by the two European democracies under scrutiny. The examined documents reveal an interconnection among China's domestic and international actions, underscoring that the intertwining of diverse challenges linked to the BRI amplifies the human security threat. The BRI is acknowledged for offering much-needed investments vital for economic development in Europe and other target regions. However, these investments are also discussed to have soured due to mismanagement—potentially amenable to Western assistance, according to some perspectives—or blatant disregard for basic human security. Those latter instances, where such neglect is linked to a perceived authoritarian domestic approach, are posing a systemic challenge to the liberal international order and can thus hardly be rectified through cooperation. The heightened prominence of these perspectives in both European nations coincides with the release of the 2019 EU China strategy, which advocates for a principled defense of interests and values in addressing China's systemic rivalry.<sup>1931</sup> While the BRI was embraced by optimistic voices as a blessing for development, critics regard it as a concealed poison. Should target countries swallow too much of this poison, they risk being contaminated with political dependencies, economic burdens, and human rights violations. This could ultimately pose an existential threat to democ-

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<sup>1928</sup> Huntington 1996: 121, 168-174.

<sup>1929</sup> Fels 2017: 3, 21-24.

<sup>1930</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 37 - 8.18pm.

<sup>1931</sup> European Commission 2019: 1.

racy as a political model, a securitized concern heightened by global attention on Xinjiang and Hong Kong, potentially elucidating the negative shift in BRI perceptions since 2018. Therefore, the decline in optimistic voices in both economic and human security categories may follow a similar trend as they are deeply entangled within the perceived overarching threat discourses. Nevertheless, the diverse debates surrounding Hong Kong and Xinjiang are accompanied by normative considerations that also extend to other security categories. These encompass a range of concerns linked to cyber security issues like Internet governance and environmental pollution, topics that will be addressed in detail in the ensuing section.

### **9.3. Military, Ecologic and Cyber Security: Little Attention for Grave Concerns**

Combining military, ecologic, and cyber security segments, totaling 75 across both countries, falls short of the high numbers seen in economic or human security domains. Consequently, these categories will be amalgamated into this joint section, although their significance as security concerns should not be underestimated by subsuming them in one chapter. Moreover, statements relating to these categories – particularly ecologic concerns – have already been observed in a neutral or diplomatic tone, what was previously conceived as veiled securitization. Furthermore, caution must be exercised regarding military and cyber security deliberations, as strategic political considerations frequently fall under confidentiality regulations. This limitation in interpreting securitization was particularly evident in Germany during a parliamentary inquiry, where the government cited national security and intelligence concerns to withhold information pertaining to cyberattack defense.<sup>1932</sup> Accordingly the numbers of these categories could be understated by their intricate nature to national security, which may indicate veiled securitization as a special form of desecuritization by silencing public debates on sensitive issues. Still, there are specific trends visible in Germany and the UK that shed light on the concerns behind this curtain.

Starting with statements in the ecologic security category, it is noticeable that the BRI's exact impact on eco-environmental aspects is hardly evaluated in most statements of both countries' national level political elites. Already in 2015, the Green Silk Road was

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<sup>1932</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 55.

founded and addressed by Xi Jinping at the 1<sup>st</sup> BRF in May 2017 after a series of concerns raised about the BRI's environmental impact.<sup>1933</sup> In this initial phase of the discourse, the political elites at the national level in both Germany and UK scarcely address the BRI's environmental record. The few remarks extracted from documents in both countries emphasize cooperation opportunities on clean energy, particularly in relation to potential trilateral projects under the BRI. This has been complemented by bilateral dialogue platforms such as the UK-China Clean Energy Partnership, which resulted in the signing of an Action Plan to facilitate ongoing collaboration between the two nations and extend it to projects in third countries.<sup>1934</sup>

Attention toward the BRI's environmental impact increased and shifted to the negative around 2018. All 33 segments coded in the documents for this category emerged from 2018 onwards, with 19 negative assessments in German publications and 14 in the UK.<sup>1935</sup> This aligns with the overall downward shift towards a more critical discourse on the BRI during this later period, as discussed earlier. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> BRF in 2019, the 'Green BRI' received significant attention, with a series of initiatives announced to address sustainability, climate change, and the environment. Researchers such as Carey and Ladislav attribute the heightened focus on these issues by the Chinese leadership to the intensified public discourse surrounding the BRI's adverse ecological impacts, which is mirrored by the negative tilt in our data.<sup>1936</sup>

At a quick glance, ecological security concerns related to the BRI are often grouped together with other issues in sentences or paragraphs, particularly in close relation to economic or human security concerns. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the codes for ecological, economic, and human security form a cluster.<sup>1937</sup> This is exemplary in an inquiry issued by the German Green party in 2020 that questioned the sustainability of the BRI in regards of "rising debt and violations of climate and environmental standards, labor norms, and human rights"<sup>1938</sup>. Similar enumerations, where the envi-

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<sup>1933</sup> Liu and Bennett 2022: 168; Carey and Ladislav 2019: 3.

<sup>1934</sup> 08-21-2018-GBR-GO-PP-ExportStrategy: 20; 12-18-2017-GBR-GO-A-EnergyDialogue: 1; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 5-6.

<sup>1935</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>1936</sup> Carey and Ladislav 2019: 6-7. As discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>1937</sup> Illustrated in the code maps in Appendix 7.

<sup>1938</sup> Own translation. Full original: "Doch angesichts steigender Verschuldung und der Verletzung von Klima- und Umweltstandards sowie Arbeitsnormen und Menschenrechten ist die Nachhaltigkeit vieler

ronmental impact is listed among other concerns without elaboration, are observed in both Germany and the UK.<sup>1939</sup> In Germany, the government clearly expressed its view that the BRI does not sufficiently adhere to international sustainability standards.<sup>1940</sup> This critical stance remained consistent in the documents: Berlin stressed that while the BRI could potentially contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it has failed to implement the welcomed reforms and sustainability initiatives following the 2nd BRF.<sup>1941</sup> As previously discussed, the UK government also welcomed the reform efforts of the 2nd BRF, but refrained from openly criticizing. Instead, the UK government representatives expressed their continued reservations in a diplomatically neutral manner during parliamentary debates and international events. This underscores the ecological dimension of the norms and standards discourse described in the previous chapter. During such occasions, exemplified by Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond' speech at the 2nd BRF, UK emphasized its willingness to help ensure the BRI is delivered in line with recognized standards of environmental impact and carbon emissions, which corresponds to the deficits raised by the German government.<sup>1942</sup> This may help explain why ecological security is notably absent from the 2020 UK documents. The neutrally coded yet consistently expressed references on the alignment of international standards are too subtle to be categorized as securitizing acts. Nonetheless, they conspicuously align with the environmental concerns of their continental counterparts, which indicates a desecuritization by casting them in terms other than security rather than indicating the resolution of the security concern.<sup>1943</sup>

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BRI-Projekte aus Sicht der Fragesteller mindestens fragwürdig" (06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 2).

<sup>1939</sup> 09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254: 27; 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 2; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 29; 06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759: 18; 07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471: 2; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 3-4; 11-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195477: 4; 12-11-2018-DEU-BT-WD14318: 2; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18; 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 5, 9, 12, 21, 23.

<sup>1940</sup> 12-04-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196328: 2.

<sup>1941</sup> 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 2; 07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471: 2; 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 4; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765: 47.

<sup>1942</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18pm; 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 1; 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 24 - 5.37pm; 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2; 04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina: 1.

<sup>1943</sup> This partly corresponds to Lene Hansen's 'change through stabilization'-form of desecuritization, where the larger conflict is not resolved but the security issue re-casted in other terms than security (Hansen 2012: 529).

Some yet few statements explicitly address the negative environmental impact, highlighting potential hazards, including loss of biodiversity, landscape deterioration, and environmental pollution resulting from infrastructure development such as roads, towns, and villages. These issues are regarded to be aggravated by weak governance and corruption in BRI target countries.<sup>1944</sup> In the UK, a K4D study delved deeper into the consequences of the Digital Silk Road. It sheds light on the contradictory nature of the BRI's impact, as it may facilitate smarter environmental management and adaption to climate change while also exacerbating issues such as e-waste and increased energy consumption due to digitization and economic development. Furthermore, the study notes that many Chinese companies operating along the BRI, including Alibaba, Baidu, and Tencent, primarily rely on coal and non-renewable energy sources, challenging the Sustainable Development Agenda.<sup>1945</sup>

Comparable concerns have been raised in other documents from Germany and the UK, urging consideration of the adverse effects of BRI projects involving coal-fired power stations abroad, which could potentially undermine the goals of the Paris Agreement.<sup>1946</sup> Despite environmental issues' overall low occurrence in the analyzed documents, it is evident that national-level political elites in both countries share these concerns over a potential undermining of the Paris Agreement and the broader UN SDG agenda if the BRI disregards environmental norms. This sentiment is echoed in the literature, suggesting that international criticism has tarnished China's BRI reputation, prompting Beijing to pivot toward a greener approach.<sup>1947</sup> This shift was viewed as having failed implementation by the elites under review, who kept demanding further adaption. However, there remains ambiguity regarding the BRI as it presents both opportunities and potential hazards for eco-environmental development. In the documents, China is portrayed as both "a key partner in renewable energy"<sup>1948</sup> and a potential violator of environmental protection, posing challenges to achieving a greener future. This is also mirrored in the statement by Tobias Ellwood in the House of Commons:

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<sup>1944</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 5; 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 10; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 26;

<sup>1945</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 21, 29, 31, 36.

<sup>1946</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 10-11, 58; 07-03-2019-GBR-GO-SP-RoryStewart: 7; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 9; 04-05-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1993: 11146.

<sup>1947</sup> Carey and Ladislaw 2019: 2. 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 12, 21, 34.

<sup>1948</sup> 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 7 - 3.43pm.



“There is a lot of duality in what China provides. It is providing some of the greenest capabilities in the world, but it is investing more in coal—it is building hundreds more coal-fired power stations at the very time when we need to wean ourselves off coal.”<sup>1949</sup>

These dualities are less evident in the military sphere within the data corpus, which will be examined next before exploring the least-discussed quality of duality of the BRI in cyber security. With just 28 coded segments, military security is the second lowest security category ahead of cyber security in the analyzed documents. In line with the overall negative turn, the military category emerged in both countries under review in 2018. It kept turning up until 2020, indicating the overall continuity of concerns voiced in this area. The German documents feature a higher number of military security statements, with 17 coded segments, compared to the UK, with 11 security statements.<sup>1950</sup> Examining them more closely in the following, the British statements indicate a slightly more alarmed attitude as they convey the perception of being directly affected by the BRI’s military implications, whereas the German statements convey military security concerns in a more distanced view regarding overall geopolitical tensions, particularly with the United States.

The geopolitical implications of infrastructures built under the BRI indeed provide a shared starting point for this category in both countries. Both countries’ national-level political elites caution that the BRI serves as a tool of military expansionism designed to extend China’s sphere of influence. Since the earliest documents examined in this study, the perception of the BRI as a geopolitical tool has been noted in a non-securitized context, reflecting a sober assessment of China’s perceived intentions.<sup>1951</sup> This further accentuates the negative shift observed over time, as the geopolitical or strategic intentions behind the BRI are frequently occurring watchwords to issue warnings in the military category.<sup>1952</sup> This negative tilt by 2018 can also partly be attributed to the ‘debt trap’ news about the strategic takeover of the Hambantota port in 2017, as Sri Lanka is mentioned in the statements of this category.<sup>1953</sup> This issue is part of overarching con-

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<sup>1949</sup> 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 32.

<sup>1950</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>1951</sup> 12-07-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs187016: 46.

<sup>1952</sup> 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6 - 4.52pm; 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 18; 04-12-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1996: 11562; 10-22-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914340: 3; 11-28-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1915567: 2; 12-11-2018-DEU-BT-WD14318: 12; 01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788: 95 - 9.19pm.

<sup>1953</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 18; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 16; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 18.

cerns about territorial conflicts in the South China Sea, which emerges as a prevalent keyword in the military coded statements. Within these territorial conflicts, the BRI, notably the Maritime Silk Road, is perceived as a strategy for China to extend its physical reach by constructing ports and accumulating greater influence over disputing states, both bilaterally and within international organizations.<sup>1954</sup> Djibouti, China's inaugural foreign naval base, is mentioned alongside speculations regarding the future of ports in Vanuatu, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.<sup>1955</sup> While these statements often express apprehensions about the potential military dimension of port infrastructures as naval bases, only implicit references are made to the dual use of BRI infrastructures and technologies.<sup>1956</sup>

In the context of these growing military-strategic capacities, the BRI debate in Germany and the UK concentrates on three states that are seen as challenged in their security: India, the USA, and Australia. The statements from Germany and the UK share a common thread on these countries, which can be summarized as follows. Firstly, India stands out as the nation most apprehensive about the geopolitical and military ramifications of the BRI. Engaged in a territorial dispute with its neighbor Pakistan, a significant recipient of BRI investments, India faces heightened Chinese influence and bolstered capabilities within its vicinity. Tensions between India and China themselves are further exacerbated by Beijing's growing power under the BRI. Additionally, India faces the risk of having its maneuverability constrained by strategically positioned BRI ports dominated by China. There are even concerns, encapsulated in the concept of the 'string of pearls', about the potential for a military encirclement. Consequently, India has thus far declined involvement in the BRI and voiced concerns about the BRI towards its international partners, such as the USA.<sup>1957</sup>

Secondly, the USA is depicted as a global hegemon concerned about maintaining its status relative to China. The apprehension revolves around a perceived erosion of pow-

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<sup>1954</sup> 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6 - 4.52pm; 10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 15 - 3.24pm; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 19; 03-20-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1934: 23; 01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788: 95 - 9.19pm; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 21-22.

<sup>1955</sup> 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678, S. 7; 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685, S. 6. 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14, 19.

<sup>1956</sup> During the observation period, no further official military structures were created or civilian BRI structures were converted into such.

<sup>1957</sup> 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 2; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 17, 19; 10-24-2019-DEU-BT-BTTP19121: 14992; 12-18-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196609: 3; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16-17.

er, notably evident in international organizations and maritime domains. In the maritime domain, the USA asserts its influence via its worldwide network of naval bases, which is perceived to be challenged by China's naval capacities and facilities extended under the BRI. These concerns align with the previously examined normative power competition between the two great powers. As indicated in the documents, this rivalry has markedly escalated during the tenure of US President Donald Trump.<sup>1958</sup> Consequently, one of the assumed military-geopolitical drivers behind the BRI is "to hedge against American containment in China's near seas."<sup>1959</sup> While the issue is neither discussed in-depth in Germany nor in the UK, this reference might point to the US' capability to block the Malacca strait, which is China's main energy import lane. This military projection capability was built up by the USA with a global network of military bases. In reference to China, some US military installations, including those in South Korea, Japan, Australia, and Guam, are described as a "C-shaped ring of encirclement."<sup>1960</sup> To bypass this American-controlled first island chain and the Malacca dilemma, some scholars claim that China develops BRI infrastructures like the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, connected by transportation routes extending to Xinjiang.<sup>1961</sup> This geopolitical interest in the BRI is rarely discussed in the documents of both countries, conveying instead a sober assessment of Beijing's perceived vital drivers without raising military or economic security aspects as analyzed in the academic literature.<sup>1962</sup> Especially, in the UK, the geostrategic dimension is absent in the statements on the business and cooperation opportunities in the CPEC, as discussed in its case study chapter.<sup>1963</sup>

Moreover, ways to hedge against American containment are implicitly related to China's fortifications of infrastructures on islands in the South China Sea. These include military facilities on the Paracels and Spratlys, which have intensified concerns about the potential 'weaponization' of BRI port infrastructures to the detriment of the USA, as

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<sup>1958</sup> 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6 - 4.52pm; 04-12-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1996: 11562; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16-17.

<sup>1959</sup> 04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 17.

<sup>1960</sup> Zhou and Esteban 2018: 492.

<sup>1961</sup> Garlick 2020: 185; Zhou and Esteban 2018: 492-493.

<sup>1962</sup> 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 11; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 8, 16, 23; 12-17-2018-DEU-BT-WD15418: 12.

<sup>1963</sup> See Chapter 8.

highlighted in a report by Russel and Berger.<sup>1964</sup> However, the specific term of weaponization is not present in the documents, where the attention on these islands is more directed toward a broadly perceived contentious issue with China, alongside concerns about China's increasing closing on Australia.<sup>1965</sup>

So, thirdly, summarizing similar statements in Germany and the UK regarding the BRI's military implications for Australia, the primary concern centers on China's efforts to expand its maritime boundaries by flouting international law, including the 2016 UNCLOS ruling. Like in the case of India, there are apprehensions that China is gradually encroaching upon Australia. The country is also described as notably anxious about Chinese penetration into various aspects of daily life and the economy.<sup>1966</sup> At this point, however, perceptions diverge, suggesting in the UK a sense of personal involvement through emphasis on its alliance with Australia. Placing this in the context of other British statements regarding the BRI's perceived impact of weakening of alliances, the UK's membership in the Five Eyes, and calls for action in partnership with the USA, the UK's own military involvement and indirect concerns about the BRI's military implications become evident.<sup>1967</sup> In these examples, the urgency of the security threat is also emphasized by the use of words such as 'we' and 'our'. This is further supported by the demands of the FAC and its Chair, Tom Tugendhat, to the UK government to improve communication regarding military deployments in the Indo-Pacific, clarifying their purpose of upholding the principle of freedom of navigation. Greater efforts in communication are deemed necessary to mitigate hostile Chinese perceptions that these deployments aim to contain its rise or provoke direct military confrontation.<sup>1968</sup>

A similar sense of military involvement is largely absent in the German statements despite some similar interests. For instance, the 2020 Indo-Pacific guidelines of the Federal Government imply some converging interests with the UK in the region. The paper advocates for broadening EU cooperation formats and NATO partnerships with coun-

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<sup>1964</sup> Russel and Berger 2020: 26, 28

<sup>1965</sup> 10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 15 - 3.24pm; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 5 - 3.08pm; 7 - 3.44pm.

<sup>1966</sup> 10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 15 - 3.24pm; 06-26-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792: 6 - 3.44pm; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16-17.

<sup>1967</sup> 12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 6 - 4.52pm; 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 - 11.18pm; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18; 06-26-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792: 6 - 3.44pm.

<sup>1968</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 2 - 1.57pm; 04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 3.

tries like Australia or India. However, these issues are neither directly related nor mentioned in proximity to the BRI, which is discussed under connectivity, economic, and environmental aspects.<sup>1969</sup> In terms of connectivity, akin to the UK's Pakistan statements, German remarks also touch upon the BRI but with a distinct emphasis. They link the BRI with aspirations for infrastructure investment and development in Afghanistan, where Germany was militarily involved at the time. These statements view the BRI as a chance for stabilizing and fostering peace in both Afghanistan and the broader region, aligning with sentiments expressed in the British documents. However, the concept of third-party market cooperation under the BRI in Afghanistan is only briefly touched upon, further emphasizing the cautious stance of German national-level elites.<sup>1970</sup> Moreover, a 2019 briefing by the German delegation at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly echoes a similar desecuritized approach. Their report to the Bundestag includes the proposal that NATO shall assess the potential integration of the BRI into its Building Integrity Program and increase consultations with China.<sup>1971</sup> This parallels the British demands for better communication towards Beijing on military deployments in the Indo-Pacific.

In other documents, the distanced attitude in Germany becomes even more apparent, when the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of the USA, Australia, India, and Japan is described as a reaction to China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific area in relation to the BRI. This depiction refers more to the military security perceptions of other nations than to Germany's own concerns.<sup>1972</sup> The literature attributes Germany's reluctance to its weaker historic ties to the region compared to the UK and France. However, with increased activities by these key allies alongside the USA, Germany has also augmented its military engagement, evident in the deployment of a frigate in 2021-22, with the Indo-Pacific guidelines serving as a central foundation.<sup>1973</sup> This could provide a mandate for future research that could examine how the UK and Germany link their changing engagement in the Indo-Pacific to China and the BRI.

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<sup>1969</sup> 09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254: 7-9; 26-27.

<sup>1970</sup> 01-08-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916389: 2; 12-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916225: 1; 03-09-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs191120: 18; 04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy: 5 - 4.34pm; 03-09-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs191120: 18

<sup>1971</sup> 01-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs-197307: 5.

<sup>1972</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16.

<sup>1973</sup> Sakaki 2024: 55-56.

Overall, the military security category focuses on the BRI's capacity to establish both tangible and intangible influence for China in recipient nations, potentially paving the way for the BRI's militarization. A militarization of the BRI could yet also be an unintended consequence of insecurity in the target states according to the FAC. Instances where BRI projects are targeted by separatists or protesters, as seen in Pakistan, may prompt China to deploy armed forces to safeguard its investments.<sup>1974</sup> This necessitates the demanded dialogue formats by the FAC between the governments. Notably, government representatives in both Germany and the UK refrain from discussing the negative implications of the BRI for military security in the analyzed documents. Instead, they primarily offer desecuritized perspectives that underscore cautious attitudes toward the military implications of the BRI. Nevertheless, assessing these implications is challenging due to the secretive nature of national security calculations in the military realm.

This limitation was noted at the outset of this chapter regarding the cyber security domain, which will be further explored in the following lines. A brief overview of the data for this category reveals that the BRI's impact on cyber security is largely underrepresented in both countries, with only 14 segments coded. This disparity is particularly evident in Germany, where only two segments were recorded in 2020, while in the UK, the issue was addressed annually between 2018 and 2020 in national-level documents.<sup>1975</sup> The emergence of the statements in the UK in 2018 and recurrent concerns over Chinese proliferation and vendors of 5G technology through the DBAR underscore the 5G technologies' central role in this area. This significance persists despite the overall little attention given to the cyber dimension of the BRI, which also concerns both countries' broader 5G discussions where the DBAR is conspicuously absent. Even when considering the non-securitized statements on the BRI cyber implications, the DBAR has received limited attention in both countries. This highlights a notable attention gap, especially given the assessment by Chief of Defence Staff General Sir Nick Carter in December 2020, who suggested that the DBAR could "probably be the most influential element of the Belt and Road Initiative"<sup>1976</sup>.

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<sup>1974</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 16.

<sup>1975</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>1976</sup> 12-17-2020-GBR-GO-SP-NickCarter: 2.

Comparing the two German cyber security statements with their British counterparts reveals a significant overlap. Both countries express concerns about illicit knowledge transfer through cyber espionage, acquisitions of companies by Chinese actors, and political and economic espionage in BRI target countries that use Chinese 5G technologies.<sup>1977</sup> This brief outline encapsulates two dimensions of cyber security concerns: concerns about being targeted and affected by the BRI at home and security risks posed to other BRI countries. Both dimensions share a common root cause evident in the analyzed statements, which is the intricate relationship between the CCP government and Chinese companies. Most companies, like Huawei and ZTE, which are considered significant players in the BRI, are not perceived as private entities in a Western sense; rather, they are regarded as either state-owned or state-controlled in both Germany and the UK.<sup>1978</sup> Even beyond the issue of ownership, their connections to the state pose concerns. Chinese companies and foreign companies acquired by Chinese investors are obliged to assist in state intelligence-gathering and data sharing under Chinese cybersecurity laws. This notion of Chinese laws has fueled fears that Chinese companies install and exploit backdoors and other vulnerabilities to fulfill their duty of supporting the Chinese authorities.<sup>1979</sup> Accordingly, information security is compromised even before a BRI project is launched, as no consumer data is deemed safe from Chinese government access.

An example of this is provided in a British study pointing to the cooperation between Zimbabwe and China. Zimbabwe implemented a Chinese surveillance system to combat crime, drawing criticism from observers of its potential infringement on civil liberties. In addition, reports surfaced that the Chinese company transferred the facial identity data from this system to China, using it to used enhance its software algorithm without citizens' consent.<sup>1980</sup> On another occasion, British MP Julia Lopez stated that during a visit to Huawei's Shenzhen facility, she was "rather alarmed by how some of the facial recognition technology was deployed"<sup>1981</sup>. These issues are intrinsically linked to competing notions of Internet governance within a broader human security discourse. China

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<sup>1977</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 55.

<sup>1978</sup> 12-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924927: 6; 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm; 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 67 - 3.52pm.

<sup>1979</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 15, 25.

<sup>1980</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 15.

<sup>1981</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 16 - 5.25pm.

generally advocates for stronger state control under the slogan of ‘internet sovereignty’. This approach of internet sovereignty along with the implementation of surveillance mechanisms, sparks concerns that the DBAR promotes unfree internet and technologies, which would strengthen authoritarian governments whilst disempowering citizens. This stands in contrast to the multi-stakeholder governance concept favored in Western countries, which might be coined a clash of cyber cultures in a free reinterpretation of Huntington.<sup>1982</sup>

The British documents cite such data handling practices and state connections as reasons for countries like the USA and Australia banning Chinese 5G equipment from their networks. Moreover, these state links are said to have raised reservation, leading traditional donor countries to hesitate in collaborating on digital BRI projects. This entails the risk of a bifurcation of the digital sphere between richer countries banning Chinese technologies and poorer countries that are drawn into the Chinese sphere of influence by low-priced digital infrastructures according to the documents.<sup>1983</sup> This once more links to the normative power struggle described in the human security section.<sup>1984</sup> Substantiating this observation, the combined code map generated from MAXQDA shows the human security category most frequently aligned with cyber security, despite cyber security generally being the most distant from other categories.<sup>1985</sup> Following this connection, the British documents warn that China is pursuing a geopolitical authoritarian agenda in cyberspace, aiming to establish itself as the dominant cyber power. Thereby, Beijing would ultimately subject all countries using Chinese technologies under totalitarian surveillance.<sup>1986</sup> These statements mirror US apprehensions regarding the alleged ‘digital authoritarianism’ fostered by the DBAR. It articulates well the frame bridging of the human and cyber security fields. This key phrase highlighted by Heidbrink and Becker is nevertheless absent in both British and German BRI segments.<sup>1987</sup> Without reaching the same outspoken escalation, the coded European perceptions of Chinese endeavors in the digital realm align with the US concerns as they encompass cautionary

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<sup>1982</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 6, 38.

<sup>1983</sup> 12-17-2020-GBR-GO-SP-NickCarter: 2; 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 15, 34.

<sup>1984</sup> See Section 9.2.

<sup>1985</sup> See Appendix 7.

<sup>1986</sup> 12-17-2020-GBR-GO-SP-NickCarter: 2; 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm; 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 67 - 3.52pm.

<sup>1987</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 322.



remarks about the digital infrastructure expansion, setting proprietary technical standards, state-led cyberattacks, espionage, and strategic takeovers.<sup>1988</sup> This sentiment is echoed in the warning concerning China's ambitions made by Lord Truscott: "If it cannot buy up our high-tech industries, it is not above trying to penetrate them through covert means."<sup>1989</sup>

In the broader context of power rivalry, these cyber security challenges amplify military apprehensions in the UK, particularly as China bolsters its PLA cyber forces.<sup>1990</sup> Chair of the Defence Committee Tobias Ellwood proposes to address these challenges with broader Western initiatives, possibly spearheaded by the Five Eyes alliance, to offer secure alternatives to Chinese technologies. However, this approach risks exacerbating the divide between Western and non-Western technological spheres.<sup>1991</sup>

In contrast, the K4D report by Gong, Gu, and Teng advocates for collaborative advancement of digital projects. Challenging the authoritarian notion of the DBAR, the report contends that the constructed digital infrastructure and services foster more accessible and equitable public administrations.<sup>1992</sup> While this report displays a notably optimistic outlook on the BRI's promises, both 2019 K4D studies underscore the DBAR's potential to bridge the digital gap between developed and developing countries, necessitating efforts to address digital disparities beyond physical infrastructures, including digital literacy.<sup>1993</sup> Both reports, along with other statements on cyber security and cooperation, overlook some existing cooperation programs on the sub-national level. For instance, the MoU between the British satellite telecommunications company Inmarsat and the China Transport Telecommunication Information Centre, aimed at providing satellite services across China and the BRI, received no further public attention in the collected documents following its announcement in 2015.<sup>1994</sup> Overall, the nuanced K4D assessments on the DBAR as well as sub-national cooperation programs

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<sup>1988</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 55; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 15; 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 27 - 1.14pm.

<sup>1989</sup> 01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788: 95 - 9.19pm.

<sup>1990</sup> 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 27 - 1.14pm; 01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788: 95 - 9.19pm.

<sup>1991</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm.

<sup>1992</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 2, 4, 7.

<sup>1993</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 7-8; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 4.

<sup>1994</sup> 10-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-Chinesestatevisit: 2.

highlight the ambivalence of the issue, which remains challenging to evaluate in the public discussions and documents at the national level in Germany and the UK.

In the outset of reviewing securitization literature on scales of securitization, Buzan and Wæver warned that some inclusive securitizations may operate across different security sectors but may remain incomplete within the individual sectors.<sup>1995</sup> Comparing the low number of security segments in the military, ecological, and cyber security domains to the extensive economic and human security implications issued, the result indicate thematic imbalances in securitization and desecuritization. This is particularly evident in the political disputes within the ecological dimension, where the BRI is framed as both an opportunity and a threat to sustainable environment and climate change policies. These counterframings underline the lack of persuasiveness of securitization in this area. This is also expressed in both European countries with hopes for partnering with China on environmental questions while issuing diplomatic demands for the integration of (environmental) standards in BRI projects. Comparable patterns are observed in the cyber security realm, which yet reveals little attention of the BRI's digital implications by both countries' national-level political elites. Similar to the military dimension, it can be assumed that general concerns about China's foreign policy tend to increase over time, as reflected in the respective discourses on Huawei and Indo-Pacific engagement. Nevertheless, the securitized perceptions toward the BRI remain barely visible in the documents until the end of the observation period, which means that the BRI can generally be considered as not successfully securitized in both countries, at least in these fields. However, this statement must also be taken with a grain of salt, as some actors choose to remain silent or do not have permission for public securitization.<sup>1996</sup> Especially in view of the steep decline in positive and neutral statements on the BRI in both countries in 2020 and the reference to the confidentiality of sensitive national security information at the outset of this section, the question arises to what extent the BRI's securitization or desecuritization can be clearly attested.

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<sup>1995</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 258.

<sup>1996</sup> Balzacq et al. 2016: 509.

## **10. Revisiting the Three BRI Security Discourses Lines in Germany, UK, and China**

In their seminal book on securitization, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde highlighted that security sectors shall be reassembled into a holistic picture in the last step of the analysis to provide a coherent assessment of their relation.<sup>1997</sup> This brings together the diverse BRI perceptions from China, Germany, and the UK derived from the respective national-level publications and scientific assessments from the reviewed BRI literature in this chapter. These three dominant discourse lines derived from Chapter 3 underscored that the BRI may either be challenged by security issues, tackling security issues or creating security issues. In this order, we will proceed reviewing each of the three security lines, which supports the reaggregation of security perceptions and signaling patterns beyond Daase's security issue categories without losing a nuanced picture.

These three lines provide, nevertheless, a heuristic-intellectual structuring rather than a clear-cut boundary, as the analyzed issues frequently cross and connect the discourse lines. This fosters an understanding of how Wendt's social act of signaling and receiving is mirrored in official BRI presentations and national-level political elite debates. In this way, we can identify areas of agreement and disagreement among Germany, the UK, and China. The following sections demonstrate a significant gap in the BRI security signaling from all sides despite some converging interests, which helps to explain the overall low-level cooperation between the three countries under the BRI framework. Moreover, it will be demonstrated and explained that neutral-coded speech acts featuring a balanced account or diplomatic attitude do not automatically point to desecuritization. This presents avenues for future research, which are further explored in the concluding chapters of this study.

### **10.1. The BRI Is Challenged by Security Issues**

This first discourse line derived from the literature review highlights that the BRI is challenged by security issues. This first and also the third line of discourse, that the BRI is creating security issues, can be found almost exclusively between the lines of the Chinese documents, which paint an overall positive picture of the project's effects. For

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<sup>1997</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 8, 17.

one, this corresponds to the mandate to tell the Chinese story well.<sup>1998</sup> For another, this pattern can be interpreted as a deliberate omission of points of contention and a simultaneous reinterpretation of opportunities for cooperation on security problems in line with the second line of discourse. Accordingly, the Chinese signals highlighted in this chapter are mostly loosely or indirectly connected to this discourse line and are derived by exercising caution and triangulation with existing research.

To commence this exploration, the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative emphasized in its 2019 progress report: “Peace and security are the prerequisite and guarantee for building the Belt and Road.”<sup>1999</sup> In the following lines, the report calls to intensify counterterrorism efforts by addressing its root causes, such as poverty and underdevelopment. To jointly oppose terrorism, separatism, and extremism, the report contains stipulations to discard a ‘Cold War mentality’ and power politics.<sup>2000</sup> These and related security challenges are articulated in diverse Chinese documents, depicting the complex global and regional security challenges that China is attentive to.<sup>2001</sup> Although these are not explicitly articulated as key challenges the BRI faces, these elements resonate with the components described in the academic literature and German and UK statements. The first aspect highlights violence created by development divergences within and between countries, the second zooms into this challenge by singling out the three evil forces, and the third underscores the challenges produced by power rivalry. These three aspects are often interconnected and not easily distinguished, as will be demonstrated in the following.

Starting with the first aspect, Clarke’s analysis found the BRI sets out to manage both domestic and international sources of insecurity.<sup>2002</sup> Beijing is described as utilizing development strategies such as the BRI to safeguard its position and promote a more harmonious political environment operating under the assumption that contented citizens are less likely to revolt against their leadership.<sup>2003</sup> This simplified formula blends into the broader political concepts of a harmonious society (‘hexie shehui’) and the impera-

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<sup>1998</sup> Chan and Song 2020: 424; Gloria 2021: 498.

<sup>1999</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>2000</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50-51 (04-22-2019-OD).

<sup>2001</sup> 09-27-2019-PR.

<sup>2002</sup> Clarke 2019: 1-2; Clarke 2018: 85.

<sup>2003</sup> Clarke 2018: 92; Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 268.

tive to maintain stability (‘wending’), as underscored in Chapter 6.<sup>2004</sup> This rationale for action is linked to the second discourse strand, which states that the BRI addresses security issues. It is based on a security-development nexus, which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter. In fact, both discourse strands are intricately intertwined because the BRI is challenged by some security threats it aims to address.

While these aspects are not explicitly at the forefront of the respective national-level discourses in Germany and the UK, several statements in both countries recognize the challenges for the BRI. Even at first glance, it is evident that the BRI faces various mundane challenges, such as numerous administrative obstacles, customs procedures, and a dearth of technical standards that affect every cross-border project.<sup>2005</sup> Completely absent in the Western BRI statements is the shared challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas a Chinese document called it a “common challenge for humanity”<sup>2006</sup>. In the Chinese dataset, seven documents in 2020 contain statements on COVID-19.<sup>2007</sup> Especially, a June 2020 high-level BRI video conference on combating COVID-19 indicated that this area is of common concern for BRI countries and workers on the ground.<sup>2008</sup> These challenges, along with funding and debt issues, have caused delays or halts in several large-scale infrastructure projects.<sup>2009</sup> There is thus a significant number of ‘white elephant’ projects that did not even pass the planning phase, which is further attributed to weak supervision structures according to the literature.<sup>2010</sup>

As outlined in the UK’s case study, these challenges are interpreted as a business opportunity for British legal, technical, and financial advice.<sup>2011</sup> In 2018, the China-Britain Business Council (CBBC) estimated that the UK could gain £1.8 billion annually by increasing its involvement in the BRI.<sup>2012</sup> Upon closer examination of the British documents, it is discovered that the CBBC is a significant advocate for enhanced UK participation in the BRI and, thus, the widespread business opportunity narrative. The business

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<sup>2004</sup> Garlick 2020: 114; Brown 2018: 216-217.

<sup>2005</sup> 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 4.

<sup>2006</sup> 03-17-2020-BD.

<sup>2007</sup> 03-17-2020-BD; 06-17-2020-BD, 06-18-2020-OD, 08-24-2020-BD, 11-18-2020-OD, 12-10-2020-BD, 12-22-2020-OD.

<sup>2008</sup> 06-18-2020-OD.

<sup>2009</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 6; 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 6.

<sup>2010</sup> Rolland 2019c: 218; Zhao 2019: 2; Xin and Matheson 2018: 4258.

<sup>2011</sup> 06-28-2018-GBR-GO-A-UKbusinesses: 2; 06-29-2018-GBR-GO-SP-AldermanCharlesBowman: 3.

<sup>2012</sup> 06-28-2018-GBR-GO-A-UKbusinesses: 2.

association is mentioned 13 times in seven documents in the British dataset. It actively fosters BRI engagement by hosting international workshops, conferences, and dinner events, sharing commercial cooperation information, and providing practical advice for UK firms.<sup>2013</sup> Although their strong advocacy role is corroborated in some studies, it remains largely overlooked in the analyzed literature.<sup>2014</sup> Notably, the CBBC is absent from the collected 2020 documents, aligning with a discernible negative shift and decline in the business opportunity narrative.

In contrast, German stakeholders are more cautious about being involved in these challenges than their British counterparts. Private and public business associations such as the Federation of German Industries (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V., BDI) or Germany Trade and Invest (GTAI), which also hosts webinars on business opportunities for German enterprises, also appear in this context. However, they act less prominently in the analyzed documents and even criticize possible market distortions caused by the BRI and missing financing standards.<sup>2015</sup> In addition, the BDI proposed initiating a foreign policy offensive aimed at establishing an EU alternative to the BRI.<sup>2016</sup> In January 2019, the BDI released a policy paper two months ahead of the EU's strategic outlook, characterizing China as both a partner and a strategic competitor. This characterization denotes a firm European lobby stance as it employs a strikingly similar wording of its ambivalent perspective on China. Subsequently, this terminology was adopted by the Merkel administration to articulate the German government's position on China.<sup>2017</sup> Accordingly, both the government and BDI adopt a careful stance toward the BRI, emphasizing the necessity of cooperation while regarding Chinese companies as competitors rather than a threat.<sup>2018</sup> This ambivalence aligns with the prevalent wait-and-see attitude observed in the German case study. Röhr explains that this tentative stance is rooted in the prevailing political indecisiveness among Berlin's

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<sup>2013</sup> 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 22; 06-28-2018-GBR-GO-A-UKbusinesses: 2; 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 22; 03-29-2017-GBR-GO-A-UKShowcases: 1; 04-05-2017-GBR-GO-A-DITroundtable: 1; 11-15-2016-GBR-GO-SP-GregHands: 2; 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 1-2.

<sup>2014</sup> Lunn and Curtis 2020: 13; Van der Putten et al. 2016: 64-65.

<sup>2015</sup> 03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137: 12-13; 09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254: 26; 03-28-2019-ENU-BT-WD03919: 4, 8.

<sup>2016</sup> 03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137: 14.

<sup>2017</sup> Biba 2020: 541.

<sup>2018</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020: 449.

political elites, ambiguous terms of BRI participation, and the limited capacity of German enterprises to execute large-scale infrastructure projects on foreign soil.<sup>2019</sup>

Consequently, the British approach strongly emphasizes national commercial interests, whereas the German approach seems to prioritize the European perspective. Overall, in both the German and UK contexts, there were calls for proactive engagement and developing an action plan to address the BRI, as outlined in case study chapters 7 and 8. From a positive perspective, both cases underscore the potential of engagement to meet the challenges the BRI is confronted with, influence its trajectory, and yield commercial advantages. Conversely, dissenting perspectives advocate for strategies to counter the initiative or propose alternative approaches to address the security implications associated with the BRI, which will be thoroughly examined in the third section of this chapter. At this point, however, it should be emphasized that some local security challenges would also affect any alternatives to the BRI, as the security situation in some BRI target countries is unstable. This is likewise acknowledged in the reviewed German and British documents, which describe the diverse and difficult security situation in BRI target countries in Central Asia or Africa, encompassing terrorism, organized crime, and corruption.<sup>2020</sup>

These significant risks that fragile environments pose for Chinese investments shed more light on the reasons for Western hesitancy to engage or invest in these countries. Especially, terrorist threats in Afghanistan and Pakistan are mentioned in both German and British documents. China shares borders with both countries, which hold the potential for cross-border terrorist activities to sweep into the already fragile Xinjiang region. Thus, securing and investing in developing its immediate neighborhood may also foster security in China. Accordingly, China was assigned a potential role in forging an intra-Afghan mediation with the Taliban.<sup>2021</sup> This brings us back to Clarke's argument that the BRI embodies a convergence of domestic and foreign policy priorities. Furthermore, aligning with the aforementioned business opportunity narrative, British Chancellor

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<sup>2019</sup> Röhr 2021: 199, 203-204, 208.

<sup>2020</sup> 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 13; 07-30-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs193622: 2.

<sup>2021</sup> 02-25-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198031: 18; 12-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916225: 1.

George Osborne said during his 2015 visit to Urumqi that the UK plans to strengthen BRI trade ties, aiming to support regions like Xinjiang in unlocking their potential.<sup>2022</sup>

The press report on the chancellor's visit yet leaves out the question of how investments and infrastructure in fragile environments are to be protected. For Pakistan, for example, violent attacks by separatists and protesters on BRI projects have been noted in a UK document. These attacks are viewed as a challenge to the progress of the BRI and could result in militarization as Chinese stakeholders feel the need to secure their investments with armed forces.<sup>2023</sup> Scholarly literature more intensively discusses this challenge. They highlight several insurgent attacks involving the Baluchistan Liberation Army and other violent incidents when Chinese workers have been killed. These could be signs of rising Sinophobia provoked by the growing Chinese presence.<sup>2024</sup> In previous instances, such as in 2016, this has prompted China to deploy PLA forces to ensure the security of CPEC projects.<sup>2025</sup> Linked to this, some studies contend that Beijing's anti-terror campaigns in Xinjiang are connected to their interest in safeguarding their BRI investments.<sup>2026</sup>

Arguing in a similar direction, some statements are made on the Chinese 'strike hard' campaigns against terrorism in Xinjiang and against protesters in Hong Kong, which relate to Beijing's domestic concerns about the three evil forces. In the former region, German and UK documents recognize incidences of violence, including a 2014 series of terrorist attacks in Kunming, a 2015 suicide bombing in Guma County, and an attack on a police checkpoint in Kashgar City. Accordingly, the establishment of re-education camps is connected in both German and British documents to the CCP's rationale to ensure stability and secure Xinjiang as a regional BRI transit hub.<sup>2027</sup> While Beijing's concerns regarding terrorism are deemed legitimate, their policies targeting primarily Muslim Uyghurs are similarly condemned as unacceptable, brutal violations of the UN

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<sup>2022</sup> 09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina: 2.

<sup>2023</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 16.

<sup>2024</sup> Garlick 2020: 154, 193; Wolf 2020: 151; Zhao 2019: 275; Arduino and Gong 2018: 21.

<sup>2025</sup> Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 274.

<sup>2026</sup> Zhao 2019: 6; Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 275; Brewster 2017: 285-286.

<sup>2027</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9, 13; 06-29-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 47 - 7.00pm; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 19; 07-15-2015-GBR-GO- PP-ChinaUpdate: 2.



Convention on Human Rights in both German and British debates.<sup>2028</sup> From a different angle, some voices in the UK showed concern about the potential damage that these measures could have on China's international reputation and the implementation of the BRI, which runs through several Muslim-majority countries.<sup>2029</sup> Although these voices do not promote the securitization of the BRI itself, they warn that securitization and opposition might be the result.

We find a comparable argumentation line in the case of Hong Kong. While this is a major concern in the UK, the central concerns highlighted in the previous human security category analysis in chapter 9 were largely mirrored in German national-level documents. The noteworthy aspect of this section lies in the statements by British Minister Field that remind Chinese actors that it is in their interest to ease their hold on Hong Kong to avoid jeopardizing the BRI.<sup>2030</sup> In the case study from the UK, it was evident that there were substantially compatible interests between the UK and China in fostering the financial integration of the BRI as part of the five BRI connectivities (wutong), for which Hong Kong played a vital role. As Summers' analysis demonstrates, these British efforts and indignations did not lead to success but instead highlighted a lack of leverage vis-à-vis Beijing.<sup>2031</sup> Despite lacking the UK's historical ties to Hong Kong, a similar observation can be made for the German context. This indicates that the human rights debates in Hong Kong and Xinjiang fostered a general disillusionment with China and facilitated a closer alignment with the US. However, it is evident that there was still a general willingness to cooperate with the BRI, especially on the part of Great Britain. Although these views on the challenges to the BRI are not widely shared in the discourse, they underscore a potential pragmatic approach to cooperation. This approach, however, lost momentum as the two campaigns progressed. As interpreted in the German case study, these examples signify a severe security dilemma: By addressing the challenges to the BRI and improving domestic security, Beijing's measures backfire and create more insecurity.

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<sup>2028</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs1917125: 7; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 19; 01-29-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol653: 13 - 3.07pm.

<sup>2029</sup> 01-29-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol653: 13 - 3.07pm; 02-11-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol795: 3 - 2.36pm; 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 34-35 - 8.01pm.

<sup>2030</sup> 04-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol658: 7 - 12.44pm; 06-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 6 - 4.09pm; 06-13-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661: 5 - 12.24pm.

<sup>2031</sup> Summers 2020: 282.

Accordingly, both case studies have evinced that these two areas prompted grave security concerns in Germany and the UK, as they are not exclusively viewed as Chinese domestic issues but as instances of actively exporting human rights problems and challenging the liberal Western system and silencing critical voices.<sup>2032</sup> Beijing's actions sparked value-based opposition to the Chinese political system and perceptions that the BRI functions as a vehicle to disseminate it. The BRI is, therefore, subject to two concurrent perspectives, one addressing the challenges to its realization and the other regarding the BRI itself as a catalyst for these threats, as can also be observed in other discursive contexts.

Particularly in fragile environments, it is feared that the weaknesses of the BRI could be further exacerbated by local oligarch networks. By offering investments without tying them to good governance conditions, the BRI might inadvertently fuel those insecurities that are challenging its progress and that it sought to mitigate.<sup>2033</sup> Corresponding statements relate to different geographical contexts, be it Africa or Asia, whereby the German statements frequently refer to the European context. Tackling corruption seems to constitute an area of overlapping interest, mentioned as such in the Chinese 2019 progress report and highlighted as an important outcome of the 2nd BRF by the German government.<sup>2034</sup> In this context, a controversial debate persists regarding whether this challenge rather represents a form of 'strategic corruption', wherein Chinese actors actively exploit and foster corrupt structures in support of China-friendly policies.<sup>2035</sup> In a more generous view, Chinese companies are generally perceived as more risk-prone than their Western counterparts to invest in countries struggling with an unstable political situation. This is related to a 'Going out' mission Beijing supports with massive subsidies and a business mentality that more risk promises higher returns.<sup>2036</sup> These claims extend into the third line of discourse, which will be discussed later, warning of the dangers posed by the BRI. In a broader picture, this international business strategy and its geopolitical implications provoked sour remarks by opposition representatives that

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<sup>2032</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9; 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDV01797: 34 – 35; 8.01pm; 11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939.

<sup>2033</sup> 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 11.

<sup>2034</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 64 (04-22-2019-OD). 08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192: 3.

<sup>2035</sup> 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 13; 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 9.

<sup>2036</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 15; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 10.

the German and the British governments have so far neglected to invest in some regions and have failed to respond adequately to the BRI.<sup>2037</sup>

These geopolitical implications are being discussed in Germany and the UK in relation to various power dynamics that implicitly challenge the BRI, which are largely absent from the Chinese documents. This is particularly obvious by reviewing each country's BRI positions related to India, Russia, and the USA. According to scholarly literature and analyzed Western datasets, these powers have the capability and some geopolitical interest to challenge the advancement of the BRI.<sup>2038</sup> With the exception of the USA, relations with China's neighbors are generally framed positively in the collected Chinese documents. Although India has refrained from officially joining the BRI, the Chinese documents signal its implicit inclusion in the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor as part of its six major BRI corridors.<sup>2039</sup> Further cooperation was undertaken in the BRICS format, highlighting regular consultations that also involved Russia, Brazil, and South Africa.<sup>2040</sup> The collected dataset does not propose any substantial collaboration under the BRI with New Delhi, indicating the difficult nature of the relationship between the two countries. This was evident in a joint statement between China and Pakistan, during which the Kashmir dispute was deliberated demonstrating the delicate situation.<sup>2041</sup>

This is more explicitly addressed in Germany and the UK, where India's antipathy of the BRI, the scenario of a 'string of pearls' as well as the crossing of BRI projects through the contested territory of Kashmir have been discussed.<sup>2042</sup> Once more, these issues spill over into the third discourse line as the challenge to the BRI arising from geopolitical skepticism and opposition is, to a great extent, caused or intensified by the initiative itself. Several of these statements in both countries seem to deliberately avoid criticism by adopting a sober tone, eschewing direct attribution of blame to BRI or Chi-

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<sup>2037</sup>12-19-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19137: 176; 09-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19111: 13676; 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 5 - 4.46pm; 05-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 13 - 5.09pm; 01-31-2019-ENG-BT-BTPP1977: 8935; 05-17-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1933: 3141.

<sup>2038</sup> Chan and Song 2020: 427.

<sup>2039</sup> 05-10-2017-OD: 10; 05-2017-OD: III. Framework; 06-20-2017-OD: 3-4; 07-2016-OD: IV. Priorities for Cooperation.

<sup>2040</sup> 11-18-2020-OD.

<sup>2041</sup> 03-17-2020-BD.

<sup>2042</sup>10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 16; 06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD: 1-2; 10-22-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914340: 3; 12-18-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196609: 3, 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 7; 01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619: 26 - 1.09pm.

na. Moreover, the heightened security concerns regarding the BRI providing China with a military advantage are emphasized in documents related to India, as well as other countries such as Australia, Japan, and the USA.<sup>2043</sup> As discussed in the cross-category analysis, the German documents exhibit a more reserved perspective on alliance implications involving these states compared to the British. Nevertheless, some German statements point to India as a potential alternative facilitator for regional infrastructure projects and emphasize its significance as a like-minded (democratic) partner.<sup>2044</sup> Despite their historical ties, British proposals to strengthen ties with India for an alternative collaboration platform are virtually non-existent, although it seems political elites harbor similar thoughts compared to Germany.<sup>2045</sup> Instead, the hope that the BRI could have a positive transformative effect on the trilateral relationship between China, Pakistan, and India is only expressed in the House of Commons.<sup>2046</sup>

Turning to Moscow, the Chinese documents positively portray their relations, emphasizing Russia's importance as a key partner and expressing a desire for closer ties. This sentiment is reiterated in relation to their partnership in BRICS, collaboration in the Arctic, and several specific projects along BRI economic corridors crossing Russian territory.<sup>2047</sup> Reflecting cautious optimism, German State Secretary Ederer described potential trilateral cooperation, citing a German-Russian solar project in Tajikistan funded by the Chinese Silk Road Fund.<sup>2048</sup> At first glance, the BRI appears to be less challenged than promoted by this power relation, though this becomes more complicated on closer inspection.

The majority of BRI-related statements, including those by the State Secretary himself, focused on the ambiguous relationship between the two major powers rather than seeking to establish new project partnerships. The convergence of interests and complexities for Russia and China to align their EEU and BRI programs has been noted. This sparked concerns regarding the potential of these projects, especially the EEU, to exac-

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<sup>2043</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16.

<sup>2044</sup> 11-13-2019-DEU-BT-WD12019: 5; 10-24-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19121: 14991-14992; 11-19-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs195837: 2.

<sup>2045</sup> 11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787: 19 - 9.14pm.

<sup>2046</sup> 01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619: 26 - 1.09pm.

<sup>2047</sup> 06-18-2020-OD; 11-18-2020-OD; 09-27-2019-PR: 4. Developing global partnerships; 04-22-2019-OD: 10, 17; 05-10-2017-OD: 13-14; 03-28-2015-OD: III. Framework.

<sup>2048</sup> 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 5-6.

erbate divisions with the West and create a political bloc that rivals the EU. Russia's role in the BRI is yet described as a double-edged sword for the country: The initiative has helped Moscow bypass Western sanctions to some extent, but Russia plays only the role of a junior partner with concerns about China's growing economic penetration in its traditional spheres of influence. This dynamic gives China more leverage over Russia, although any collaboration is also perceived to balance Moscow and Beijing's conflicting interests.<sup>2049</sup>

Given its vast territory, longstanding historical and cultural connections in Central Asia, and robust military capabilities, Russia has the capacity to act as a "geostrategic gatekeeper"<sup>2050</sup>. Based on the content analysis, it can be inferred that China is pursuing a strategy of co-opting Russia and leveraging this role in Central Asia through the BRI. The obstacles to realizing cooperation, as highlighted in the German and British statements, point to the limitations of this approach. However, these Western documents primarily scratch the surface of this dynamic, despite vital concerns voiced about Russia as a threatening actor, warranting a more comprehensive parliamentary debate of this relationship under the BRI.

Ultimately, great power competition between China and the USA provides a challenge to the BRI in virtually all security realms. Washington's potential to challenge the BRI in order to maintain its global hegemony is also a common theme in Chinese academic literature.<sup>2051</sup> China even addresses the USA directly in its documents to choose cooperation and "abandon the Cold War mentality"<sup>2052</sup>. In both Germany and the UK, the USA's opposition to the BRI is frequently addressed, albeit in various ways. This ranges from a sober assessment of growing transatlantic wariness to more securitized calls for efforts to bolster relations with Washington. Both European countries are thus considering Washington's security concerns vis-à-vis the BRI, but these did not prevent them from joining the AIIB. Still, Washington's opposition to this engagement has been outlined in some analyzed segments, potentially limiting each country's engagement

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<sup>2049</sup> 11-17-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924390: 6; 12-16-2019-DEU-BT-WD13419: 13; 05-2019-GBR-HCCom2243: 12-13; 10-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs194758: 12; 06-28-2017-ENG-BT-BTPP18242: 24834; 05-11-2016-DEU-BT-WD03016: 1, 4, 11-12; 12-07-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs187016: 46-47; 03-24-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol760: 8 - 4.21pm.

<sup>2050</sup> Heidbrink 2022: 467.

<sup>2051</sup> Wang 2019b: 97; Wang 2017: 218.

<sup>2052</sup> 09-27-2019-PR: Developing global partnerships.

willingness. Furthermore, the statements indicate that the USA presents a formidable security challenge for China with its capacity to block sea routes, such as the Malacca Strait. In this context, the BRI is described as opening up essential alternative trading routes for Beijing's energy and other supplies.<sup>2053</sup> In the reviewed materials, the dynamics of power competition are thus quite evident, while Cold War rhetoric is notably missing from German and British BRI statements. The exception is a speech by Tobias Ellwood, who cautioned against entering another cold war and even called for another Sputnik moment for the West to wake up to China's geopolitical challenge.<sup>2054</sup> On the contrary, some officials from Germany warn against forming new bloc divisions, while still advocating for a more value-based *realpolitik* in relation to China.<sup>2055</sup>

Taking a holistic perspective of this section, the BRI is found to be challenged by security issues in practical ways, violent pushback on the ground, spiraling insecurity in terms of a security dilemma, and as a consequence of rising security concerns in relation to power rivalry. While most challenges are only implicitly described in Chinese BRI releases, German and British stakeholders debate these topics more concretely, except for the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtually all of these aspects point out that the BRI is challenged by security issues that it sought to address in the first place, linking it to the second discourse line. In a more pessimistic view, the BRI is considered in the evaluated Western debates and publications to be causing or compounding these issues, which will be subject to analysis in the section dedicated to the third discourse line.

## **10.2. The BRI Tackles Security Issues**

The second discourse line contending that the BRI tackles security issues is the most prevalent in Chinese documents. As we have established in Chapter 6, this view is premised on an understanding that development solves security issues. The security-development nexus is virtually omnipresent in the Chinese releases, which present the BRI as a vehicle for managing joint non-traditional security issues such as social unrest, terrorism, piracy, and global environmental challenges surrounding climate change.

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<sup>2053</sup> 10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 16; 09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582; 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 20; 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 11; 04-12-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1996: 11562; 04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 27; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 16; 11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015: 7.

<sup>2054</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38 - 8.18pm.

<sup>2055</sup> 09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172: 21582; 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20424; 06-28-2017-ENG-BT-BTPP18242: 24834.

This is also reflected in the most frequent security terms, including non-traditional security, social security, or food security in China's dataset. However, while these specific terms are abundant in Chinese publications, they are hardly reflected in British and German documents.

Only one document from the UK in the dataset refers to food security and social security. It agrees with the Chinese view that the BRI could be transformational for BRI countries and their food security situation; however, only "if implemented well."<sup>2056</sup> The same document reports on the Chinese and Zimbabwean views that BRI technologies benefit social security in tackling robberies and other crimes. On the downside, these technologies are reported to affect individual freedoms adversely and may bolster repressive government capacities.<sup>2057</sup> This example underlines a divergence between the Chinese cooperation priorities and benefits for security and German and British discourses. The cautious attitude reflected in this single document taking up the specific social and food security terms suggests underlying normative concerns. This might be explained by Foot's assertion that the Chinese security-development nexus prioritizes stability over all other goals, including protecting individual human rights.<sup>2058</sup> This is, in turn, gravely at odds with the Western human security-focused development approach.<sup>2059</sup>

Beyond that, more normative differences between Chinese development paradigms and those favored by Germany and the UK are reported in the literature that offer an explanation for the discursive patterns in our data. The Chinese approach favors government-to-government relations for fostering a top-down approach to development, equaling it to infrastructural and technological modernization. Western donor countries, on the other hand, broadly favor reform-oriented good governance and a bottom-up approach. Accordingly, normative aspects such as social safeguards are considered central prerequisites for any development projects.<sup>2060</sup> Several German and UK statements reflect this by calling for better integration of human and labor rights in BRI projects, as highlighted in the previous chapter 9. These divergent approaches are certainly challenging to in-

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<sup>2056</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 30.

<sup>2057</sup> 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 29.

<sup>2058</sup> Foot 2019: 159.

<sup>2059</sup> Bandurski et al. 2021: 34-36.

<sup>2060</sup> Bandurski et al. 2021: 22-23.

tegrate. In a broader picture, this mirrors a normative divide in economic development and globalization concepts between the state-driven version preferred by China and the company-driven approach by the US reproduced in Germany and the UK.<sup>2061</sup> The division in the discourses indicates the need for communication mechanisms for exploring cooperation opportunities despite disparate political preferences for a shared problem: The demand for more international investments and effective development strategies.

Indications of a shared awareness of the problem and a certain degree of convergence between Western reactions and Chinese signals are reflected in the documents' positive and neutral statements. In particular, the hopes voiced in German and British documents on Afghanistan or Pakistan align with the general security-development idea. In both contexts, the respective elites proposed to bolster international BRI cooperation to facilitate development and stability.<sup>2062</sup> Even Tobias Ellwood, previously cited as one of the fiercest critics of China in the UK, saw huge opportunities for the whole region, including Afghanistan, in the BRI. At the same time, he also warned that extremism and terrorism could undermine these opportunities.<sup>2063</sup> This connects this discourse line to the former saying that the BRI might be challenged by security issues, which could effectively impede it from tackling these security issues. This appears tautologic at first but may be interpreted as a call for action to jointly advance the BRI to ensure its positive effects for aiding root causes of insecurity.

Similarly, the German government cautiously supported the idea of third-party market projects to support civil stabilization, reconstruction, and development in Afghanistan.<sup>2064</sup> Specific cooperation offers have not been proposed in the documents under review. Instead, a 2020 German government statement welcomes investment in infrastructure and efforts towards stability and development but also refers to the introduction of international standards, transparency, and sustainability.<sup>2065</sup> According to Harnisch, this shows that the German government initially had an optimistic attitude toward the BRI. His analysis shows that as early as mid-2017, Beijing's normative and

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<sup>2061</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 323; Noesselt 2018a: 46-48.

<sup>2062</sup> 02-25-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198031: 5; 2-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916225: 1; 08-16-2018-GBR-GO-PP-PakistanTradeExportGuide: 6; 08-14-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField: 7; 04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy: 5 – 4.34pm; 04-23-2015-DEU-BT-BTPP18100: 9570.

<sup>2063</sup> 04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy: 5 - 4.34pm.

<sup>2064</sup> 03-09-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs191120: 18.

<sup>2065</sup> 01-08-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916389: 2.



political influence along the BRI, especially in Europe, caused skepticism in Berlin, which is consistent with our observations.<sup>2066</sup>

A similar trend can be observed in the UK. Here, government representatives expressed a much more positive attitude toward the BRI, which initially corresponded to the generally proclaimed Golden Era of UK-China relations. Several statements are presented in the case study suggesting that especially the City of London is ideally placed to harness mutual benefits within trilateral BRI projects.<sup>2067</sup> This was supported in Westminster by a bipartisan all-parliamentary group for the China-Pakistan Corridor in 2018 and 2019. Chairperson Faisal Rashid echoed the government's narrative of a well-placed natural partner for the BRI. He qualifies that the UK's cooperation

“must be tied to a commitment to uphold human rights, as well as social and environmental protections. (...) At the heart of the BRI is a spirit of mutual co-operation, but China can best embody that spirit by acting with more transparency, embedded in the rules-based international order.”<sup>2068</sup>

This again illustrates the normative divide mentioned above, which seems to widen over time. In both Western countries, this shift coincided with a general decline in positive perceptions of the BRI. This downward trend in Germany and the UK is similarly found in several studies including García-Herrero and Schindowski, Biba, Summers and Turcsányi and Kachlikova.<sup>2069</sup>

While these are tied to normative considerations surrounding international standards in the broadest sense in both countries, the deterioration of perceptions is particularly obvious in the shifting tone of the UK's statements offering to help to ensure the BRI's implementation. These changed over time, particularly from 2019 on, from enthusiastic collaboration offers to sober diplomatic statements, as highlighted in the case study in chapter 8.<sup>2070</sup> These statements align with van Noort and Colley's observation of a 'China helper'-attitude in the UK. They see this attitude tied to a sense of ontological superiority.<sup>2071</sup> Accordingly, the negative shift in perceptions observed in this study

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<sup>2066</sup> Harnisch 2018: 40-43.

<sup>2067</sup> 08-21-2018-GBR-GO-PP-ExportStrategy: 20.

<sup>2068</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 5 - 4.46pm.

<sup>2069</sup> García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 14, 30; Summers 2021: 104; Biba 2020: 540-543; Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 74-75.

<sup>2070</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18pm.

<sup>2071</sup> Van Noort and Colley 2021: 56.

might be interpreted to be caused to a great extent, but not exclusively, by grave irritations of another ontological pillar in the UK's China-relation, which is their history towards Hong Kong.<sup>2072</sup> This interpretation is reinforced by studies such as Summers', which emphasize London's historical connection to Hong Kong and soft partisanship with the protesters.<sup>2073</sup>

Tying these different observations together, third-party market cooperation under the BRI provided an area of overlapping interest between China, Germany, and the UK. As highlighted in each country's documents and the scientific documents under review, this cooperation could tackle joint security concerns in the BRI's target countries.<sup>2074</sup> However, this common interest was not regularly pronounced between the governments, as seen from the comparably few explicit third-party market cooperation offers. In addition, possible positive effects for their own security in Germany and the UK, for example, in the joint handling of environmental and climate issues in the BRI, were scarcely included in the documents during the entire observation period. On the contrary, the analysis finds some disagreement about the BRI's environmental impact between China and the two European countries. European counter-narratives substantiate this, underscoring perceived missing international standards and negative environmental effects.

This area of ecological implications revealed a striking discrepancy in perception between China and the European democracies examined in the analysis, both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the Chinese documents, the environment ranked among the most frequent issues to be addressed by the BRI as common challenges, including environmental pollution, degradation or climate change policies. Providing a new concept of ecological civilization, the community of common destiny is extended to the eco-environmental sphere in the Chinese documents.<sup>2075</sup> These concepts do not impose strict environmental targets or regulations on the participants but aim for a collaborative, government-led approach to environmental management.<sup>2076</sup> With this, the Green BRI follows China's long-held approach of 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities', claiming an independent handling of the environment and cli-

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<sup>2072</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 111.

<sup>2073</sup> Summers 2022: 279.

<sup>2074</sup> Wang 2017: 181, 183-185.

<sup>2075</sup> 05-08-2017-OD; 05-14-2017-OD\_2.

<sup>2076</sup> Liu and Bennett 2022: 175-176.

mate action proportionate to a country's development status.<sup>2077</sup> Promoting these concepts under the BRI, China created an ever-evolving list of 'Green' guidelines, programs, and cooperation forums. Some scholars, such as Ladislav and Carey, view this engagement for a BRI 2.0 peaking at the 2nd BRF as an answer to international pressure against the general unsustainability of the BRI.<sup>2078</sup> Consequently, China elevated the BRI as a platform to address environmental security issues jointly and adapted it to the criticism that the BRI caused harm to the target countries' eco-environment.

Still, these actions' underlying principles and inherently voluntary character were met with reservations in the West.<sup>2079</sup> China's role in climate governance and the BRI's overall environmental record is ambiguously displayed in our dataset, as evinced in the case studies and the cross-category analysis. In terms of quantity, these issues are less prevalent in European than in Chinese documents.<sup>2080</sup> The discrepancy is even more obvious in the securitized perceptions, where the environmental category receives little attention. From a positive viewpoint, China is a key partner that plays an important role in global climate action. This is accompanied by acknowledgments about green actions under the BRI, especially after the 2nd BRF. From an opposing viewpoint, China is presented as a global polluter, aggravating the international situation with the BRI. Particularly in the aftermath of the 2nd BRF, the German government demonstrated its disappointment over little or missing action by China living up to its environmental and sustainability promises.<sup>2081</sup> In the German case study, we coined this narrative of China being an 'irresponsible stakeholder', which is connected to a wider array of missing sustainability in the BRI. In the UK, national-level elites have both been critical of China's construction of coal-fired stations along the BRI and showing commitment to fostering green investments and standards in the BRI.<sup>2082</sup> Summing up, the environmental area

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<sup>2077</sup> Xueji 2021: 118.

<sup>2078</sup> Carey and Ladislav 2019: 1-2, 6-7.

<sup>2079</sup> Ladislav 2019: 2.

<sup>2080</sup> An automated search of all 1421 tone coded segments in MAXQDA for the keywords environ\*, ecolog\*, Umwelt, ökolog\*, Klima, climate, coal, Kohle, Kraftwerk, and solar only returned 131 findings in 40 out of 204 documents. This number also includes several segments with more than one key-word.

<sup>2081</sup> 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58.

<sup>2082</sup> 03-12-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol802: 16 - 4.44pm; 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 7 - 3.43pm; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765: 47; 06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910783: 2; 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 16; 04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina: 1; 04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond: 2.

was met with great duality in the European countries that barely corresponded to China's signals for a collaborative approach to address eco-environmental security issues under the BRI. These ambivalent views correspond largely with the EU's 2019 strategic outlook, which aims to engage China to meet common responsibility for managing climate change.<sup>2083</sup>

Still, both European governments demonstrated their economic interest in fostering the inclusion of their country's companies in third-party market projects in the BRI. In this area, the Chinese signals for the role of European countries, as observed in Chapter 6, are congruent with the receptions of Germany and the UK, representing an area of cooperation where 'ego' and 'alter' views converge. However, these common areas of interest were not widely recognized (sometimes even disputed) among the political elites, particularly the governments, so that the congruence lacked the legitimizing power for an official state joining of the BRI. While the German government more staunchly called for better participation opportunities for European companies, the positive narrative of the BRI as a business opportunity was quite prominent in the UK until 2019. This stronger emphasis by the UK is corroborated by its 2019 Departmental Memorandum of Understanding between the UK's DIT and China's NDRC on infrastructure cooperation in third countries.<sup>2084</sup> Meanwhile, the UK's government clearly drew a red line to a national MoU stating that it "no plans formally to join the BRI"<sup>2085</sup>. The German government, too, dismissed the notion of a BRI MoU due to its reservations about fair participation, absence of standards, lack of transparency, sustainability issues, and disregard for EU regulations.<sup>2086</sup>

The reluctance to enter into a national MoU is thus in line with the securitized perceptions of the countries over time. At the end of the observation period, both countries' respective governments and parliamentary parties largely reject a national MoU. At the same time, sub-state cooperation or single departmental agreements are promoted and

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<sup>2083</sup> European Commission 2019: 2-3.

<sup>2084</sup> 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 2; 09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue: 17.

<sup>2085</sup> 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 1.

<sup>2086</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 1-2.

included in BRI-related business MoUs.<sup>2087</sup> The patterns of deteriorating attitudes lead to the inference that as soon as the countries' ontological security pillars were irritated, optimism for joint action to tackle security challenges using the BRI eroded due to growing concerns about the security threats induced by the BRI. This leads us to the third discourse line, which will be examined in the next section.

### **10.3. The BRI Creates Security Issues**

The third discourse line claims that the BRI creates security issues. While this section echoes the main findings of the previous cross-category comparison, it is dedicated to fostering the next higher degree of abstraction regarding how and why the BRI is perceived as the root of insecurities. In this area, the Chinese documents do not offer any direct statements, which would contradict its positive framing and the imperative of “telling the Chinese story well,”<sup>2088</sup> as underscored in the previous section. Consequently, this chapter centers on the German and British statements, which will be triangulated and further interpreted with the broader scholarly landscape – including Chinese literature. At this point, the central findings of the analysis need to be reiterated to promote a broader interpretation of the results before the threat narratives are presented. This way, oversimplification and overgeneralization of the results are avoided because the focus of this discourse line risks falling into a negative bias.

To start with, we found that in both cases, securitized perceptions have been virtually absent in the initial year of the review. The coding further revealed that the variety of securitized perceptions jumped from a minimal degree to substantial in Germany and even comprehensive in the UK in 2018. The level of securitized expressions varied over the years, gradually intensifying in the UK and reaching the upper medium level by 2020. In contrast, Germany featured a substantial thematic variety but low intensity of securitized statements in the same year. These tendencies suggest a growing and multifaceted discourse about security issues created under the BRI, but the findings of the cross-category and previous discourse lines yielded great asymmetry in the nature of securitizing actors, attention to security topics, and the desecuritizing views. In Germany,

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<sup>2087</sup> 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 2; 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18pm; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 18-19; 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 2; 08-16-2018-GBR-GO-PP-PakistanTradeExportGuide: 6; 10-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-Chinesestatevisit: 2.

<sup>2088</sup> Huang and Wang 2019: 2984-2985.

the analysis bore out the observation that opposition parties, particularly the liberal FDP, have been more explicit than the government in warning about the security issues created by the BRI.<sup>2089</sup> The German government frequently maintained a diplomatic stance but also grew more critical of the BRI over the years. In some of those diplomatically articulated statements, the government chooses to remain vague in its statements or promote the EU-Connectivity Strategy rather than respond to critical questions about the BRI.<sup>2090</sup>

In the UK, the gulf between the government and parliamentarians in both chambers is greater than the divide between representatives from the Labour and Conservative parties. Representatives from all parties – minority and independent members included – express a range of criticism, neutral remarks, and optimistic views on the BRI. The UK government transitioned from enthusiastically embracing the BRI to a more cautious and reluctant approach, mirroring the shift seen in its German counterparts but from a more upbeat starting position.<sup>2091</sup> This is further evidenced by the pattern that no positive statement has been issued in the UK in 2020 at all, whereas the most specific warnings about “significant threats”<sup>2092</sup> or “possible dangers”<sup>2093</sup> of the BRI are issued by non-governmental stakeholders. Similarly, in both countries, members of the parliament complained that either their governments or the EU lacked strategic will for a common response to the BRI.<sup>2094</sup> This indicates that non-government stakeholders can voice more critical opinions about the challenges related to the BRI and their countries’ policies due to their institutional position, which renders them more visible securitizing actors in the analyzed national-level political arenas.

In addition, scientific reports and expert consultations were most detailed about the BRI in both countries and included the highest density of codes per document as evinced in the respective country case studies. The reports cover the widest range of assessments

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<sup>2089</sup> See Section 9.1 on economic security.

<sup>2090</sup> E.g., 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 11; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 27; 02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707: 2.

<sup>2091</sup> See Section 9.1 on economic security and chapter 8.

<sup>2092</sup> 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 67 - 3.52pm.

<sup>2093</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657: 4 - 1.57pm.

<sup>2094</sup> 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20438; 01-28-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916820: 1; 05-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 13 - 5.09pm; 09-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19111: 13676; 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 49; 06-27-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19107: 13284; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932: 27; 01-31-2019-ENG-BT-BTPP1977: 8935; 06-27-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs192996: 1; 05-17-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1933: 3141.

from various sources. They specifically assessed how China reacted to certain security issues that were not addressed in parliamentary debates, such as stricter regulations under the March 2018 NDRC 11 guidelines or the policy revolution towards the Green BRI.<sup>2095</sup> Their balanced assessment does not mean that they did not contribute to the debate about security issues created by the BRI, as they addressed several negative aspects of BRI projects that were not covered in parliamentary and government sources. For example, the German Scientific Service was the only entity that studied the failure of investments in Sihanoukville, Cambodia.<sup>2096</sup> These documents have a dual effect on national-level political debates, as evinced in the country case studies. Some mitigate security concerns by emphasizing the economic or development advantages of the BRI and cautioning against exaggerated risk narratives.<sup>2097</sup> Other scientific reports perpetuate threat narratives such as the debt trap diplomacy or ‘string of pearls’, while certain expert testimonies in the field of human rights portray extremely negative views of the BRI to national parliaments and governments.<sup>2098</sup> By and large, parliamentary debates and government statements do not delve deeply into the topic and provide a comprehensive assessment. This is partly due to the nature of the matter, as these are speeches or written statements of a shorter scope, and partly due to the lack of public national parliamentary debates on the BRI. In total, 31 of the 304 documents collected feature the topic of BRI in their title. The 14 German documents were only published in 2019 and 2020, while the 17 British documents cover the period from 2016 to 2020, including 6 in 2018 and 8 in 2019.<sup>2099</sup> These documents encompass inquiries, scientific studies, and government publications. However, between 2015 and 2020, not a single parliamentary debate was devoted exclusively to the BRI that extensively discusses and reflects on the issue at the national level. This identifies an attention gap, indicating a lack of parliamentary decision-making on the BRI in both countries, although there has been some progress from inertia in the initial year to some processing by 2019.

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<sup>2095</sup> 10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG: 11-12.

<sup>2096</sup> 12-17-2018-DEU-BT-WD15418: 12-13; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 19-22.

<sup>2097</sup> 02-20-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1923070: 71; 06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243: 15-17; 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 5, 8; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad.

<sup>2098</sup> 11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191752: 4; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191748: 16.

<sup>2099</sup> Appendix 3 provides an overview of all collected documents for Germany, Appendix 4 for the UK.

This development in attention coincides with the pessimistic shift in the discourses, as mentioned in the preceding chapters. Collating the unfavorable perspectives on the BRI, apprehensions regarding the BRI's implications for global power distribution have been associated with the earliest cautions against the project. In the 2015 to 2017 statements, the few expressed security concerns primarily pertained to economic prowess and competitive dynamics. The BRI is perceived to engender and fortify long-term dependencies in the target countries as China extends its dominance in trade and supply chains. In the UK, the direct challenge to its own commercial interests is weighed against the potential opportunities. German statements more broadly indicate potentially growing unease in Russia regarding the shifting power dynamics in its vicinity and the political alignment of BRI countries. Furthermore, the interconnected geopolitical implications of cooperation and competition within this project (including the AIIB) are deliberated in both countries in relation to China's perceived emerging assertiveness and its aim to establish an alternative or revolutionary institutional architecture with Chinese characteristics.<sup>2100</sup> The discrepancy between the desire for economic cooperation, which is a phase of little consensus, and the attentive attitudes in Berlin is noted in the literature on Germany.<sup>2101</sup> Meanwhile, some studies on the UK emphasize the enthusiasm related to the prevailing business opportunities, in line with the second discourse line studied earlier, and tend to overlook the few cautious voices that existed in this phase.<sup>2102</sup> From a Chinese perspective, the UK's active participation in the BRI's initial years despite not being an official BRI country was welcomed as the "the best example for the world in the participation of Belt and Road construction."<sup>2103</sup>

In 2018, early warnings about security issues expanded to cover a wider range of categories. Most security issues associated with the BRI were related to the economic category, although the human security category gained traction and temporarily dominated in the UK with the emergence of the Hong Kong protests in 2019. Still, the overarching concern remained centered on power dynamics of "coercive leverage"<sup>2104</sup>. provided by

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<sup>2100</sup> 03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13 - 1.56pm; 07-18-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783: 20 - 4.49pm; 11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787: 19 - 9.14pm; 07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien: 2; 03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779: 13: 1.56pm; 04-01-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor: 14, 22.

<sup>2101</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 105-106; Harnisch 2018: 27-28.

<sup>2102</sup> Montesano 2019: 151; Van der Putten et al. 2016: 8.

<sup>2103</sup> Wang 2017: 251.

<sup>2104</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 19.



the BRI. In economic terms, some commentators fear that BRI targets are “forced into compliance as the price for economic aid through the belt and road initiative”<sup>2105</sup>. This is framed as a hidden price of political conditionality refuting the Chinese BRI slogan of ‘no strings attached’.<sup>2106</sup> Already in 2011, Mattlin and Nojonen discussed this pattern of political conditionality in Chinese lending, along with embedded conditionality, cross-conditionality, and emergent conditionality. The first condition, political conditionality, links investments to accepting key sensitivities such as the One-China principle.<sup>2107</sup> Embedded conditionality involves meeting project-specific requirements such as utilizing Chinese contractors, technologies, or workforce.<sup>2108</sup> Cross-conditionality is when Chinese banks or stakeholders use their funding of multiple projects in the same recipient country as leverage. This means that the disbursement of a loan or the implementation of one project may be linked to certain measures in another project or context.<sup>2109</sup> Finally, emergent conditionality pertains to the structural impact of Chinese investments, resulting in path-dependencies that favor Chinese actors in subsequent decision-making, restrict the maneuverability of the recipient countries, and foreclose market access to non-Chinese stakeholders.<sup>2110</sup> These and other types of conditionality have later been applied to Chinese BRI funding. For example, Theodor Tudoroiu concluded that in the case of Caribbean countries, unconditionality under the BRI is a “myth”, fostering a cognitive and normative Chinese-centered space in target countries.<sup>2111</sup>

These conditionality categories help categorize and understand the concerns about leverage generated under the BRI debated in Germany and the UK in the context of various cases and security categories. The One-China policy was explicitly mentioned as a requirement to cease collaboration with Taiwan in order to establish a bilateral partnership with Beijing.<sup>2112</sup> Even more frequently, the BRI is associated with human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong as a means to silence dissent and discourage

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<sup>2105</sup> 10-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800: 22 - 4.37pm.

<sup>2106</sup> 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD: 47 - 4.30pm; 02-06-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol654: 12 - 10.05a; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 25 - 4.11pm.

<sup>2107</sup> Mattlin and Nojonen 2011: 16-17.

<sup>2108</sup> Mattlin and Nojonen 2011: 18.

<sup>2109</sup> Mattlin and Nojonen 2011: 21-22.

<sup>2110</sup> Mattlin and Nojonen 2011: 22-23.

<sup>2111</sup> Tudoroiu 2019: 101, 185, 200.

<sup>2112</sup> 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 12.

foreign interference in what is portrayed as domestic matters.<sup>2113</sup> In the UK, the challenging position of Australia, its Five Eyes ally, which was even sanctioned by China, was emphasized.<sup>2114</sup> In Germany, the vetoes of European partners, including Greece and Hungary, against EU joint motions to condemn Chinese human rights violations such as in March and June 2017 have been criticized as signs of economically induced silencing of criticism.<sup>2115</sup> Academic studies corroborate the impression of increasing concern based on these incidents from 2017 onwards. Specifically, the German government is found to grow more cautious about how Beijing was utilizing its investments to sway the political decisions of EU member states and aspirants, especially within the China-CEEC, to serve its own interests.<sup>2116</sup> Apprehensions about undermining the political unity and values of the EU as a result of the BRI have been raised far more frequently in Germany than in the UK.<sup>2117</sup> Comparing these perspectives, there is an underlying agreement that the BRI creates security issues in other countries by exporting China's domestic problems or authoritarian tendencies through the mechanism of political conditionality.<sup>2118</sup> This phenomenon has been discussed in the previous chapter's section on human security in connection with liberal peace assumptions, pointing to the potential of authoritarian suppression as a domestic and foreign policy constant of non-democratic states. The subsequent passage by Wenzel Michalski, Director of Human Rights Watch Germany before the Human Rights Committee in November 2020 effectively encapsulates this particular apprehension:

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<sup>2113</sup> 05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164: 20424; 12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD, S. 47 - 4.30pm; 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 7 - 3.43pm; 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 34-35 - 8.01pm; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751: 12; 03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919: 10; 11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939.

<sup>2114</sup> 07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678: 2 - 3.35pm; 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 5 - 11.18pm; 06-26-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792: 6 - 3.44pm.

<sup>2115</sup> 05-13-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1971: 22; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191748: 16; 03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917687: 2; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191748: 16; 05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751: 15; 10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 7.

<sup>2116</sup> Dave and Kobayashi 2018: 277; Harnisch 2018: 42.

<sup>2117</sup> Conducting a quick automated MAXQDA search, it was found that the word stem 'Europe' appeared 200 times in German and 44 times in British statements out of the 1421 tone-coded segments. This count does not include indirect references to specific European countries and related abbreviations. Still, this discrepancy indicates that the German debate was more focused on Europe than the British discussion.

<sup>2118</sup> 11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685: 38; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 18-19; 11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939.

“We see that Hong Kong has lost its independent status, and we see that the human rights problem in China is not only a problem within China but is also being exported through the Chinese ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative.”<sup>2119</sup>

Responding to this challenge, both Germany and the UK appear to share the perspective that it is essential to form a military or political (Western) coalition, such as the Five Eyes or the European Union, to counter negative Chinese influence expanded under the BRI and to increase moral leverage on Beijing. This underscores an inherent Self-Other-dichotomy between a perceived authoritarian China and the democratic West. An othering based on authoritarian features along with concerns related to the erosion of a seemingly unified EU has also been identified by Rogelja and Tsimonis as central pillars constructing an existential ‘China Threat’, as mentioned before cited.<sup>2120</sup> Such a Self-Other-dichotomy could be interpreted as a precursor to the previously discussed Cold War mentality, which is also reflected in further statements about how the BRI creates security issues.

In addition to political conditionality, economic and human security-related concerns about embedded conditionality are voiced regarding unequal participation opportunities, missing international standards, little consideration for environmental protection by Chinese actors, and the lack of integration of local labor forces into BRI projects.<sup>2121</sup> These statements directly counter the Chinese mutually beneficial ‘win-win’ idea in BRI projects, claiming that China wins twice<sup>2122</sup> by acting as investors, executors, and beneficiaries at the same time.<sup>2123</sup> These unequal schemes are perceived to compound the target countries’ over-indebtedness, which leaves them vulnerable to the effects of cross-conditionality. These effects were deliberated in relation to providing Chinese ac-

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<sup>2119</sup> Own translation. Original: “Wir sehen, dass Hongkong seinen unabhängigen Status verloren hat und wir sehen, dass das Menschenrechtsproblem in China nicht nur ein Problem in China darstellt, sondern durch die ‘Belt and Road’-Initiative der Chinesen exportiert wird” (11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966: 9).

<sup>2120</sup> Rogelja and Tsimonis 2020: 123-128.

<sup>2121</sup> 07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471: 2; 06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759: 12, 18.

<sup>2122</sup> There are also opposing arguments to these claims, such as a study in a 2020 German scientific report showing that 89 percent of the employees hired by Chinese companies in African countries are locals, while only 44 percent of the managers and 47 percent of the suppliers to these companies are locals (10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420: 15).

<sup>2123</sup> 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14, 16; 11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI: 3.

tors access to natural resources through unfavorable resource-for-infrastructure deals or even corresponding to resource or land grabbing as a condition for debt relief.<sup>2124</sup>

With regard to emergent conditionality, the infrastructural build-up of telecommunication and surveillance technologies has been observed. An eminent concern revolves around the prospective loss of interoperability between these technologies and their Western counterparts, leading to the closure of markets for Western companies due to adverse path dependencies. Additionally, reservations arise regarding the susceptibility of these technologies in cyberspace, which could enable Chinese stakeholders to conduct data espionage within the domains of BRI target countries. Moreover, the obligation of Chinese companies to provide security-relevant data to their domestic authorities, as stipulated by the Chinese cybersecurity law, fuels distrust towards the technological infrastructures erected by the BRI. State-subsidized enterprises such as Huawei or ZTE are perceived not only to perpetuate market distortions along the BRI but to exacerbate governance deficiencies in recipient nations. By providing BRI target governments additional tools to suppress a dissenting populace, these companies are seen to further compound human rights concerns.<sup>2125</sup> Once again, these statements correspond to the broader authoritarian othering associated with Chinese companies and power competition between the US, its Western allies, and China. Lord Anthony Giddens confirms towards the global extension of the digital BRI that “it does not take much imagination to grasp the geopolitical tensions that could arise around it.”<sup>2126</sup>

These geopolitical concerns culminate in conversations about Chinese (neo)colonialism crafted under the BRI’s benevolent disguise.<sup>2127</sup> Shifting power in Beijing’s favor is thus a common thread across all aspects of the BRI, spanning various geographic and thematic areas throughout the entire observation period. In this broader geopolitical pic-

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<sup>2124</sup> 09-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922471: 2-3; 09-07-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922169: 3; 11-13-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924279: 2; 07-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662: 38 - 6.36pm; 05-21-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910387: 1; 02-06-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol654: 12 - 10.05am; 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 10; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 25.

<sup>2125</sup> 12-17-2020-GBR-GO-SP-NickCarter: 2; 01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670: 67 - 3.52pm.; 12-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924927: 6; 06-17-2020-DEU-Adrs191796: 36-37; 03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137: 13; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad Report Government: 21, 29, 33; 03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad: 6; 11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787: 19 - 9.14pm.

<sup>2126</sup> 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 52 - 9.10pm.

<sup>2127</sup> 03-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19149: 18645, 18649; 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 18 - 5.30pm; 09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646: 5 - 3.08pm.

ture, the BRI creates security issues by contributing to China’s capability to challenge the liberal core of the global international order.<sup>2128</sup>

In all these conditionality areas, the government statements previously identified as veiled securitization reinforce the impression that the BRI is creating security issues despite their diplomatic articulation. This type of criticism takes three different forms: First, it is formulated in a neutral tone suggesting improvements to deficiencies within the BRI or adherence to certain international conduct or standards. Second, it takes the form of avoiding answering critical questions about the BRI and advocating its own proposals (such as the EU Connectivity Platform) instead. Lastly, which is specific to the case of Germany, the government particularly referred to the confidentiality of national security information rather than offering critical information.<sup>2129</sup> Particularly in the first form of veiled securitization, there appears to be a significant congruence between the 51 instances related to the thematic realm of norms and standards in German and the 42 instances in British government statements. Compare, for example, the following statements. In July 2019, Minister for the Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, said:

“We have made it clear that we regard ourselves as a natural and willing partner for global infrastructure projects, but we are also clear that all projects must develop in line with recognised standards on transparency, environmental impact, including carbon emissions, social standards and—importantly—debt sustainability. Therefore, there needs to be a sense of transparency on international standards.”<sup>2130</sup>

This position is echoed by the German government in August 2019 responding to a critical parliamentary inquiry on the BRI cooperation:

“China is and will remain an important partner. Cooperation must take place under transparent and fair framework conditions and in accordance with international standards and norms, particularly in the areas of trade, the environment, social issues and financing.”<sup>2131</sup>

The statements emphasize both willingness and reluctance to cooperate under the BRI by addressing the fundamental requirements in terms of norms and standards. However, they do not provide specific examples or evidence of the exact violations of the BRI or

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<sup>2128</sup> 04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 13; 01-10-2019-DEU-BT-WD16718: 12; 11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939.

<sup>2129</sup> See the previous chapter 9 on cross-category securitization comparison.

<sup>2130</sup> 05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 24 - 5.37pm.

<sup>2131</sup> Own translation. Original: “China ist und bleibt wichtiger Partner. Kooperation muss zu transparenten und fairen Rahmenbedingungen sowie in Einklang mit internationalen Standards und Normen insbesondere im Handels-, Umwelt-, Sozial- und Finanzierungsbereich erfolgen” (04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 29).

the actual regulations that are required to be followed. The German government's increasingly critical statements being observed at this point in time further corroborate concerns about the lack of improvements following the 2nd BRF.<sup>2132</sup> The negative shift coincided in a timely manner and thematically with UK government reservations.<sup>2133</sup> Based on these observations, it can be inferred that even statements that do not portray the BRI as directly harmful might indirectly validate the securitized perceptions by refraining from challenging negative claims and, at times, by affirming them following the described Self-Other-dichotomy. This is why such neutrally formulated statements do not contribute to the BRI's overall desecuritization but are instead called instances of veiled securitization in this study.

This veiled securitization can be interpreted as a communicative tactic by both governments to signal apprehensions toward the BRI but retain some room for cooperation and negotiation, which would be stifled by open criticism. They might thus constitute instances to uphold maneuverability and prevent an escalation to securitization. Building on these insights and previous studies in International Relations, this communication tactic could be termed the neologism of 'hedging securitization'. To elaborate on this idea, hedging securitization could be used to describe a communicative strategy that involves veiled securitization employed by state representatives. This strategy aims to balance between securitizing certain aspects of an issue while maintaining flexibility or strategic ambiguity in their response. Originally, hedging terms an international strategy as a middle ground between balancing and bandwagoning towards more powerful states. To strike this balance, hedging involves a combination of cooperation, competition, and confrontation.<sup>2134</sup> Guided by their national self-interest, second-tier powers use this strategy to bolster their sovereignty, especially given the tense great power dynamics between the United States and China, as evinced in hedging research.<sup>2135</sup>

Transferring these insights to the proposed concept for a rhetorical strategy, hedging securitization involves expressing willingness to cooperate while concurrently expressing

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<sup>2132</sup> 12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222: 2; 06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 58; 04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182: 29; 02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395: 2.

<sup>2133</sup> 07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804: 3 - 11.18pm; 04-28-2020-GBR-HC-WA41169: 1; 06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 1.

<sup>2134</sup> Korolev 2016: 376-377.

<sup>2135</sup> Gurol 2023: 703.

discontent over challenging issues. This approach allows for rhetorically addressing a security threat without fully committing to a comprehensive securitization process. Instead, state representatives can even hedge their responses by de-securitizing issues related to beneficial cooperation. This could take the form of proposing business collaborations similar to those pursued by the UK in areas where the BRI had weaknesses, or adopting alternative approaches based on political alignments, as was outlined in Germany to promote an EU-China Connectivity Platform.<sup>2136</sup> This approach allows actors to hedge their bets, preserving options and minimizing the risks. These forms embody an inherent Self-Other-dichotomy, as observed before, promoting the narrators' key strengths while pointing out corresponding areas for improvement in the Other. In essence, hedging securitization could become a novel concept in securitization theory to capture how state actors navigate a middle ground between simultaneous cooperation and confrontation without fully securitizing an issue as observed in government statements toward the BRI in Germany and the UK. At this point, however, elaborating on and testing this new model more extensively would exceed the scope of the analysis of the security discourse lines.

Upon reviewing the third discourse line based on German and British national-level statements, it is evident that the BRI is viewed as raising security concerns in two ways. Firstly, there are statements indicating that the BRI is directly causing security issues, often related to specific projects and events on the ground. Secondly, there is a widespread perception that the BRI indirectly exacerbates existing security issues or hinders collaborative efforts to address these. This refers to both weak governance in BRI target countries as well as in China itself. As it was observed in the discussions centering on Hong Kong and Xinjiang, the direct and indirect security effects of the BRI may be perceived as intertwined. In these instances, ensuring success was cited as a suspected rationale for taking suppressive action, thus leading to a security dilemma. This dilemma resulted in the reviewed states expressing heightened insecurity regarding Beijing's actions and the BRI. These measures stifled international cooperation willingness and raised concerns that international dissent over these measures would be silenced due to the dependencies created under the BRI.

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<sup>2136</sup> See Chapters 7 and 8.

To sum up this third discourse line with an analogy: The BRI functions as a honeypot that turns out as a sweet deception for a molasses trap for target countries. Once target nations become reliant on Chinese BRI investments, they are no longer able to free themselves from the sticky situation. The analogy can be extended to optimistic perceptions of the BRI, aiming to extract its benefits for target countries and satisfy their hunger for investments and technologies from the Chinese honeypot while minimizing the risks of turning it into a molasses trap. This analogy of a honeypot effectively captures the ostensibly ambiguous nature of the BRI, which is echoed in the extensive spectrum of perspectives regarding its implications for international security in Germany and the UK. The complex communication style of government representatives to address this metaphorical honeypot between 2015 and 2020 may potentially be denoted as ‘hedging securitization’, serving as an IR-theory-based extension of securitization theory, which leads the way to future research tracks to be discussed in the subsequent final part of this study.



#### **Part IV: A Synthesis of Narration, Cooperation, and Confrontation**

As this academic journey of exploring the securitization of German and British perceptions of the BRI is soon coming to a close, this final part is dedicated to offering a synthesis of the study. The primary aim of this analysis was to address the research question of the extent to which the BRI is viewed as a security issue in Germany and the UK. This inquiry is situated within the broader context of an ascendant China, whose position of power and global aspirations have sparked intense academic and political debates.

Part of the conundrum is the implications of the BRI as a manifestation of Beijing's international ambitions and as a national development program, which intermingle in foreign and domestic debates. Either way, the BRI encourages participants to collaborate in enhancing physical connectivity through infrastructure development such as roads and railways, digital connectivity in cyberspace, and soft connectivity through intercultural projects or establishing rules and norms. All these areas are shaped by the words of those who promote the project, report on it, or even seek political alternatives. Thus, the BRI becomes a central stage of narration, cooperation, and confrontation of all actors involved. These actors do not strictly adhere to a predetermined script across all acts but rather engage in improvisational theater. They bring a repertoire of past experiences, political relations, cultural roles, national interests, and slogans. Unraveling this intricate performance is a challenging puzzle for researchers who seek to comprehend and interpret it within the broader context of significant power transitions in world affairs. Ultimately, they also become participants in the theater beneath the overarching framework of the BRI, shaping the ambiance in the theater with their research findings.

Grounding this analogy in the scientific reality of the present approach implies that profound reflections are necessary on the numerous intricate issues that were addressed through the inquiry. To conduct such a reflective assessment, the subsequent discussion chapter furnishes a comprehensive outline of the study's analytical steps. This will reiterate the main objectives and key findings, as the research question prompted a pioneering approach, which will be summarized in the final concluding chapter, taking a holistic view.

## 11. Discussing the Main Results: The Discrepancy of Perceptions

From a panoramic perspective, this study offered major innovations to the current research landscape: It created an innovative systematic theoretical model to capture securitized perceptions by integrating and updating a genealogy of security concepts, constructivist security studies, and securitization. The security categories, based on these reflections, introduced a methodological innovation. Utilizing a combination of qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis, a language-based research model was constructed to assess securitization in its full spectrum. This novel framework appraises both the intensity of securitized perceptions in terms of positive, neutral, and negative statements on the BRI and their variety based on the comprehensiveness of security policy areas derived from progressing Daase's security issue dimension.<sup>2137</sup> This way, the analytical framework develops a nuanced picture of both securitized and non-securitized discourses of an issue such as the BRI.

This leads us to the empirical innovation that delivered a security-focused assessment of the BRI from a Chinese, German, and British perspective. The inclusion of the three countries follows Wendt's original logic, contending that international relations are intersubjectively constructed by a social act between a signaling 'ego' and receiving 'alter'.<sup>2138</sup> According to our investigation, no study has yet provided such a comprehensive security-focused assessment of the BRI in its first six years from 2015 to 2020, based on national-level documents officially released by each of the three countries. Each of these accomplishments contributes to the existing knowledge base and has specific advantages and limitations, which will be thoroughly evaluated in the following sections.

This will be done in three steps: The first section involves an examination of theoretical modernization and its empirical implications, with a particular focus on the innovative securitization model. In this theoretical review, the empirical findings are utilized to discuss the revised security concept and the securitization approach, as well as to consider potential future research opportunities. Secondly, the empirical studies on the BRI in the context of China, Germany, and the UK are reviewed. The findings are discussed along with explanations and practical implications based on existing literature. Thirdly,

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<sup>2137</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 10; Daase 2010a: 3.

<sup>2138</sup> Wendt 1992: 404-405.

a brief assessment of the BRI's development after 2020 is provided to consider events following our observation period. This aims to understand the broader trajectory of the BRI and highlight the relevance of this study beyond the immediate scope of our investigation. In each stage, the discussion aims to elucidate the primary research findings of this study and underscore the potential for future research to cultivate more robust theoretical, methodological, and empirical studies in the field of International Relations and beyond.

### **11.1. Innovating the Securitization Spectrum**

The first part of the research puzzle aimed at reviewing a seemingly ever-expanding security concept under constructivist tenets. To effectively capture various perceptions of security, the study set out in Chapter 2 to categorize a four-dimensional security spectrum following the seminal works of Christopher Daase.<sup>2139</sup> Reviewing these four security dimensions contributed to an in-depth understanding of security discourses. By revising and updating Daase's original genealogy, this study contributed to a more systematic approach to IR security studies. The updated system, as previously illustrated in Figure 1, has the potential to foster future discussions on security as a concept and how it is employed in research.

These four dimensions proved too far-fledged to be integrated into an analytical framework that covers an extensive evolution over time and between the two countries under review. Only the issue dimension that discerned security policy areas proved a useful starting point for building a nuanced, flexible, and parsimonious coding frame for BRI security discourses. Revising and extending the other security dimensions laid the foundation for systematizing the field. Although the referent axis was not used for coding, reviewing it accentuated insecurities for groups of people below the society level as an important category for security research. The case studies demonstrate the significance of this category by indicating that the treatment of Uyghurs hurt perceptions of China and the BRI. This opens avenues for future securitization research exploring the impact of group (in)security on state perceptions and securitization degrees.

In addition to the current framework, German statements frequently framed the BRI as jeopardizing the integrity of the European Union. This leads to whether the reference

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<sup>2139</sup> Daase 2010a; Daase 2010b.

dimension needs another extension with a category of international or supranational organizations. Indeed, neither Daase's original framework nor the updated reference dimension considers such stakeholders as another legitimate actor in security governance.<sup>2140</sup> There is controversy surrounding whether an organization like the EU, which combines supra- and international governance, can effectively act as a security actor in global governance because of the primacy of states in international affairs. Some empirical studies, such as those by Julia Gurol, emphasize that the EU plays a distinct role as a security actor in global governance, with an increased actor quality since the Lisbon Treaty. Gurol's analysis of the EU's and China's security roles in the Middle East found that they play complementary security roles, with the former focusing on normative and geopolitical factors and the latter prioritizing geo-economic aspects.<sup>2141</sup> The EU is not only characterized as a security actor in scholarly work but also perceived as an endangered object, as evidenced by the study conducted by Rogelja and Tsimonis. Their research outcomes closely correspond with the threat outlined in the German case study, particularly concerning the EU being portrayed as a unified, even unitary, actor targeted by Chinese investments challenging its political-normative cohesion.<sup>2142</sup> Building on these observations, future research can explore the dynamics of the EU or other regional political organizations as distinct referent objects, security actors, and threatened targets. These insights contribute to an academic comprehension of contemporary security reference dimensions and altering security governance beyond the nation-state.

As previously mentioned, some categories are used inconsistently in most texts and speech, posing challenges for effective analysis. This is evident in the spatial and danger dimensions. Starting with the spatial dimension, the semantic confusion in the global security category highlights the challenge that security research using geographic designations might be complicated by diverse referent objects.<sup>2143</sup> At the global level, the BRI case studies revealed apprehensions regarding geopolitical power competition and its influence on economic, conflict, and environmental governance. With and beyond the BRI, China is advancing its own principles and concepts for global governance, such as the 'community of shared destiny for all humankind,' as elaborated in chapters

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<sup>2140</sup> Schlag et al. 2016: 8-9; Daase 2010a: 9.

<sup>2141</sup> Gurol 2020: 21, 33.

<sup>2142</sup> Rogelja und Tsimonis 2020: 119-123.

<sup>2143</sup> See Chapter 2.1.2.

5 and 6.<sup>2144</sup> Particularly, the UN and its Security Council have been found instrumental for Chinese officials in promoting a positive, desecuritized image of the BRI, as well as a self-portrayal in Chinese documents as an active global stakeholder. These findings on a global level are further supported by more focused analyses for the United Nations conducted by Haug, Foot and Baumann, Oud, as well as Mendes and Wang. The authors share the view articulated in this study that the PRC promotes its own normative principles through pre-defined tifa in global (security) governance, as embodied in the BRI.<sup>2145</sup> This underscores the necessity for additional exploration of establishing security dialogue and mechanisms at a global level while acknowledging the varying semantic and political interpretations in this domain.

Moreover, future research may examine these changing security dynamics for the new spatial categories in extraterrestrial and sub-national areas. While the Space Silk Road has previously been subject to academic interest, neither case study has demonstrated particular national-level political awareness of this issue.<sup>2146</sup> As noted in the case studies, sub-national MoUs involving the British satellite telecommunications company Inmarsat and the German-based technology conglomerate Siemens can bridge the sub-national and extraterrestrial domains, although these issues did not receive much attention from the studied political elites.<sup>2147</sup> Furthermore, security issues limited to specific geographic areas, such as Hong Kong or Xinjiang, emphasize the importance of adding the sub-national category to the spatial security dimension. Previous studies, like the one by Trédaniel and Lee in 2018, suggest that the securitization by the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang has exacerbated local ethnic tensions and fueled radicalization.<sup>2148</sup> Combining this finding with our and Colley and Van Noort's observation of the correspondingly deteriorating BRI perceptions in the UK and other countries due to Beijing's behavior in Xinjiang policies prompts further research on the conditions that spur aligning or rejecting securitization.<sup>2149</sup> Research in this area can explore the security implications of projects such as the BRI on these specific geographical regions and shift the focus by analyzing how security laws and practices in these regions influence (inter-

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<sup>2144</sup> Wang and Jiang 2019b: 125; Gallelli and Heinrich 2019: 25.

<sup>2145</sup> Haug et al. 2024: 9-10, Oud 2024: 86-87; Mendes and Wang, 2023: 119.

<sup>2146</sup> Rolland 2019b: 4.

<sup>2147</sup> See Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>2148</sup> Trédaniel and Lee 2018: 178, 190.

<sup>2149</sup> Colley and Van Noort 2022: 249-250.

)national relations, as will be discussed below. Accordingly, these new spatial categories offer opportunities for further investigating security perceptions or the lack thereof by political and scientific stakeholders.

Shifting attention to the field of danger, the terminology used to distinguish between different hazards often does not align with common descriptions of risks, threats, and challenges in everyday language. The word ‘challenge’ is not even included in the danger categories due to its conceptual vagueness, although the case study revealed its frequent use in the context of China and the BRI. The word could imply any category on the danger dimension, from vulnerability to risk, danger, and threat. It may also be used to avoid direct securitization, which could contribute to further exploring language variants of what we proposed as veiled securitization as a result of the BRI case studies. Although the danger category was not included in the coding scheme, its review fostered an understanding of the previous analysis.

Drawing from the prior case studies, it can be inferred that the desecuritized portrayal advocated in official Chinese documents seeks to position the BRI as a mechanism for mitigating specific vulnerabilities, dangers, and risks, aligning with the established second discourse line that the BRI addresses security challenges. By contrast, the German and British statements have become less aligned with this desecuritized view but increasingly critical of the path-dependent vulnerabilities the BRI may involve, as summarized in chapters 9 and 10. Following the definition of danger<sup>2150</sup>, the BRI is sometimes identified as a harmful event contributing to the deterioration of security in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Such observations build less on the exact designation of the BRI creating a vulnerability or constituting a danger but on implicit characterizations. This might offer a possible avenue for systematically identifying instances of veiled securitization and counter-frames for desecuritization by categorizing statements or security practices into the attributes of the danger hierarchy.

In relation to the broader issue of the EU’s triad of China as a partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival, other researchers can use the hierarchy of threats to determine whether China is portrayed in a unified manner constructs it as a threat in itself, or as the origin of different types of danger. To illustrate, the negative statements coded in

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<sup>2150</sup> See Chapter 2, Table 1.

the economic and human security areas can be interpreted to foster China's threat image. Especially those statements that designate the BRI as a tool for conquering international markets, creating economic-political dependencies, promoting Chinese values, and fostering political divisions in the EU have an antagonist momentum.<sup>2151</sup> Overall, the danger dimension presents ample research opportunities, with this study introducing a concise definition table as a starting point that future studies can expand on.

In the second step of the present study, the constructivist foundations of this study, particularly their link to securitization theory, have been explored. Intersubjective understandings of political issues form communities of identity, which enable windows of opportunity for advancing cooperation and limit the impact of anarchy in the form of security dilemmas, according to Hopf.<sup>2152</sup> In a quest to uncover intersubjective understandings of the BRI's security implications that are formed by a social act of signaling-receiving-reacting according to Alexander Wendt, an approach was formed to assess Chinese official rhetoric on the BRI as the signaling ego, and German and UK responses as the receiving alter.<sup>2153</sup> This led us to securitization theory, a research framework focusing on the question of how issues evolve and dissolve on the security agenda.

The Copenhagen School's discursive focus on securitizing actors employing speech acts to establish a security issue provided a security-focused access point for designing a mixed-methods approach facilitating discourse and content analysis. Upon reviewing the original framework in light of the expanded taxonomy of security dimensions and empirical securitization studies, it is evident that the Copenhagen Schools' definition of securitization is fairly narrow. Its fixed characterization of securitization on existential threats and emergency actions was deemed too narrow to foster a procedural and fine-grained understanding of the securitization spectrum.<sup>2154</sup> This has resulted in an excessive number of studies that define securitization as a binary concept, where an issue is either securitized or non-securitized, as observed by Bourbeau.<sup>2155</sup> There are only a few studies, such as Bourbeau or Baele and Rousseau, that seek to operationalize the securitization spectrum, wherein an issue may be perceived more or less intensely as a

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<sup>2151</sup> See Chapter 9.

<sup>2152</sup> Hopf 1998: 189-190, 193.

<sup>2153</sup> Wendt 1999: 257-258.

<sup>2154</sup> Stritzel 2014: 18; Williams 2011: 214; Buzan et al. 1998: 26.

<sup>2155</sup> Bourbeau 2011: 42.

threat.<sup>2156</sup> These approaches integrate security issues that do not escalate to the level of an existential threat, which represents the highest extreme on the securitization scale. Despite numerous requests in the existing scholarly debate to address this imbalance, no satisfactory approach has been developed to assess the extent of security policy areas concerned with an issue, and the intensity of negative versus other statements on the issue within a predefined discourse arena.<sup>2157</sup> Addressing this gap in the existing literature, the present study set out to further operationalize the securitization spectrum.

For this objective, the current landscape of BRI studies, particularly those related to securitization and the countries under review, was explored.<sup>2158</sup> The literature review revealed that the securitization of the BRI was still an underexplored issue despite a ballooning number of BRI-related publications. Even fewer studies juxtaposed official rhetoric in Chinese and Western documents on the matter of security.<sup>2159</sup> The existing studies underscored a broad range of methodologies to study shifting perceptions of the BRI, security issues discussed, and divergences within and between country discourses on the BRI. These provided insightful pieces operationalizing the research puzzle and interpreting the results. As per the literature review, the present study provides systematic horizontal (across space), vertical (across time), and diagonal (across policy areas) assessments of the BRI's securitization. The theoretical and methodological choices will be further elaborated in the following lines, with the empirical results to be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The choice to study the performances of national-level political elites in the parliament and government has revealed a wide range of opinions related to the BRI, but it initially proved to be a complex task to conceptualize. The Chinese government established a Belt and Road document database, but no equivalent database exists for Germany or the UK. The process of selecting which utterances to include and exclude represents a significant example of selection bias. Consequently, this study does not claim to be exhaustive in representing the entirety of the respective national Belt and Road Initiative discourses. The choice to select parliamentary and governmental websites aligns with

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<sup>2156</sup> Baele and Rousseau 2023; Bourbeau 2011.

<sup>2157</sup> Emmers 2019: 179; Gaufmann 2017: 18; Hansen 2012: 545; Williams 2011: 218; Abrahamsen 2009: 59.

<sup>2158</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>2159</sup> Such as Arifon et al. 2019.



the Copenhagen School's focus on key political stakeholders endowed with an influential position in the security decision-making system. Accordingly, we had to accept that certain statements would not be included in the analysis, even though they encompass views from across the whole political spectrum. This concerns, for example, the previous German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, who featured prominently as a warning voice in academic studies on BRI attitudes in Germany, but did not take center stage in the reviewed documents.<sup>2160</sup> In both countries, the heads of government did not participate in the parliamentary debates with any BRI utterances or deliver focused speeches published on the respective databases under review. These gaps in the compiled data were partially filled by the existing studies in the analytical chapters because previous scholarly work focused on prominent executive figures but overlooked the broader parliamentary stakeholders. Furthermore, the governmental voices designated to address the issue in parliamentary discussions and respond to inquiries were effectively involved in our approach, ensuring its relevance and consistency. Nonetheless, future studies could build on the applied framework to systematically analyze and compare political stakeholders' views on the BRI presented in other public arenas, such as the media or international summits.

In a global view, the approach revealed that expert voices featured in hearings and research services were the most sophisticated on the BRI. The associated documents exhibited the highest code density as they were committed to conducting a more in-depth analysis of the BRI than elected parliamentarians or government stakeholders could accomplish in debates or written inquiries. In this respect, the analysis chapters pointed out that the frequency counts and number of coded segments were significantly inflated by these specialized documents. This is a specific drawback of the QCA methodology. Combining it with discourse analysis was therefore critical for assessing document impact and contents, which underscores the strengths of the applied approach. Nevertheless, these documents proved indispensable for uncovering distinct argumentation lines and information given to elected representatives about issues such as the environmental impact of the BRI or the DBAR. These sub-branches have been subject to previous research, like the DBAR study among US political elites by the author and Becker.<sup>2161</sup>

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<sup>2160</sup> Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020: 447; Harnisch 2018: 43.

<sup>2161</sup> Heidbrink and Becker 2023.

This indicates that the developed research methodology could offer more targeted insights into the security dynamics of BRI subsidiaries, like the Arctic Silk Road, Space Silk Road, Health Silk Road, and others. Our coding framework may be applied to each of these and other issues beyond the BRI to study to what extent these are prone to securitization. Especially given the lack of comparative BRI analysis of securitization dynamics in previous studies, as determined in Chapter 3, the innovated securitization spectrum model employed in this research holds significant potential to advance future scholarly inquiries.

## **11.2. The BRI Security Conundrum in China, Germany, and the UK**

The analytical framework used in this study brought innovation to the current research on the BRI. It is the first comprehensive study to systematically analyze BRI security perceptions based on documents collected from three countries: China, Germany, and the UK. Any attempt to characterize national perceptions should be approached with caution, as it generalizes the multifaceted views negotiated between political stakeholders. Nevertheless, these attempts to gauge national perceptions offer insights into valuable political signals to other countries, reconnecting to Wendt's social acts as a central assumption in this study. The research framework generated for this acknowledges the diverse perceptions by capturing their complexity and channeling them toward heuristic interpretations. The main research question guiding this study asks to what extent the BRI is perceived as a security issue in Germany and the UK from 2015 to 2020. Accordingly, the focus was on the receiver side of the social act, although its basic conception required a review of the sender side, hence Chinese signals, as well.

As a consequence, Part II of this study was devoted to outlining the BRI's historical milestones in the period under review and analyzing the documents issued by Chinese authorities on the BRI's official website. As these documents on the Belt and Road Portal are administered by the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the BRI, they are considered elements of strategic communication encompassing the government's preferred guiding slogans, principles, and security concepts. The Portal presents extensive opportunities for researching Beijing's official communication. This involves reviewing and enriching the findings from the present study that concluded in 2020, with a focus on the identified security links in BRI documents. Moreover, incorporating Chinese-

language documents in future studies could provide new perspectives on these concepts. Considering Marina Rudyak's cautionary note that Chinese documents are modified in style and content in foreign languages to suit the target audience, subsequent studies could investigate these adaptations by comparing the Chinese and English versions of key documents.<sup>2162</sup> This may reveal the adjustments and facilitate an understanding of how Chinese elites frame security issues differently for domestic and foreign audiences. This would have stretched the current research framework focusing on outward signaling, so the Chinese documents were excluded from the present study, which was partly compensated by integrating existing studies.

This leads to another limitation of the applied approach, as it required applying distinct analytical frameworks to China's data set on one side and German and British documents on the other. This proved necessary due to the different signaling character of the documents and in light of the fundamental debate in the literature about the BRI having a security policy character at all in its official conception and presentation. The prevalent finding of the analysis indicates that the BRI has incorporated the term "security" in its official communication from its inception.<sup>2163</sup> The finding contradicts the notion that the BRI is not security-focused, an image that Chinese leaders sought to promote, as suggested by Mayer or Dadabaev.<sup>2164</sup> Instead, the findings corroborate Prebilič und Jereb's assertion that "security was always an integral part of the initiative."<sup>2165</sup>

These divergent assessments of the BRI may indicate conceptual confusion regarding the definition of its security character, which requires the employed approach of identifying how security is uttered with reference to Ole Wæver.<sup>2166</sup> It was observed that Chinese official documents consistently portrayed the BRI positively and utilized a distinct vocabulary related to security – a distinct 'grammar of security'.<sup>2167</sup> In this 'grammar of security', the BRI is displayed to provide a platform for all stakeholders involved to jointly address security issues. This aligns with the second discourse line that the BRI addresses security issues by tackling development-related root causes such as material

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<sup>2162</sup> Rudyak 2021: 17.

<sup>2163</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>2164</sup> Mayer 2018a: 14-15; Dadabaev 2018: 16.

<sup>2165</sup> Prebilič and Jereb 2022: 2.

<sup>2166</sup> Wæver 1995: 55.

<sup>2167</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 32-33.

deprivation, food insecurity, and lagging technological infrastructures. The document analysis confirmed that the BRI represents a “five-in-one” approach.<sup>2168</sup> It spans all five policy areas within the security taxonomy and integrates all physical and virtual dimensions of land, sea, air, space, and cyber.<sup>2169</sup> This is achieved by security terms and concepts proposed in BRI documents that encompass several security policy areas, such as maritime security, food security, or non-traditional security. These and other security elements are interlinked through the guiding tifa, which directs their core task to state sovereignty and stability. Accordingly, they feed into the comprehensive security framework sponsored by Xi Jinping.<sup>2170</sup> To pursue these national and international stability goals, the BRI is framed on a desecuritized rhetoric, which pragmatically sets aside existing conflicts and rallies partners around mutual benefits by addressing shared concerns. This confirms earlier findings by Costa, Duarte, and Brakman et al., who discovered that Chinese documents employ a desecuritizing strategy aimed at alleviating fears and perceptions of threat while emphasizing an idealistic universalism.<sup>2171</sup> Highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive communication analysis, these observations emphasize the need to further refine securitization theory and terminology. This is crucial for capturing the described phenomenon where an ostensible desecuritized Chinese rhetoric on the process level facilitates the result of a “securitization of everything” under the concept of comprehensive national security.<sup>2172</sup> In future studies, this endeavor could be realized by concentrating on the identified salient security concepts, such as but not limited to maritime security or food security. Such an approach offers opportunities for a more targeted analysis of concerns, their culturally dependent communication, and an exploration of implications across the security taxonomy.

Turning to the signaled BRI roles assigned to Germany and the UK by China reveals distinct patterns that partially parallel the trends in securitization in these countries. The results indicate that by the end of the review period, the BRI had been comprehensively securitized in all policy areas for at least one year in Germany and the UK. However,

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<sup>2168</sup> Wang 2017: 137.

<sup>2169</sup> Murphy 2021: 101; Yuan 2020: 39.

<sup>2170</sup> Drinhausen and Legarda 2022: 2-5.

<sup>2171</sup> Costa 2020: 35; Duarte 2019: 150; Brakman et al. 2019: 8-9.

<sup>2172</sup> Drinhausen and Legarda 2022: 4.

the discourse never exceeded a medium intensity of securitization.<sup>2173</sup> British stakeholders showed notably more positive attitudes toward the BRI during the initial phase of the ‘Golden Era’, reflecting key tifa about mutual benefit.<sup>2174</sup> Concerning the signaled BRI roles for the UK in the Chinese Documents, collaboration in international financial affairs was most strongly expressed by British stakeholders, especially government representatives like Philip Hammond. German and British documents showed some willingness for sub-national cooperation in third-party markets. This interest is implicitly related to the acknowledgment of possible development gains for the target countries and business opportunities. Conflict-prone countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan are cited by German and British stakeholders as potential beneficiaries of Chinese investments through third-party cooperation projects. This indicates some shared understandings of a security-development nexus accelerated by the BRI in Germany, China, and the UK. While hopes for the BRI as a business opportunity are shared in Germany and the UK, the latter has been more vocal in expressing hopes and business opportunities attached to the BRI, while the former has been more restrained and skeptical, advocating for more equal participation. These observations align with some country-focused BRI studies that testify to a similar deterioration of perceptions around 2018.<sup>2175</sup>

Around this time, the discourses swiftly shifted towards higher levels of securitization in both countries, which was accompanied by an erosion of the identified instances of intersubjectivity. Paralleling this trend, positive attitudes toward the BRI gradually evaporated in both European countries under review.<sup>2176</sup> Even though the securitization intensity did not surpass the medium level during the review period, the gradual degeneration of optimistic perceptions, in combination with veiled securitization manifesting as diplomatically expressed disagreements, was interpreted as a strategy of hedging securitization. Veiled securitization was inferred from those instances where the concern over the terms and consequences of the BRI or calls for action on its weaknesses are articulated with neutral language and aligned with identified criticism. Other instances of

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<sup>2173</sup> See Appendix 6 and Figure 6.

<sup>2174</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>2175</sup> Colley and van Noort 2022: 103-111; Summers et al. 2022: 174-175; Turcsányi and Kachlikova 2020: 68, 73; Ciesielska-Klikowska 2018: 104-106; Harnisch 2018: 40-43.

<sup>2176</sup> See Appendix 6 and Figure 7.

veiled securitization in the documents include allusions to confidentiality and evasion of critical inquiries by avoiding responses or redirecting answers to initiatives other than the BRI. All these elements do not contribute to desecuritization as they indirectly reinforce securitized perceptions, including Self-Other attributions.<sup>2177</sup>

Veiled securitization, as a communication tactic, can help achieve the overall hedging securitization strategy. So far, there is neither a conceptual definition of such a communication tactic nor attempts to discern securitization as an international political strategy despite the strong state-centrism in securitization studies. Investigating these concepts could enhance understanding of the reasons and forms of international securitization, acknowledging real-life political ambiguity instead of sustaining a narrow binary notion of securitization. Studying hedging securitization can advance a synthesis of IR and securitization theory of why and how states and their representatives walk the tightrope between cooperation, competition, and confrontation in international security relations guided by a convergence of power, values, and pragmatism. As both terms are neologisms coined in this study, they invite future research to validate, complement, or reject them. For this endeavor, discourse and content analysis fare well to identify the shape of securitization, as demonstrated by the present approach. Mechanisms of securitization can yet better be substantiated by process analysis, as stipulated by Balzacq et al.<sup>2178</sup>

While the chosen method has thus a proven weakness in identifying causes of securitization, the document analysis and triangulation of relevant studies revealed some factors that may have contributed to the observed decline in BRI perceptions. This is not an exhaustive list, nor does it assess the impact or ranking of each influencing factor on securitization. Thus, the factors presented below are intended to be discussed in light of current research to prompt further inquiries. As a broad distinction, we found endogenous and exogenous factors contributing to the downturn of the relations. These can be understood as facilitating conditions, according to Buzan et al., in which securitization discourses are embedded.<sup>2179</sup>

When considering the domestic context in Germany and the UK, we observed that elections led to varying emphases in securitization due to changes in the composition and

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<sup>2177</sup> See Chapter 10.

<sup>2178</sup> Balzacq et al. 2016: 519.

<sup>2179</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 32-33.

participation of elected political stakeholders in national-level parliamentary and governmental arenas. With the FDP and AfD included in the German Bundestag after the late 2017 elections, two parties entered the discourse, with the former particularly raising critical queries about the BRI.<sup>2180</sup> In the UK, the 2019 general elections resulted in the exclusion of advocates for cooperation, as exemplified by the BRI APPG and its chairman, Faisal Rashid, potentially accelerating the recorded downward trend.<sup>2181</sup> These are instances representing classical facilitating conditions concerning the position of actors to speak security, according to Nyman and McDonald, but they are still undertheorized.<sup>2182</sup> Similarly, the impact and access of lobby groups and societal associations to national-level political debates appear undertheorized in securitization or BRI studies and highlight the need for more rigorous research. This is evident from the participation of the CBBC in the UK and the invitation of human rights activists, scientists, and business people to hearings in both countries.<sup>2183</sup> Future research could, thus, further explore to what extent the BRI's and other issues' securitization and desecuritization are affected by election cycles and political representation of different epistemic communities in democracies.<sup>2184</sup>

Some of the exogenous factors contributing to the observed shifts from an international sphere are policies and measures from China and the United States. The former changed course, becoming more repressive in some key regions, which was accompanied by greater international media attention for Xinjiang since 2018 and Hong Kong since 2019. The debates emanating in Germany and the UK highlighted that some key pillars of ontological security have been irritated. While representatives from both countries generally shared concerns over human rights violations, these are linked to the BRI in intricate ways. In the case of Germany, the discussions encompassed concerns about the potential undermining of the European Union due to the perception that domestic authoritative tendencies might be reflected in China's external behavior. Normative concerns about the erosion of the EU's values are linked to abstentions and vetoes on joint

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<sup>2180</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>2181</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>2182</sup> Nyman 2018: 104; McDonald 2008: 564, 567.

<sup>2183</sup> Summers 2022: 283, fn. 7; 284, fn. 14.

<sup>2184</sup> New synergies can be explored between securitization research from the discipline of IR and parliamentary or party studies, as Kronenberg and Hornheber (2019: 9) point out the pivotal role that parties and their representatives assume in political discourse to promote the relevance of certain demands and actively shape the political spectrum.

declarations against China's human rights violations by members such as Greece, Hungary, or Italy. Political alignment is perceived to be associated with Beijing's increasing economic leverage through the BRI, which has also resulted in violations of EU tendering regulations.<sup>2185</sup> Although this example simplifies multifaceted perceptions, it underscores some of Germany's dominant ontological security pillars as a staunch EU advocate, economic powerhouse, and one of the world's top export nations.<sup>2186</sup> As aforementioned, this research finding is supported by the seminal study of Rogelja and Tsimonis, despite their broader examination of the phenomenon of 'China threat' discourses at the EU level.<sup>2187</sup>

The UK exhibited a particular 'China helper' attitude, which resulted in proposals to collaborate in domains perceived as weaknesses of the BRI. This stance has been found to be strongly spurred by the narrative of the BRI as a business opportunity, closely tied to a self-image as a financial powerhouse represented by the City of London. Both British BRI attitudes and narratives have deteriorated in tandem with the escalation of the Hong Kong protests. Government representatives have been observed to maintain a cautious stance while calling upon Beijing's self-interests to uphold Hong Kong's special status and respect for human rights. Their statements frequently related to the special historic relationship with its former colony as another ontological security pillar.<sup>2188</sup> These observations align with the findings of Colley and Van Noort, although the scholars do not relate their discovery to patterns of securitization.<sup>2189</sup> Without directly relating to our research object, Gricius discusses new avenues for the Paris School, highlighting the potential theoretical and epistemological contributions of ontological security studies for securitization.<sup>2190</sup> Consequently, in combination with these studies, our research findings suggest the potential for further elaboration on ontological security factors as drivers or limiting factors of securitization. Concerning the latter, responsible securitization of the past, as underscored by Wæver, might offer identity elements

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<sup>2185</sup> See Chapter 9.

<sup>2186</sup> Hilz 2017: 148-149, 153. The EU aspect, especially the growing presence of EU-skeptical parties like the AFD, requires future monitoring in Germany and other EU states. In general, the uprising of radical parties has the potential to endanger democracy (Kronenberg and Hornheber 2019: 1, 10).

<sup>2187</sup> Rogelja und Tsimonis 2020: 119-123.

<sup>2188</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>2189</sup> Colley and Van Noort 2022: 104-111.

<sup>2190</sup> Gricius 2024: 334, 338.



linked to ontological security that could uncover facilitating conditions impeding spiraling securitization – even beyond European states.<sup>2191</sup>

Juxtaposing Germany with the UK, the statements on the EU and Europe in general have been noticeably more pronounced in Berlin than in London. This fact may be related to the Brexit perspective in British discourses over the entire review period, possibly indicating that BRI perceptions have been influenced by the UK's upcoming departure from the EU. Our data suggests quite the contrary: Brexit primarily serves as a contextual factor in British foreign policy, acting more as a concomitant than a driving force behind the UK's BRI policies. This is evident in the fact that the BRI is not portrayed as a solution to the challenges posed by Brexit. Instead, in British foreign policy documents and debates, the BRI is mentioned casually as a cooperation platform, despite or in the wake of Brexit. In the analyzed debates regarding Brexit, the BRI is only briefly mentioned as an additional trade opportunity with European or other states. In addition, BRI perceptions were the most negative in 2020, the year of Brexit.<sup>2192</sup> This is supported by the research findings of Tim Summers, who argues that “Brexit did not feature as a key factor in shaping the UK Government perceptions of China.”<sup>2193</sup> Instead, Summers finds these perceptions influenced by the UK's reaction to events in China, such as increasing violence in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, as well as in the UK regarding issues with 5G telecommunications and in other areas like the South China Sea. This required a delicate balance between economic opportunities and security concerns, which have also been raised by the United States.<sup>2194</sup>

Summer's research raises the inquiry into exogenous facilitating conditions—especially the impact of the USA—on deteriorating perceptions in Germany and the UK. This alliance factor was also discussed in Chapter 9 in relation to Wuthnow's observation that the US shifted publicly towards opposition earlier than the UK and Germany. Washington's stance alone was not a sufficient explanation for the deteriorating perceptions in both countries, although it should not be negated in the list of facilitating conditions.<sup>2195</sup> This can be related to several observations during our study. First, Germany and the UK

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<sup>2191</sup> Wæver 2000: 285. See Chapter 2.

<sup>2192</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>2193</sup> Summers 2021: 122.

<sup>2194</sup> Summers 2021: 117-122.

<sup>2195</sup> Wuthnow 2018.

joined the AIIB despite Washington's criticism of the institution. Secondly, statements from both countries about their willingness and reluctance to collaborate on the BRI overall rarely referenced the USA's position. In those instances where Washington's critical view of the economic and strategic implications of the BRI has been cited in German and British statements, the former seemed rather detached in its considerations, while the latter encompassed rather unspecific alliance calculations.<sup>2196</sup> Nonetheless, we observed an increasing focus on Five Eyes Alliance considerations in the UK and a pivot towards the Indo-Pacific in Germany. This underscores the growing significance of this factor alongside rising concerns among several alliance partners other than the US, which warrants further investigation.

The evolution of powerful narratives could influence the impact of the former exogenous factor of alliances. In combination with the previously cited concerns, we noted heightened debates on the issue of debt sustainability and spreading violations of norms and standards under the BRI after the widespread reception of Chellaney's debt trap article.<sup>2197</sup> The issue of norms and standards was not only connected to financial issues of debt but also linked to human rights, political values, and ecological aspects. These patterns can be described as a frame contestation where the benign portrayal of China as a responsible stakeholder on the global stage is confronted by assertions that the country is actually an irresponsible stakeholder.<sup>2198</sup> The frame of contestation is accompanied by a conflict that negatively reinterprets China's 'win-win' proposal of mutually beneficial cooperation as 'China wins twice' or even thrice by acting as a financier, implementer, and user of the BRI.<sup>2199</sup> This way, the frame of the BRI "built by all and for all"<sup>2200</sup> is challenged with portrayals of the BRI built by China and for China. These representations align with the concerns about the spread of imperialism and neo-colonialism through the BRI, which all inherently involve elements of Othering.<sup>2201</sup> Wang Yiwei re-

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<sup>2196</sup> See Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>2197</sup> Chellaney 2017.

<sup>2198</sup> See Chapters 5 and 10.

<sup>2199</sup> 11-13-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924279: 2; 10-12-2018-U-BT-BTPP1956: 619; 10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14, 16; 07-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662: 38 - 6.36pm; 05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797: 24 -7.25pm.

<sup>2200</sup> Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative 2019: 50 (04-22-2019-OD); Wang 2017: 147-148.

<sup>2201</sup> Gu and Mayer (2007: 104) investigated the claim that China is practicing neocolonialism in Africa already in their 2007 study. They found that the allegation of China pursuing a neocolonial energy strategy in Africa lacked credibility. This demonstrates that the intellectual foundations of threat narratives

jects these representations as misperceptions, indicating that these discourses are also received, processed, and rebutted in China as the next stage of the social act.<sup>2202</sup> From this, we can deduce that the combination of material and immaterial characteristics of the BRI is brought together under powerful narratives, creating facilitating conditions for changing the grammar of securitization. This conclusion is supported by the strong connections between the economic and human security discourse strands.<sup>2203</sup> In both Germany and the UK, they are the most prominent security categories, which underlie most of the previously cited concerns across the identified facilitating conditions. This demonstrates that material/tangible and ideational/intangible power elements constantly interact in the international competition of interests from a social-constructivist perspective.<sup>2204</sup>

While the ecological dimension is partially reflected in these representations, there is a weak emphasis on cyber and military security in both Germany and the UK. This offers numerous research opportunities to investigate whether this lack of emphasis is due to limited attention to these aspects or if it is a result of veiled securitization, as discussed earlier. These findings indicate that the BRI is, first and foremost, securitized from an economic-normative security perspective in Germany and the UK.<sup>2205</sup> The different emphasis on security categories reflects the weak intersubjectivity on the BRI between China and the two European countries under review, particularly beyond these two dominant categories. China has placed significant emphasis on the opportunities to foster ecological security in its BRI documents, as shown in Chapter 6. The adjustments made under BRI 2.0 have been welcomed in the states under review. However, instead of gaining open endorsement, these adjustments have led to reluctance due to a perceived lack of progress in the aftermath.<sup>2206</sup> Debates about the weaponization of interdependence and the military dual-use functions of port or digital infrastructures have been notably rare or even absent in the examined European states during the first six years of the BRI, while academic literature, particularly from and about the USA, has

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significantly predate the BRI, serving as instances of frame extension and transformation that can be more rigorously examined within the framework of securitization in the future.

<sup>2202</sup> Wang 2017: 158-159; 245-246.

<sup>2203</sup> See Appendix 7.

<sup>2204</sup> Gu 2018: 258-259; Wendt 1999: 23-25.

<sup>2205</sup> This aligns with Malik's (2020: 18-19) research on how European media emphasizes the economic competition driven by the BRI, while US perspectives highlight more prominent threat perceptions.

<sup>2206</sup> See Chapter 9.

extensively addressed these issues.<sup>2207</sup> This reveals a dual dissonance in the international signaling landscape: one pertains to geostrategic considerations in the US, and the other relates to encouraging signals from China concerning the Digital Silk Road and other areas neglected during the observation period, such as health.<sup>2208</sup> To conclude, the unequal distribution of securitized perceptions and their overall fair intensity suggests less comprehensive than partial securitization of the BRI in Germany and the UK from 2015 to 2020, according to Buzan and Wæver's scale of macrosecuritization.<sup>2209</sup> At times, both national-level conversations have comprehensively covered security categories, and positive attitudes have generally waned, demonstrating the potential to shift the BRI towards macrosecuritization in both European countries. This requires further research attention, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

### **11.3. BRI After 2020: Looking Ahead of the Road**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the world in 2020 and the following years. It forced not only numerous BRI projects to a halt but also pushed financially weak countries to the brink of insolvency, which had significant repercussions for local societies and international relations alike. Despite the intense debates over the project's future, the Belt and Road did not succumb to the pandemic. Due to its inherent adaptive framework, Beijing reshaped the BRI's framework more towards the Health Silk Road, renegotiated foreign debt, and steered it in new directions.<sup>2210</sup> The persistence and flexibility of the BRI under the Health Silk Road were already ingrained in its statutes of the 2015 Vision and Actions, but this received little attention from Germany and the UK in previous years, as mentioned in the last chapter. After more than a decade since the Belt and BRI was first announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, this section is dedicated to providing a concise update on its progress, current status, and recent developments on selected key issues shaping the road ahead.

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<sup>2207</sup> Kardon and Leutert 2023; Heidbrink and Becker 2023: 327; Prebilič und Jereb, 2022: 2; Russel and Berger 2020: 26, 28.

<sup>2208</sup> Mayer and Balazs (2018: 210), similar to Prebilič and Jereb (2022: 2), state that the geostrategic-military dimensions of the BRI were long discussed under the "Malacca Dilemma" concerning Chinese energy and goods trade. These aspects have yet received little attention in the analyzed public debates in Germany and the UK, which further indicates an international discursive disconnection.

<sup>2209</sup> Buzan and Wæver 2009: 258-260.

<sup>2210</sup> Gu et al. 2022: 15; Colley and van Noort 2022: 249.

The initiative's current state and future are repeatedly under international scrutiny. Due to its global scale, the counting of projects is virtually impossible. An AidData report released in September 2021 counted more than 13,400 BRI projects in 165 countries, underscoring the magnitude of the project.<sup>2211</sup> Newer numbers are probably even higher. Taking stock of its recent investments, the total BRI engagement volume surpassed the USD 1 trillion mark in 2023. Despite a slowdown during the initial COVID-19 year, BRI investments recovered after 2021 and increased from USD 74.5 billion in 2022 to USD 92.5 billion in 2023.<sup>2212</sup> At the 3rd BRF in October 2023, Beijing announced to fund the BRI with another RMB 780 billion (equivalent to about USD 107 billion) for the next five years, demonstrating its ongoing viability.<sup>2213</sup> The forum is seen to mark the beginning of the next phase of the BRI 3.0 grounded on the principles of lean, smart, clean, and green investments. Greater emphasis is placed on the BRI's digital connectivity, along with emerging technologies and renewable energy. The future of the BRI is directed towards pursuing projects that are "small but beautiful." This means focusing on projects that are financially and environmentally sustainable, directly benefit local populations, and are thus more cost-effective. Xi Jinping's vision of BRI projects being "small yet smart" calls for more targeted, smaller-scale, low-risk, but high-tech investments aimed at addressing the digital divide and technology development needs in emerging markets.<sup>2214</sup> The impact of these new directives is already noticeable. Although the average investment size for BRI deals has doubled from USD 354 million in 2020 to USD 772 million in 2023, the average investment volume for BRI construction projects has decreased by more than a quarter from 2017 to 2023, reaching around USD 394 million.<sup>2215</sup>

With these adaptations, the BRI 3.0 addresses concerns about white elephant megaprojects and insurmountable debt in target countries, which sparked intensive discussions from domestic and international perspectives. Rising debt levels during the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened existing domestic concerns about project failures and the repayment of Chinese loans, as well as external concerns about increased dependencies,

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<sup>2211</sup> Malik et al. 2021: 1.

<sup>2212</sup> Nedopil 2024: 8-9.

<sup>2213</sup> Yu 2024: 202.

<sup>2214</sup> Yu 2024: 202; Wishnick 2023.

<sup>2215</sup> Nedopil 2024: 10.

which could be alleviated in the future through the revised BRI 3.0.<sup>2216</sup> The substantial scale of implementation challenges is evinced by Malik et al., who found in their dataset of over 13,000 BRI projects that 35 percent of the infrastructure projects encountered major issues, including corruption scandals, labor violations, environmental hazards, and public protests.<sup>2217</sup> The emergence of BRI 3.0 thus reflects Beijing's efforts to rectify past shortcomings. It also underscores the need for collective action, even in Western countries that have not been involved in the initiative before, as the ramifications of the BRI's first decade materialize.<sup>2218</sup> The adjustments in the BRI also imply that previously neglected areas of security, especially cyber and ecological security, will probably require more attention in the future.

Since its inception, the BRI has notably transitioned towards green investments, expanding with the BRI 3.0 on the more environmentally friendly approach of the BRI 2.0 announced at the 2nd Belt and Road Forum in 2019. These adjustments are also positively linked to the UK's co-sponsoring of the BRI's Green Investment Principles. The principles expanded to over 40 global institutions and 15 countries, indicating Western cooperation's productive impact on the BRI.<sup>2219</sup> Although the BRI's principles and investments have notably shifted towards renewable energy projects, the already planned and built coal-fired power plants, oil and gas production, and transportation infrastructures will shape global energy for the decades ahead.<sup>2220</sup> This underscores the need to collaborate for green energy transition and climate change adaptation and mitigation measures with China and BRI target countries. As identified in the previous country case analysis, this area is one of the few remaining bastions of partnership in times of rising tensions. This is driven by an awareness that cooperation with China is crucial to protect the climate, environment, and biodiversity, which is correspondingly stressed in Germany's 2023 China Strategy.<sup>2221</sup>

The document only contains three direct mentions of the BRI, portraying it as a scheme designed to foster political dependencies, contributing to unsustainable debt levels

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<sup>2216</sup> Colley and Van Noort 2022: 248; Xin and Matheson 2018: 4258; Cai 2017: 16.

<sup>2217</sup> Malik et al. 2021: 1, 70-72.

<sup>2218</sup> Schrader and Cole 2023.

<sup>2219</sup> Yu 2024: 200.

<sup>2220</sup> Nedopil 2024: 23; Gu et al. 2022: 28-29.

<sup>2221</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2023: 10, 20.

through infrastructure loans, and forming a global network with China at its core. This corroborates the previous German course balancing reluctance, engagement, and competition with its own initiatives, such as the EU’s Global Gateway or the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment.<sup>2222</sup> German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has shown non-engagement and reticence – BRI cooperation was not deliberated at the latest state visits by either head of state. His Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock declared in 2022 that the government continues to observe the security implications of the BRI by saying, “With regard to Belt and Road, we also see that investments in infrastructure are particularly relevant to security.”<sup>2223</sup> The Minister underscored that cooperation is sought wherever possible and infrastructural autonomy wherever necessary, which aligns with the de-risking approach of the 2023 China Strategy. These approaches are still clearly situated under the EU triad of China as a partner, competitor, and systematic rival, leading to repeated public discussions due to its ambiguity.<sup>2224</sup>

In comparison, the latest British strategic documents have been similar on the issue of de-risking, yet even more explicit in drifting away from the previous Golden Era. This was evident in the 2021 Integrated Review, as mentioned in Chapter 3, which described “China as a systemic competitor”, whose “increasing ambition to project its influence on the global stage, for example through the Belt and Road Initiative, will have profound implications worldwide.”<sup>2225</sup> Even though the subsequent Integrated Review Refresh 2023 did not feature any references to the BRI, its foreword issued by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak underscores how stark British rhetoric has turned around to the 2015 partnership discourses by stating:

“China poses an epoch-defining challenge to the type of international order we want to see, both in terms of security and values – and so our approach must evolve. We will work with our partners to engage with Beijing on issues such as climate change. But where there are attempts by the Chinese Communist Party to coerce or create dependencies, we will work closely with others to push back against them. And we are taking new action to protect ourselves, our democracy and our economy at home.”<sup>2226</sup>

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<sup>2222</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2023: 10, 20, 48.

<sup>2223</sup> Baerbock 2022: 7. Own translation. Original: “Wir sehen auch mit Blick auf Belt and Road, dass Investitionen gerade in Infrastruktur sicherheitsrelevant sind.”

<sup>2224</sup> Federal Foreign Office 2023: 10-11; Baerbock 2022: 7.

<sup>2225</sup> HM Government 2021: 26.

<sup>2226</sup> HM Government 2023: 3.

The UK's strategic documents thus resemble key issues of Germany's strategy towards China, although they seem even more resolute. Both seem to be built around three inter-related strands, which Waitzman summarized for the UK in a HL report: First, protect its country's key strengths, economy, democratic freedoms, and critical infrastructures; second, align with key allies; and third, engage with China bilaterally and multilaterally.<sup>2227</sup> Accordingly, closer alignment with allies such as the United States seems to have continued since the end of the review period in 2020 Germany and the UK. This bears further research opportunities, particularly in light of political changes due to 2024 UK and 2025 German national elections.

Between 2023 and the first half of 2024, the official websites of the national-level governments of Germany and the UK did not feature substantial deliberations on the BRI. This indicates that the previously initiated diplomatic detachment from the BRI has accelerated, resulting in greater difficulty in discerning the stances of either government on the BRI. This reinforces the need to further monitor the securitization of perceptions within these and more countries. One way to achieve this in times of lacking transparency by official government repositories might be big data media analysis as undertaken by García-Herrero and Schindowski. Their research corroborated the negative shift we observed in Germany and the UK and highlighted that the media sentiment in the former is still more positive than in the latter. Their analysis revealed that countries of strategic importance to Washington in their security relations with China, including India, Japan, and the AUKUS partners Australia and the UK, exhibit notably critical sentiments toward the BRI. Across the world, perceptions of the BRI are generally positive but have declined significantly from 2017 to 2022 and vary greatly between regions and countries.<sup>2228</sup> The authors emphasize that the sentiment in BRI countries is more favorable than in non-BRI countries. Furthermore, they note that despite debt distress in recipient countries, there seems to be no discernible impact on overall sentiments.<sup>2229</sup> Summarizing the previous observations, the global reception of the BRI has experienced some setbacks, particularly in the two countries under review, but on average, it is still positively received. Most states remain eager to collaborate within the

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<sup>2227</sup> Waitzman 2023. See especially the “Our values and interests” section in the German China strategy (Federal Foreign Office 2023: 11-13).

<sup>2228</sup> García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 5-6, 12-15, 29-31.

<sup>2229</sup> García-Herrero and Schindowski 2023: 4-6, 12.



framework, and the PRC is willing to fund projects, indicating that the BRI is very much alive.

In this view, China's latest initiatives, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI), demand further attention in their roles for the BRI. Some commentaries, such as Wu, consider "the waning BRI is being eclipsed, if not replaced, by the GDI."<sup>2230</sup> The previous findings on the BRI's vitality call for more caution in describing these new proposals as replacements, but rather suggest that they are complementary in nature. Xi Jinping proposed the former at the UN General Assembly back in September 2021 and the latter at the Boao Forum for Asia in April 2022. According to Vuori's analysis, Chinese observers portray the Global Development Initiative as a more concentrated extension of the BRI's endeavors to promote comprehensive development.<sup>2231</sup> It focuses on reducing poverty, ensuring food security, and controlling pandemics, hence incorporating some major security realms of the BRI as detailed in Chapter 6. In addition, the GDI and GSI continue on central tifa, such as the community with a shared future for mankind. The GSI, however, not only addresses social root causes of conflict but also aims to enhance global security governance while upholding the centrality of the UNSC. In contrast to the BRI, the GSI openly encompasses military means and the idea of comprehensive security, implying an emphasis on state sovereignty and regime stability.<sup>2232</sup> Reiterating its proposals at the United Nations and G20 summits, as of November 2022, demonstrates a global audience for the new initiatives, not targeting specific countries but extending beyond BRI participants. Scholars thus argue that these initiatives underscore Beijing's efforts to shape international governance and constitute itself as a provider of global public goods.<sup>2233</sup> Similar to the BRI, Vuori points out that the GDI and the GSI have been presented by the PRC to promote the desecuritization of international relations with other major powers.<sup>2234</sup> As a result, these initiatives stimulate ideas for additional research into Chinese desecuritization rhetoric, their international reception, and their supplementary role in Beijing's foreign policy next to the BRI.

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<sup>2230</sup> Wu 2023.

<sup>2231</sup> Vuori 2024: 178.

<sup>2232</sup> Foot 2024: 25; Vuori 2024: 178-179; Yu 2024: 129; Wu 2023; Drinhausen and Legarda 2022: 5-6.

<sup>2233</sup> Foot 2024: 25; Vuori 2024: 178-179.

<sup>2234</sup> Vuori 2024: 178-179.

Moreover, researchers interested in the current state and future pathways of the BRI could concentrate their research on the impact of wars and local violence. These include, among others, Russia's war in Ukraine, the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the ongoing crises in the Middle East, and extremist attacks in BRI countries like Pakistan. Due to the global reach and intercontinental connectivity program of the BRI, it is vulnerable to multiple violent disruptions on the ground. For instance, the overland route of the China-Europe Railway Express connects more than 20 European countries, mainly passing through Russian territory. Approximately half of its 78 operating lines traverse through Russia.<sup>2235</sup> Initial European transport bookings on the railway reportedly dropped on this route after Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022.<sup>2236</sup> Moreover, there have been no new BRI agreements with Russia in 2022, even though it remained one of China's key BRI energy engagement destinations.<sup>2237</sup> In order to avoid transport through Russia, the maritime Suez shipping route and the Middle Corridor have been explored as alternative transport and project routes. The maritime shipping route is yet under attack by Houthi Rebels, already prompting Western-led naval missions such as Operation Prosperity Guardian or the European Union Naval Force Aspides in the Red Sea. The United States and the United Kingdom are involved in the former, while Germany is engaged in the latter operation, which was initiated after surging attacks of the Houthis since the start of the Israel-Gaza war.<sup>2238</sup> Shipping goods along the Maritime Silk Road from China to Europe takes 30-45 days via the Suez Canal route. Opting for the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the Red Sea adds 10-12 days to the journey. This is in contrast to the average 16-18 days overland transit time, which is faster but still more expensive than sea freight. The Middle Corridor, connecting Europe with China through Kazakhstan and Turkey via the Caspian Sea, is considered a safer but more complicated and expensive transport route, taking around 26-29 days. The Middle Corridor, which links Europe to China through Kazakhstan and Turkey via the Caspian Sea, is deemed a safer yet more intricate and costly transportation route, requiring approximately 26-29 days for transit. Container traffic on the Middle Corridor increased by 33 percent in 2022 compared to 2021, and European demand for transit on the China-Europe Railway

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<sup>2235</sup> Yu 2024: 199.

<sup>2236</sup> Handley 2024.

<sup>2237</sup> Nedopil 2024: 11, 16.

<sup>2238</sup> Karlsson 2024: 2-3.

has recently recovered due to insecurity on the maritime route.<sup>2239</sup> Bilateral BRI engagement also saw a new project in mid-2023 when China National Chemical Engineering Corporation (CNCEC) partnered with AEON Corporation to commence the construction of a methanol plant in Russia.<sup>2240</sup>

As mentioned in the literature review and case study chapters, Russia is critically observed as an intricate partner for China, and its Eurasian gatekeeper role for the BRI and great power aspirations are frequently debated among IR scholars.<sup>2241</sup> The examination of Moscow's geopolitical implications could serve as an additional area of study, especially in sectors like the Arctic Silk Road or the Iron Silk Road, which have been overlooked in the reviewed national-level discourse. The logistics briefing further accentuates that political and economic interests require strategic security negotiations, not only regarding European participation in BRI projects but also concerning the possibilities and limits of use along transport infrastructures. Furthermore, this previous outline demonstrates how the BRI and global trade can be disrupted by armed conflict and are constantly balanced by political and economic actors in their respective theaters. This observation has been previously noted in the case analyses and continues to be relevant, even in other BRI regions. In March 2024 in Pakistan, a suicide attack resulted in the deaths of five Chinese workers and their Pakistani driver. During the same month, the Gwadar Port Authority facility, a centerpiece of the CPEC, was targeted in an attack by the Baloch Liberation Army.<sup>2242</sup> These incidents are part of a series that demonstrates the persistent susceptibility of the BRI in fragile regions with challenging security conditions. Accordingly, the local-to-global dynamics of international relations, especially during times of crisis, could be studied across the geographical, political, economic, and military domains of the BRI.

To bring this discussion chapter to an end, the BRI has brought about substantial transformations in infrastructural connectivity and continues to influence the geo-economic landscape in Asia and beyond. Although the BRI has faced various challenges and remains contentious, it has showcased an adaptable framework for political learning and

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<sup>2239</sup> Gowans 2024; Handley 2024.

<sup>2240</sup> Nedopil 2024: 11.

<sup>2241</sup> Heidbrink 2022: 467. See Chapters 3 and 7.

<sup>2242</sup> Ebrahim 2024.

practical adjustment. The BRI's connection to security proved versatile, as it faces security challenges, aims to address root causes of insecurity, and generates new security concerns. Meanwhile, the UK's and Germany's favored Western-led infrastructure initiatives, including B3W, Global Gateway, and the G7 Partnership, do not seem to have comparable momentum. Scholars characterize these initiatives as primarily in the "vision stage"<sup>2243</sup> or "uncertain"<sup>2244</sup> in their prospects for success. Despite this discrepancy and structural relevance, the political discourses in Germany and the UK appear to be dormant rather than engaging in a public, strategic, and profound debate on the BRI, their own initiatives, and their respective security implications, which could pave the road ahead.

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<sup>2243</sup> Yu 2024: 193.

<sup>2244</sup> Colley and Van Noort 2022: 283.

## 12. Final Résumé

Under the impression of China as an awakening giant, this study aimed to examine the shifting security perceptions of the Belt and Road Initiative in Germany and the UK during the initial years following its inception. The research puzzle lies in the absence of official national-level Memoranda of Understanding regarding the Belt and Road Initiative, despite the substantial economic ties between these two major European democracies and the People's Republic of China. Due to their economic, structural, and political significance in regional and global institutions, the respective national perceptions guiding the future directions of these European countries are relevant beyond their bilateral relations with China. It was assumed that the security concerns held by political stakeholders at the national level uncovered the reception of the BRI and the subsequent reservations that arose. As stated in the introduction, the main goal of this study was to determine the extent to which the BRI was perceived as a security concern in these Western democratic nations.

To accomplish this objective, the investigation involved three pieces of the research puzzle that had to be assembled in this study: a theoretical, a methodological, and an empirical piece. Each piece elucidates the innovative approach taken in this study, contributing to advancing the current state of knowledge. In the first stage of this undertaking, the study sought to explore the theoretical and empirical state of knowledge required to develop a robust understanding of the field within the discipline of International Relations. It was found that security studies have significantly broadened their scope over the last few decades, outpacing existing classifications. Consequently, the theoretical inquiry in Chapter 2 revised the existing security genealogy proposed by Christopher Daase to classify the key terms of security into a modernized four-dimensional taxonomy.<sup>2245</sup> This innovation in classification was crucial for understanding the complex nature of security perceptions and research approaches, which informed the overall analysis.

In the second part of Chapter 2, the study was situated within the constructivist realm of IR research, specifically in securitization studies aimed at capturing how issues develop on the security agenda. Based on Alexander Wendt's constructivist social act proposi-

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<sup>2245</sup> Schlag et al. 2016. Daase 2010a; 2010b.

tion, the heuristic assumption was established that the perceptions expressed in Germany and the UK represent the receiving ‘alter’ interpreting the BRI as originating from the signaling ‘ego’ China.<sup>2246</sup> Consequently, a sophisticated understanding of the history, principles, and primary security ideas of the BRI was deemed crucial for interpreting ego- and alter-reflections of the project. Securitization theory similarly suggests that political understandings are constantly negotiated among political stakeholders. Briefly put, scholars in this field appraise how language and actions create a sense of urgency to safeguard a reference object from an existential threat. Following the Copenhagen School securitization model, political issues can be categorized on a spectrum, ranging from non-politicized to politicized and securitized.<sup>2247</sup> The level of securitization can increase through speech acts and practices that emphasize security and decrease through desecuritization. While this sounds clear and accessible, each aspect of securitization theory has fostered controversies on how to operationalize it. One of the most significant controversies pertains to the consideration of existential threats, which characterize the extreme end of the securitization spectrum, as opposed to the more subtle, mundane insecurities. In most cases, securitization studies do not cover the entire spectrum but rather use a binary understanding, categorizing an issue as either securitized or not securitized. Upon closer examination of the research landscape in Chapter 3, it was evident that no adequate model had been identified to effectively address the gap in the securitization theory of encompassing the intensity and variety of security perceptions along and within security categories. Furthermore, there was a lack of empirical studies capable of systematically capturing and contrasting security perceptions of the BRI, including both securitized and de-securitized perspectives across the entire securitization spectrum. Both the biased securitization studies and the theoretical and empirical gaps have serious implications for academia and politics, highlighting the importance of this study’s contributions. Overly focusing on the dichotomy of securitization neglects its diverse nature and consequences for adequate policymaking in terms of identifying political options and means and strategically allocating resources. A nuanced understanding of different security policy areas may inform and direct decision-making, mindful of the essential requirements and interconnections between security domains. Engaging in cross-country analysis enhances intercultural understanding of security concerns and

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<sup>2246</sup> Wendt 1992: 404-405.

<sup>2247</sup> Buzan et al. 1998: 23-26.

preferences, helping to avoid academic oversimplifications and practical security dilemmas. Accepting the complexity of concurrent security perspectives is crucial for scholars and practitioners alike, as indicated by the three security discourse strands derived from the literature review in Chapter 3, accentuating that the BRI is discussed as being exposed to security issues, capable of addressing security issues, and also a source of security issues.

Based on these findings, Chapter 4 forged the analytical framework designed to uncover the variety and intensity of securitized perceptions. Based on a synthesis of discourse and content analysis, a novel model was developed to identify the tone of utterances, direct this towards a level of securitization intensity, and categorize the securitized statements into security policy areas of the security taxonomy representing the degree of securitization variety. These two scales indicate the extent of securitization by simultaneously recognizing and capturing non-securitized perceptions. This way, the model identifies and categorizes the visible residues of perceptions of the BRI across different time periods and geographical locations. Although the model was designed for analyzing BRI perceptions, it can be used to study the discourse of any issue. The decisions made to facilitate the analytical framework open up numerous analytical opportunities for future research, not only by studying different geographies but also in terms of the limitations of this study. To gain insight into the changing political responses to the new political initiative epitomized by BRI, the study concentrated on the developments during the initial six years from 2015 to 2020. As mentioned earlier, upcoming research could expand or update the observation period to analyze the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic or other global crises on perceptions of the BRI.

Collecting the written records of their discussions from their main online repositories provides pragmatic access to public national-level elite deliberations. These elites include elected stakeholders in legislatures, executive representatives, scientific experts, and a wider circle of invited experts for public debates and testimonies. Certain government stakeholders, including the heads of government, were largely absent in the collected dataset as they did not make any BRI statements in the focused arenas. Moreover, the broader societal and academic discourses in media outlets and think tank analyses that shape democratic decision-making were neglected for the sake of feasibility

and coherence. Further research could focus on these unresolved issues and investigate securitization by a different selection of stakeholders. It could also examine the acceptance or rejection of securitization tendencies by various audiences. This aspect of the success of securitization in the form of changed practices and legislation has been largely disregarded due to the focus on the speech act.

To gain insights into Chinese signals of security, a specific combination of literature review and document analysis was used in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5's objective was to delineate the BRI's historical and organizational milestones, including the central political slogans (referred to as *tifa*). This exposed the BRI's adaptive framework as well as the sheer mass of actors, thematic subsidiaries, and projects. Afterward, Chapter 6 analyzed a total of 65 Chinese documents collected on the Belt and Road Portal regarding key issues, roles attributed to Germany and the UK, and salient security signals. Summarizing the main findings of these chapters, the BRI documents contained numerous security concepts from the beginning directed toward comprehensive national security, requiring a thorough understanding of Chinese history and political objectives. These were articulated in an optimistic, some would say desecuritized, way, emphasizing the second discourse strand: the BRI is a platform to jointly address the perceived root causes of insecurity, particularly poverty, from social, economic, and technological perspectives. Although the documents covered a plethora of security terms transcending and connecting the identified security policy areas, the analysis established that all security categories were encompassed in the documents. Particular emphasis is placed on economic and ecological security considerations, which strongly indicate a development-security nexus at the core of the BRI's domestic and international direction.

In contrast to Asian countries, which could be seen as the main beneficiaries of this development-security thrust, Germany and the UK play more of a facilitating and indirect beneficiary role. This is evident in their rarely mentioned and, thus, seemingly secondary significance in the Belt and Road Portal documents. In those instances, they are welcomed as partners for third-party market cooperation and constructive dialogue partners. The two European countries are also of interest to the BRI because of their specific structural characteristics, including their geographical locations, as well as their institutional affiliation with international bodies such as the EU, G20, and AIIB. Although



they are not highlighted as BRI target nations, Germany and the UK are also involved in BRI projects such as the China-Europe Railway Express, financial integration through the City of London, and even nuclear energy cooperation, framed as mutually beneficial in the Chinese documents. As these findings are based on a broad collection of Belt and Road Portal documents, future studies could utilize the established framework to explore Chinese-language documents or other official repositories. This could be achieved by gathering more targeted bilateral or thematic datasets to compare and contrast domestic and international policy framing.

In the third part of this study, the BRI debates in Germany and the UK were examined using 304 national-level documents, 152 each, collected for either country. Each document in this comprehensive dataset underwent a rigorous iterative and peer-reviewed process to enhance consistency and reliability based on the systematic coding scheme developed in the analytical frameworks chapter. The tone and policy areas' figures suggest a negative shift in both European democracies after 2018, with significant similarities and differences in the respective patterns. In both nations, interest in the BRI at the national level increased following the initial Belt and Road Forum. During the initial three years under examination, the public debate in Germany remained relatively inactive, while the UK exhibited a progressive increase in the inclusion of the BRI in documents from 2015 to 2018. These years have been widely described in the data and literature as the Golden Era of UK-China relations, which ended earlier than the upbeat rhetoric of these years suggested.<sup>2248</sup> Accordingly, the debates in both countries can be characterized as primarily desecuritized between 2015 and 2017. This was due to marginal political attention in Germany and positive reception in the UK. The year 2018 was a watershed moment for both countries as political debates underwent significant changes. Public debates on the BRI have increased significantly, accompanying higher degrees of securitization in terms of variety and intensity in Germany and the UK. During the period from 2018 to 2020, both countries displayed substantial to comprehensive levels of securitization, signifying the highest degrees of securitization variety. At first glance, this measure suggests an all-encompassing securitization of the BRI. Looking closely at the respective patterns, the intensity of securitization and thematic distribution across security policy areas suggest a more nuanced picture. Securitization intensity did

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<sup>2248</sup> Leoni 2022: 2.

not surpass the medium level in either country, although the UK approached the upper limit of this range by 2020. In both states under review, there was a distinct emphasis on economic and human security concerns, indicating an uneven focus on security issues. Summarizing the main concerns, the BRI is described as indirectly contributing to or even directly causing market distortions. It is further seen to create unfavorable economic path dependencies, increase political leverage, and, at best, ignore and, at worst, challenge international rules, norms, and standards. In the period under review, the BRI was rarely debated as a military, cyber or even ecologic security issue in the studied documents. These economic and human-normative security concerns reflect poor intersubjectivity on the signaled benign Chinese BRI frames. While the German debate reinforced its previous critical yet tentative monitoring, the UK's stance has notably deteriorated, reflecting diminishing hope for the BRI as a business opportunity and the intersubjectively agreed partner role in financial integration.

While these observations answer the research question on the extent of security perceptions, further aspects of this question have been detailed in the aggregated chapters on the cross-category (Chapter 9) and three BRI security discourse lines (Chapter 10). These findings informed the discussion and could open avenues for future research. One avenue concerns the conceptual innovations proposed in this study on veiled securitization as a communication tactic contributing to hedging securitization as a foreign policy strategy. Theoretical research could deepen the understanding of their characteristics and political application. Veiled securitization was coined to describe the pattern of diplomatically articulated statements that contribute to a negative, thus securitized, image of an issue rather than constituting an all-clear signal. These statements are rooted in Othering-practices and conceal criticism and concerns behind confidentiality or diplomatic proposals. Their main function is to avoid spiraling securitization dynamics by redirecting negative claims in discourse rather than rejecting them in order to retain room for cooperation and negotiation while signaling discontent. This might be one of several tactics in a broader communication strategy of hedging securitization. There is currently a dearth of concepts connecting securitization and IR theories, which could be explored by examining how state representatives use or restrict securitization to influence bilateral security policies or regional security architectures. By examining and theorizing this field, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the motives behind state

actions and the impact of securitization on international and even global security dynamics. From a practical standpoint, this theoretical synthesis can serve as a valuable tool for devising interculturally sensitive communication strategies aimed at advancing the state's interests. At this stage, it is crucial to bear in mind the cautions concerning the repercussions of securitization, which may give rise to stigmatization, heightened antagonism, and thereby the security predicament characteristic of a Hobbesian state of anarchy. Therefore, exploring how to diligently employ a strategy of hedging securitization could provide guidance for calculating and mitigating these perils.<sup>2249</sup>

Another avenue for subsequent studies pertains to a group of facilitating conditions that have been identified as potential factors contributing to the evolving dynamics of securitization. The following factors have been observed to impact securitization in both domestic and international arenas: changes in stakeholder composition due to elections or institutional changes, alliance considerations, policies and practices (including main guidelines or laws), key events (such as summits, pandemics, or local violence), innovations in narratives, and how these factors affect ontological security pillars including historical memories, values, economic preferences, and social elements. These elements have been discussed in Chapter 11 due to the salience of certain issues, including, among others, national role conceptions as trading or financing nations, violence in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, the role of the United States, and the respective stances towards the European Union (including Brexit). This broad set of facilitating conditions thus encompasses both tangible and ideational attributes of power, linking back to the constructivist foundations of this study and China's power ascent. Continued efforts are essential to explore and systematize the impact of these and potentially other facilitating conditions that constitute the driving mechanisms of securitization. This understanding could be utilized to develop early-warning securitization indicators and to guide specialized policy planning across various political spheres amidst global power transitions.

The last chapter highlighted that the BRI has just survived the COVID-19 pandemic but is now facing new and old challenges, such as debt distress, wars, and violence. Still, most of the BRI partner states expressed willingness to continue collaboration and further adapt the framework of projects. The declining outlook on the BRI among Germans

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<sup>2249</sup> See Chapter 2.

and Britons seems to have solidified. This brought them into closer alignment with the United States in its reservations towards China's impact on the global liberal order, although neither country has been determined to be predominantly influenced or entirely following Washington. However, the task of gauging the opinions of government stakeholders has become more daunting due to the scarcity of statements available through the traditional channels informing this study. In their recent strategic documents, Germany and the UK have continued their relations with China, in which the aspiration to shape global (infra)structures has awakened, encompassing strategies of narration, cooperation, and confrontation. Prior to this study, it was challenging to assess the identification and classification of public perceptions along the securitization spectrum and to comprehend them. Future investigations can expand on these findings and explore new pathways to engage stakeholders and the continually evolving BRI framework. Innovation is key for driving economic success and social development, as well as advancing theoretical, methodological, and empirical knowledge in academia. With the groundwork laid out by this study on the security taxonomy, securitization levels, and proposed concepts of veiled and hedging securitization, the baton is now passed to you, scholarly readers, to continue exploring the intricate dynamics of international relations, both within and beyond the Belt and Road Initiative.

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## **Appendix**

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## Appendix 1: Coding Rules and Coding Scheme

### Coding Rules:

- Auto-code all statements on the BRI based on the keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, Belt and Road, economic belt, one belt, Silk Road, DBAR, OBOR, Seidenstraße, Seidenstrasse, Seidentraßeninitiative. Then, read the context of each statement to decide whether preceding or following sentences need to be coded due to their contextual relevance. Review each document to detect whether the automated coding procedure missed BRI-related statements, particularly on specific BRI projects such as the China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC).
- Review each statement for the BRI to gauge the tone of the segment. Do not consider the general tone of the document for the decision. If the tone of a semantic unit is inconclusive, review both the preceding and following sentences to make a decision.
- Do not code the following passages: Footnotes, list of sources, table of contents.
- In the case of contradictions, the statement's context is included in the coding decision.
- Review all negative statements and code them according to the security categories, as all negative statements imply harm to a directly or implied referent object.
- Security categories are coded on a semantic unit basis. More than one security category can be applied to one negative statement. Segments coded along the security categories should not overlap based on the criterion of disjunctive coding.
- The decision to code a security category is based on the consequences for the threatened referent object and proposed measures rather than on specific keywords.
- In German documents: If the wording of a parliamentary inquiry is repeated in the government's response document, do not code the parliamentary inquiry again in order to avoid redundancy and thus biased numbers.
- Statements by Chinese officials in the collected German or British documents are not coded for tone and security categories. This exclusion is based on the observation that such statements primarily serve as direct signals from the initiator of the BRI (the sender) and may not accurately reflect the perceptions of the target or interpreting countries (the receiver).

## Coding Scheme

Categories		Definition	Example in the Original Languages
Tone	Negative Tone	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative attitude encompassing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ harm for a referent object;</li> <li>▪ assumed negative impacts;</li> <li>▪ disagreement or disapproval;</li> <li>▪ negative emotions such as criticism, dissatisfaction, displeasure;</li> <li>▪ harsh, confrontational, or disapproving words.</li> </ul>	<p>Mit neuen Abhängigkeiten versucht China, Länder gefügig zu machen, um auch auf internationaler Ebene und bei internationalen Organisationen kritische Stimmen verstummen zu lassen. Die EU braucht auch eine Strategie beim Thema Neue Seidenstraße, vor allem wegen ihrer langfristigen wirtschaftlichen und politischen Auswirkungen auf Europa. (11-08-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1961: 6939.)</p> <p>Let us be clear about what is at stake. China is a politico-military-economic challenge. Most Europeans, the UK included, have focused on China as a marketplace—import and export. But China is making an undisguised effort to become the greatest technological power in the world. The one belt, one road initiative brings a Chinese investment strategy, which includes converting debt into equity stakes in the economies of the countries along the route—with the attendant political influence that will bring—right to the borders of Europe. (04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790: 20 - 12.47pm.)</p>
	Neutral Tone	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting neither a distinct positive nor negative attitude towards BRI encompassing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ pure descriptions;</li> <li>▪ balanced evaluations;</li> <li>▪ factual, unbiased words;</li> <li>▪ impartial, objective, indifferent statements.</li> </ul>	<p>Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen der One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR) der Volksrepublik China für die Republik Indien sind vielschichtig und nicht eindeutig zu bewerten. (12-18-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs196609: 3.)</p> <p>The UK's engagement with China on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is focused on practical cooperation on infrastructure projects, including pragmatic steps and collaboration to help ensure that projects are delivered in line with the highest economic, environmental, social and financial standards in order to deliver sustainable development outcomes and opportunities for UK and international businesses. (06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527: 1.)</p>
	Positive Tone	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a positive attitude encompassing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ positive effects, benefits, opportunities;</li> <li>▪ chances for cooperation;</li> <li>▪ motivation to participate;</li> <li>▪ compliments, agreement, satisfaction, and approval toward the BRI or related projects;</li> <li>▪ uplifting, supportive, encouraging words.</li> </ul>	<p>Laut dem paneuropäischen Recherchenetzwerk Investigate Europe, zu dem auch Journalisten des Berliner Tagesspiegel zählen, gibt es bislang keine Belege für wirtschaftliche Schäden oder extreme Abhängigkeiten durch die Neue Seidenstraße. Im Gegenteil: Die Investitionen hätten bislang vor allem positive Auswirkungen auf die lokale Wirtschaft. (10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419: 4.)</p> <p>Silk Road could thus help overcome this barrier and contribute to SDG 9.C by improving the availability and affordability of broadband networks and services for these countries and other BRI countries. (03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 17.)</p>

<b>Security Categories</b>	<b>Military Security</b>	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative tone with military security implications indicated by issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ infrastructures and resources having a military purpose;</li> <li>▪ military capabilities;</li> <li>▪ military alliances;</li> <li>▪ military measures including defense policies and strategic deterrence;</li> <li>▪ tensions and conflicts with potential involvement of armed forces.</li> </ul>	<p>Insbesondere letzteres – die strategisch-militärische Komponente – ist für die Vereinigten Staaten, Indien und andere Anrainer des Indopazifik Anlass zur Sorge. Die Gesamtheit dieser Infrastrukturprojekte bildet die Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), die im Folgenden dargestellt wird. (10-25-2018-DEU-BT-WD09718: 14)</p> <p>In hard power terms, BRI provides a physical platform for expanded Chinese state presence worldwide. (04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612: 17.)</p>
	<b>Economic Security</b>	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative tone with economic security implications indicated by issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ economic regulations and policies, trade agreements, financial regulation;</li> <li>▪ effects of investments, obligations or bonds;</li> <li>▪ market effects, access to resources, economic dependencies;</li> <li>▪ financial stability at risk.</li> </ul>	<p>Heiko Maas hat Italien dafür kritisiert, dass es sich dem Neue Seidenstraße-Projekt angeschlossen hat. Er hat wörtlich gesagt: Sollten einige Länder glauben, man kann mit den Chinesen clevere Geschäfte machen, werden sie sich noch wundern und irgendwann in Abhängigkeit aufwachen. (04-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1995: 11495.)</p> <p>We must also recognise the broader agenda with things such as China’s belt and road initiative, which is about creating debt-trap diplomacy. It is about building influence by entering other economies in such a major way that those economies effectively become dependent on the Chinese state. (12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD: 47 - 4.30pm.)</p>
	<b>Ecologic Security</b>	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative tone with ecologic security implications indicated by issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ protection and preservation of the environment;</li> <li>▪ measures, policies, and standards of environmental protection;</li> <li>▪ pollution, biodiversity loss, and natural resource depletion;</li> <li>▪ sustainability practices, laws, international regulation and conservation efforts.</li> </ul>	<p>Sie teilt die Bedenken gegenüber Investitionen in fossile Energieträger, die in Verbindung mit der Belt-and-Road-Initiative stehen. Die EU-Kommission und der Europäische Auswärtige Dienst (EAD) haben in ihrer Gemeinsamen Mitteilung EU-China – Strategische Perspektiven vom 12. März 2019 festgestellt, dass China in vielen Ländern Kohlekraftwerke baut, wodurch die globalen Ziele des Übereinkommens von Paris untergraben werden. (06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 10-11.)</p> <p>Does the Minister agree that China has problems with environmental standards (...)? (05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659: 21 - 5.37pm.)</p>

	<b>Human Security</b>	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative tone with human security implications by issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ human-rights concerns;</li> <li>▪ fundamental rights and freedoms, including labor rights, freedom of speech, health, education, personal safety, basic needs;</li> <li>▪ ethical and moral principles;</li> <li>▪ respect for international institutions, laws, norms, treaties, and diplomatic practices;</li> <li>▪ other normative, value-related policies and practices.</li> </ul>	<p>In der internationalen Zusammenarbeit erwarten die Bundesregierung und die Europäische Union, dass menschenrechtliche Standards eingehalten werden. Nach Kenntnis der Bundesregierung spielen diese Überlegungen in der BRI nur eine untergeordnete Rolle. (06-25-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920411: 8.)</p> <p>That is clearly because China wants to have a good relationship with the Myanmar Government so it is able to continue with its belt and road initiative, and in my opinion it is also because China does not want people looking too closely at how it is treating the Muslim Uighur minority in the west of China. (12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651: 41 – 3.07pm.)</p>
	<b>Cyber Security</b>	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative tone with cyber security implications indicated by issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ digital infrastructure and connectivity;</li> <li>▪ malicious actors or actions in cyberspace;</li> <li>▪ cyber regulations including the protection of information systems and digital data.</li> </ul>	<p>Deutschland ist aufgrund seiner exponierten Stellung ein lohnenswertes Ziel auch für staatlich gelenkte Cyberangriffe. Mutmaßliche Ziele der Angriffe sind illegaler Wissenstransfer durch Cyberspionage, Ausforschung von Unternehmen vor möglichen Kooperationen mit chinesischen Firmen oder vor möglichen Aufkäufen aus der Volksrepublik China, sowie politische und wirtschaftliche Spionage in Ländern, die durch die Belt-and-Road-Initiative oder den 5G-Netzausbau in Verhandlungen mit der Volksrepublik China stehen. (06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346: 55.)</p> <p>However, direct partnerships in digital BRI projects may be risky for traditional development donors due to concerns that may not bode well with their citizens about the digital Silk Road spreading an unfree internet and technologies (...). (03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad: 2.)</p>
	<b>Other</b>	<p>Statements about the BRI exhibiting a negative tone but cannot be categorized into a security category because their implications are too broad or vague.</p>	<p>(No example for the UK available.)</p> <p>Xi Jinping’s legitimacy and hold on power is linked to the success of the BRI, which the Chinese government is pursuing at all costs. (05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191749: 9.)</p>



## Appendix 2: Collected Documents for China

Date	Identifier	Type	Originator	Title
27.03.15	03-27-2015-BD	BD	China and Indonesia	Joint Statement on Strengthening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and The Republic of Indonesia
28.03.15	03-28-2015-OD	OD	NDRC, MFA, MOFCOM	Vision And Actions On Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt And 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road
10.04.15	04-10-2015-PR	PR	Ministry of Commerce of PRC	MOFCOM Announcement No.12 of 2015 Administrative Measures for the Record-filing of Foreign Investment in Pilot Free Trade Zones (for Trial Implementation)
29.06.15	06-29-2015-OD	OD	AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Articles of Agreement
31.08.15	08-31-2015-BD	BD	China and Kazakhstan	Joint Declaration on New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan (Full Text)
04.09.15	09-04-2015-BD	BD	China and Myanmar	Joint News Release of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
24.11.15	11-24-2015-BD	BD	4th Summit of China and Central and Eastern European Countries	The Suzhou Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries
10.12.15	12-10-2015-BD	BD	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation	Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
13.01.16	01-13-2016-BD	BD	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC	China's Arab Policy Paper
23.03.16	03-23-2016-BD	BD	MFA	Sanya Declaration of the First Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Leaders' Meeting
18.05.16	05-18-2016-BD	BD	China and Afghanistan	Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
X.07.2016	07-2016-OD	OD	Ministry of Education of the PRC	Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative
08.07.16	07-08-2016-BD	BD	China and Papua New Guinea	China-Papua New Guinea Joint Press Release
21.08.16	08-21-2016-BD	BD	China and Myanmar	Joint Press Release Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
05.11.16	11-05-2016-BD	BD	5th Summit of China and Central and Eastern European Countries	Full Text of Riga Declaration
31.03.17	03-31-2017-BD	BD	China and New Zealand	Memorandum of Arrangement On Strengthening Cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative Between The Government of the People's Republic of China And The Government of New Zealand
31.03.17	03-31-2017-OD	OD	General Administration of Quality	The Belt and Road' Vision and Actions for Cooperation in Metrology

			Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of PRC	
05.04.17	04-05-2017-BD	BD	China and Finland	Joint Declaration between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Finland on Establishing and Promoting the Future-oriented New-type Cooperative Partnership
X.05.2017	05-2017-OD	OD	Ministry of Agriculture-NDRC-MOFCOM-MFA	Vision and Action on Jointly Promoting Agricultural Cooperation on the Belt and Road
08.05.17	05-08-2017-OD	OD	Belt and Road Portal	Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road
10.05.17	05-10-2017-OD	OD	Office of the Leading Group for the BRI	Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice and China's Contribution
14.05.17	05-14-2017-OD	OD	Ministry of Commerce of PRC	Initiative on Promoting Unimpeded Trade Cooperation along the Belt and Road
14.05.17	05-14-2017-OD_2	OD	Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation Ministry of Environmental Protection	The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan
14.05.17	05-14-2017-BD	BD	China and UNECE	Memorandum of Understanding Between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the National Development and Reform Commission of China
16.05.17	05-16-2017-OD	OD	NDRC and the National Energy Administration of PCR	Vision and Actions on Energy Cooperation in Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road
16.05.17	05-16-2017-OD_2	OD	Ministry of Finance of PRC	Guiding Principles on Financing the Development of the Belt and Road
16.05.17	05-16-2017-OD_3	OD	Leaders Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation	Joint communique of leaders roundtable of Belt and Road forum
20.06.17	06-20-2017-OD	OD	National Development and Reform Commission and the State Oceanic Administration	Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative
22.08.17	08-22-2017-PR	PR	China	Registration of Foreign-funded Companies in China
16.11.17	11-16-2017-BD	BD	China and Republic of the Philippines	Joint Statement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines
08.12.17	12-08-2017-BD	BD	China and Republic of Maldives	Joint Press Communique between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Maldives
11.01.18	01-11-2018-BD	BD	China and France	Joint Declaration between the People's Republic of China and the French Republic
12.01.18	01-12-2018-BD	BD	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC	Five-Year Plan of Action on Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (2018-2022)
29.01.18	01-29-2018-OD	OD	State Council Information Office of	China's Arctic Policy

			PRC	
01.03.18	03-01-2018-BD	BD	China and the Kingdom of Tonga	Joint Press Communique between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Tonga
04.11.18	11-04-2018-BD	BD	China and Pakistan	Full text of China-Pakistan joint statement
14.11.18	11-14-2018-BD	BD	China and Singapore	Joint statement between Chinese, Singaporean governments
19.11.19	11-19-2019-BD	BD	China and Brunei	Full text of China-Brunei joint statement
21.11.18	11-21-2018-BD	BD	China and Philippines	Full text of China-Philippines joint statement
19.12.18	12-19-2018-PR	PR	China	Full text of China's Policy Paper on the European Union
19.03.19	03-19-2019-PR	PR	Xinhua	China amends regulations to facilitate cross-border investment, financing
09.04.19	04-09-2019-BD	BD	China and the European Union (EU)	Full text of China-EU summit joint statement
12.04.19	04-12-2019-BD	BD	8th Summit of China and Central and Eastern European Countries	Full text of the Dubrovnik Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries
22.04.19	04-22-2019-OD	OD	Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative	The Belt and Road Initiative Progress, Contributions and Prospects
02.07.19	07-02-2019-PR	PR	Xinhua	China tightens regulation on PPP projects
27.09.19	09-27-2019-PR	PR	State Council Information Office of the PRC	China and the World in the New Era
28.09.19	09-28-2019-BD	BD	China and the Republic of Vanuatu	Full Text: Joint Press Communique Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Vanuatu
09.10.19	10-09-2019-PR	PR	Xinhua	China to introduce regulation to improve business environment and facilitate investment
13.10.19	10-13-2019-BD	BD	China and Nepal	Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and Nepal
14.11.19	11-14-2019-BD	BD	11th BRICS Summit Brasilia	Full text of BRICS Summit Brasilia Declaration
27.11.19	11-27-2019-BD	BD	China and the Republic of Suriname	Joint Press Communique Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Suriname
02.12.19	12-02-2019-PR	PR	Xinhua	China issues measures to promote high-quality financial market development
27.12.19	12-27-2019-PR	PR	China Daily	China revises regulations on foreign banks
17.03.20	03-17-2020-BD	BD	China and Pakistan	Full text of China-Pakistan joint statement
17.06.20	06-17-2020-BD	BD	Extraordinary China-Africa Summit	Full text: Joint Statement of the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19
18.06.20	06-18-2020-OD	OD	MFA	Joint Statement of the High-level Video Conference on Belt and Road International Cooperation: Combating COVID-19 with Solidarity

15.07.20	07-15-2020-PR	PR	Xinhua	China releases regulation on ensuring timely payments to SMEs
30.06.20	06-30-2020-PR	PR	Xinhua	China issues regulation for supervision of cosmetics industry
03.08.20	08-03-2020-PR	PR	Xinhua	Chinese regulation promoting medical consortiums to take effect
24.08.20	08-24-2020-BD	BD	3rd Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) Leaders' Meeting	Full text of Co-chairs' Statement on Cooperation of Synergizing the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation and the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor of the Third Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) Leaders' Meeting
31.08.20	08-31-2020-PR	PR	Xinhua	China to enforce regulations ensuring timely payments to SMEs
08.09.20	09-08-2020-OD	OD	International Seminar on Global Digital Governance	Full text: Global Initiative on Data Security
18.11.20	11-18-2020-OD	OD	12th BRICS Summit Moscow	Full text of BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration
10.12.20	12-10-2020-BD	BD	Xinhua	Xi, Macron reach important consensus on China-France cooperation in next stage
22.12.20	12-22-2020-OD	OD	State Council Information Office of PRC	Sustainable Development of Transport in China
<p>Identifier Structure: MM-DD-YYYY-TT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MM-DD-YYY: publishing date of the item (X: No day indicated)</li> <li>- TT: type of document. OD: Official Document; BD: Bilateral Document; PR: Policies and Regulations.</li> </ul>				

Type	Number of Entries	Selected Documents
<b>OD: Official Documents</b>	31	19
<b>BD: Bilateral Documents</b>	40	33
<b>PR: Policies and Regulations</b>	25	13
<b>Total Number of Selected Documents</b>	96	65

### Appendix 3: Collected Documents for Germany

Date	Identifier	Type	Originator	Title
23.04.2015	04-23-2015-DEU-BT-BTPP18100	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 18/100, Krieg in Afghanistan – Eine Bilanz
15.10.2015	10-15-2015-DEU-BR-BRdrs50015	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die Europäische Kommission - Handel für alle. Hin zu einer verantwortungsbewussteren Handels- und Investitionspolitik
05.11.2015	11-05-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs186610	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch den Präsidenten des Deutschen Bundestages - Bericht über die internationalen Aktivitäten und Verpflichtungen des Deutschen Bundestages
07.12.2015	12-07-2015-DEU-BT-BTdrs187016	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch "Die Linke" - Die deutschen Beziehungen zu Kasachstan
20.01.2016	01-20-2016-DEU-BT-BTPP187336	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Linke" - Die deutschen Beziehungen zu Kasachstan
02.02.2016	02-02-2016-DEU-AA-EdererOBOR	EP	Federal Foreign Office	„Implications of the One Belt, One Road Initiative for Europe and the Eurasian Continent“ – Rede von Staatssekretär Markus Ederer bei der Veranstaltung „Bestandsaufnahme OBOR“
11.05.2016	05-11-2016-DEU-BT-WD03016	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - The Eurasian Economic Perspective / Die Eurasische Wirtschaftsunion
05.11.2016	11-05-2016-DEU-AA-EdererBRI	EP	Federal Foreign Office	Rede von Staatssekretär Markus Ederer „China's Belt and Road Initiative in Context
28.06.2017	06-28-2017-DEU-BT-BTPP18242	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 18/242, Östliche Partnerschaft der EU entschlossen gestalten und konsequent fortsetzen
28.06.2017	06-28-2017-DEU-AA-EurasischeKonnektivität	EP	Federal Foreign Office	„Eurasische Konnektivität“: Regionale Botschafterkonferenz im Auswärtigen Amt
12.07.2017	07-12-2017-DEU-AA-EdererEurasien	EP	Federal Foreign Office	Rede von Staatssekretär Markus Ederer beim Jahresempfang des Ost-Ausschusses der Deutschen Wirtschaft: „Eurasien – Brennpunkt der Interessen oder Raum der Kooperation?“
21.11.2017	11-21-2017-DEU-BT-BTdrs1980	EP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung - Jahresgutachten 2017/2018 des Sachverständigenrates zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung
25.01.2018	01-25-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs19547	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Linke" - Gegenseitige Staatsbesuche, Deutschland und die osteuropäischen Staaten
09.03.2018	03-09-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs191120	EP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung - Bericht der Bundesregierung zu Stand und Perspektiven des deutschen

				Afghanistan-Engagements
21.03.2018	03-21-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1922	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/22, Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
20.04.2018	04-20-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1927	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/27, Die Gewaltexzesse gegen die Rohingya stoppen – Für die vollständige Anerkennung als gleichberechtigte Volksgruppe in Myanmar
17.05.2018	05-17-2018-DEU-BT-BTPP1933	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/33, Unvereinbarkeit des Verordnungsentwurfs der EU-Kommission über die Einrichtung einer europäischen Arbeitsbehörde (ELA) mit dem Subsidiaritätsprinzip
30.05.2018	05-30-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs192445	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die deutsche Delegation in der Interparlamentarischen Konferenz für die Gemeinsame Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik und die Gemeinsame Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik, Tagung der Interparlamentarischen Konferenz für die Gemeinsame Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik und die Gemeinsame Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik
27.06.2018	06-27-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs192996	PP	German Parliament	Entschließungsantrag, zu der Abgabe einer Regierungserklärung durch die Bundeskanzlerin zum Europäischen Rat am 28./29. Juni 2018 in Brüssel und zum NATO-Gipfel am 11./12. Juli 2018 in Brüssel
30.07.2018	07-30-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs193622	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch "Die Linke" - Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und den zentralasiatischen Staaten und Zusammenarbeit mit der Zivilgesellschaft
13.08.2018	08-13-2018-DEU-BT-WD09618	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Deutschlands Beziehungen zu den Staaten Südostasiens im Kontext seiner außenpolitischen Interessen
17.08.2018	08-17-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs193881	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch "Die Linke" - Perspektiven eines künftigen gesamteuropäischen Raums von Lissabon bis Wladiwostok
12.09.2018	09-12-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs194277	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Linke" - Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und den zentralasiatischen Staaten und Zusammenarbeit mit der Zivilgesellschaft
14.09.2018	09-14-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs194339	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Zinssubventionierte Darlehen der KfW an die Volksrepublik China
05.10.2018	10-05-2018-DEU-BT-BTdrs194758	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Linke" - Perspektiven eines künftigen gesamteuropäischen Raums von Lissabon bis Wladiwostok
09.10.2018	10-09-2018-DEU-BT-	PP	German	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die

	BTdrs194906		Parliament	Anfrage "Die Linke" - Zinssubventionierte Darlehen der KfW an die Volksrepublik China
12.10.2018	10-12-2018-DEU-BT- BTpp1956	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/56, Friedensprozess zwischen Äthiopien und Eritrea unterstützen – Zusammenarbeit ausbauen
17.10.2018	10-17-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195062	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Wirtschaftszonen im Südchinesischen Meer
23.10.2018	10-23-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195221	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Beurteilung der Entwicklungspolitik der Volksrepublik China
24.10.2018	10-24-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195285	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die deutsche Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der OSZE
25.10.2018	10-25-2018-DEU-BT- WD09718	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - China und Südostasien
02.11.2018	11-02-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195446	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Deutsche ODA-Leistungen an die Volksrepublik China
05.11.2018	11-05-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195477	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Wirtschaftszonen im Südchinesischen Meer
08.11.2018	11-08-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195624	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Beurteilung der Entwicklungspolitik der Volksrepublik China
08.11.2018	11-08-2018-DEU-BT- BTpp1961	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/61, Schwere Menschenrechtsverletzungen in Xinjiang beenden, aufklären und ahnden
19.11.2018	11-19-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs195837	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Stand der deutsch-indischen Beziehungen
27.11.2018	11-27-2018-DEU-BT- WD17818	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Kurzinformation Shanghaier Organisation für Zusammenarbeit
04.12.2018	12-04-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs196328	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Deutsche ODA- Leistungen an die Volksrepublik China
11.12.2018	12-11-2018-DEU-BT- WD14318	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Ausgewählte Aspekte der Entwicklungspolitik. Historische Entwicklung, Aktuelle Quellen, Kritik, Staatliche Akteure im internationalen Vergleich
17.12.2018	12-17-2018-DEU-BT- WD15418	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Sonderwirtschaftszonen in der Entwicklungspolitik
18.12.2018	12-18-2018-DEU-BT- BTdrs196609	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Stand der deutsch- indischen Beziehungen
02.01.2019	01-02-2019-DEU-BT- BTdrs196759	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Einfluss Chinas auf EU- Beitrittskandidaten in Südosteuropa
10.01.2019	01-10-2019-DEU-BT-	SR	Research	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Das

	WD16718		Services	Engagement der Volksrepublik China und der Europäischen Union in afrikanischen Ländern
17.01.2019	01-17-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197107	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Modernisierung europäischer Infrastruktur im Rahmen der One-Belt-One-Road-Initiative
23.01.2019	01-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs-197307	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die deutsche Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der NATO - 62. Jahrestagung der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der NATO vom 18. bis 21. November 2016 in Istanbul, Türkei
24.01.2019	01-24-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197326	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Entwicklungszusammenarbeit mit Afghanistan
25.01.2019	01-25-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197371	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "FDP" - Einfluss Chinas auf EU-Beitrittskandidaten in Südosteuropa
31.01.2019	01-31-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1977	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/77, Jahreswirtschaftsbericht 2019 der Bundesregierung
05.02.2019	02-05-2019-DEU-BT-WD15718	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Die USA und Südostasien
13.02.2019	02-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs197707	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Modernisierung europäischer Infrastruktur im Rahmen der One-Belt-One-Road-Initiative
25.02.2019	02-25-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198031	PP	German Parliament	Anwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Entwicklungszusammenarbeit mit Afghanistan
04.03.2019	03-04-2019-DEU-BT-WD02319	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Potenzielle Auswirkungen eines Brexit auf Deutschlands maritime Wirtschaft und die Fischerei
06.03.2019	03-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198137	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Reaktion der Bundesregierung auf systemische Wettbewerber
14.03.2019	03-14-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198386	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Modernisierung europäischer Infrastruktur im Rahmen der One-Belt-One-Road-Initiative (Teil 2)
19.03.2019	03-19-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs199284	EC	German Parliament	Stellungnahme Prof. Dr. Markus Taube zu den Anträgen der Fraktion der "FDP": Attraktivität Deutschlands für ausländisches Kapital sichern und der Fraktion "BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN": Schlüsseltechnologien und Kritische Infrastruktur schützen – Standortattraktivität für Investitionen sichern
20.03.2019	03-20-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1934	PP	German Parliament	Wortprotokoll der 34. Sitzung des Ausschuss für Wirtschaft und Energie - "Attraktivität Deutschlands für ausländisches Kapital sichern" und "Schlüsseltechnologien und Kritische



				Infrastruktur schützen – Standortattraktivität für Investitionen sichern"
21.03.2019	03-21-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1989	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/89, Fusion von Deutscher Bank und Commerzbank – Konsequenzen für die Steuerzahlerinnen und Steuerzahler
22.03.2019	03-22-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198668	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Deutsch-chinesische Entwicklungszusammenarbeit im Stromsektor
22.03.2019	03-22-2019-DEU-BT-WD03219	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Haltung der Europäischen Union zum chinesischen Investitionsprojekt Neue Seidenstraße
26.03.2019	03-26-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198720	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Deutsche Beteiligung an der südamerikanischen Transkontinentalbahn
28.03.2019	03-28-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198799	PP	German Parliament	Anwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Modernisierung europäischer Infrastruktur im Rahmen der One-Belt-One-Road-Initiative (Teil 2)
28.03.2019	03-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD03919	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Chinas „Neue Seidenstraße“
29.03.2019	03-29-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199030	EP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung - Sechster Bericht der Bundesregierung über die Entwicklung und Zukunftsperspektiven der maritimen Wirtschaft in Deutschland
02.04.2019	04-02-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs198906	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Wassersicherheit entlang des Nil und chinesisches Engagement in Äthiopien
05.04.2019	04-05-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199081	PP	German Parliament	Schriftliche Fragen mit den in der Woche vom 1. April 2019 eingegangenen Antworten der Bundesregierung
05.04.2019	04-05-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1993	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/93, Aufstrebenden Wirtschaftsmächten den Status als Entwicklungsland entziehen – Keine Förderung im Rahmen der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und des Außenhandels für Schwellenländer
08.04.2019	04-08-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199182	PP	German Parliament	Anwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Reaktion der Bundesregierung auf systemische Wettbewerber
09.04.2019	04-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199213	PP	German Parliament	Anwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Deutsche Beteiligung an der südamerikanischen Transkontinentalbahn
11.04.2019	04-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1995	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/95, Zwölfte Verordnung zur Änderung der Außenwirtschaftsverordnung, Lenkende Industriepolitik ablehnen – Änderung der Außenwirtschaftsverordnung

				zurücknehmen, Attraktivität Deutschlands für ausländisches Kapital sichern
12.04.2019	04-12-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1996	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/96, Die Rolle Europas in einer Welt des Umbruchs
23.04.2019	04-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199651	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Deutsch-chinesische Entwicklungszusammenarbeit im Stromsektor
24.04.2019	04-24-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199686	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Wassersicherheit entlang des Nil und chinesisches Engagement in Äthiopien
07.05.2019	05-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs199916	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "CDU/CSU" und "SPD" - Zehn Jahre Östliche Partnerschaft der Europäischen Union – Für eine intensive Zusammenarbeit auf dem Weg zu Wohlstand, Sicherheit und Demokratie
08.05.2019	05-08-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA1932	PP	German Parliament	Wortprotokoll der 32. Sitzung - Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe
08.05.2019	05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191752	EC	German Parliament	Human Rights Watch – Wenzel Michalski, Schriftliche Stellungnahme zur Anhörung im Menschenrechtsschuss „Religionsfreiheit: Die menschenrechtliche Lage religiöser Minderheiten in China“
08.05.2019	05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191750	EC	German Parliament	Documenting Genocide: The Extrajudicial Killing Of Prisoners Of Conscience For Organs In China And The Campaign To Eradicate Falun Gong Fact Finding & Analysis Report
08.05.2019	05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191749	EC	German Parliament	Religious Freedom: The human-rights situation of religious minorities in China World Uyghur Congress Written Statement
08.05.2019	05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191748	PP	German Parliament	Beantwortung des Fragenkatalogs für die Anhörung des Ausschusses für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe des Deutschen Bundestags zum Thema „Religionsfreiheit: Die menschenrechtliche Lage religiöser Minderheiten in China“ am 8. Mai 2019
08.05.2019	05-08-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191751	EC	German Parliament	Schriftliche Stellungnahme von Ulrich Delius, Direktor der Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, zum Fragenkatalog der Anhörung „Religionsfreiheit: Die menschenrechtliche Lage religiöser Minderheiten in China“ am 8.Mai 2019
09.05.2019	05-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1998	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/98, Privilegierte Partnerschaft statt Vollmitgliedschaft – EU-Erweiterungspläne für den Westbalkan überdenken
10.05.2019	05-10-2019-DEU-BT-	PP	German	Drucksache 19/10041, Schriftliche

	BTdrs1910041		Parliament	Fragen mit den in der Woche vom 6. Mai 2019 eingegangenen Antworten der Bundesregierung
10.05.2019	05-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP1999	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/99, Europas Industrie zukunftsfest machen – Innovationen, Zukunftstechnologien, Klimaschutz, fairer Wettbewerb
14.05.2019	05-14-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910163	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "FDP" - Für eine starke maritime Wirtschaft als Teil der deutschen Industrie der Zukunft
21.05.2019	05-21-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910387	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Gemeinsame Erklärung EU-China vom 9. April 2019
05.06.2019	06-05-2019-DEU-BT-ÖA-1935	PP	German Parliament	Wortprotokoll der 35. Sitzung - Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe
05.06.2019	06-05-2019-DEU-BT-Adrs191759	EC	German Parliament	Stellungnahme Amnesty International zum „13. Bericht Der Bundesregierung über Ihre Menschenrechtspolitik“, Berichtszeitraum 01. Oktober 2016 Bis 30. September 2018
06.06.2019	06-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910745	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Gemeinsame Erklärung EU-China vom 9. April 2019
06.06.2019	06-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19104	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/104, 30 Jahre Niederschlagung der friedlichen Proteste am Platz des Himmlischen Friedens – Für eine umfassende Aufarbeitung und die Achtung der Bürger- und Menschenrechte
07.06.2019	06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910777	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Exportfinanzierung im Kontext der chinesischen Herausforderung
07.06.2019	06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910783	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - EU-Asien-Konnektivitätsstrategie
07.06.2019	06-07-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1910765	PP	German Parliament	Schriftliche Fragen mit den in der Woche vom 3. Juni 2019 eingegangenen Antworten der Bundesregierung
27.06.2019	06-27-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19107.pdf	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/107, Nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele erreichen – Potenziale aus der Agrarökologie anerkennen und unterstützen
09.07.2019	07-09-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911440	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Exportfinanzierung im Kontext der chinesischen Herausforderung
10.07.2019	07-10-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911471	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - EU-Asien-Konnektivitätsstrategie
18.07.2019	07-18-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1911747	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Afrika als Plattform für den Ausbau Chinas neuer Seidenstraßeninitiative – Wirtschaftliche Kooperationspotentiale für deutsche Unternehmen nutzen
06.08.2019	08-06-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1912192	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Afrika als

				Plattform für den Ausbau Chinas neuer Seidenstraßeninitiative – Wirtschaftliche Kooperationspotentiale für deutsche Unternehmen nutzen
11.09.2019	09-11-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19111	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/111, Auswärtigen Amtes, Einzelplan 05
13.09.2019	09-13-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1913193	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch "Die Linke" - Deutsche Arktispolitik
17.10.2019	10-17-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1913402	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch den Präsidenten des Deutschen Bundestages - Bericht über die internationalen Aktivitäten und Verpflichtungen des Deutschen Bundestages
22.10.2019	10-22-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914340	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "CDU/CSU" und "SPD" - Die deutsch-indischen Beziehungen stärken
24.10.2019	10-24-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19121	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/121, Die deutsch-indischen Beziehungen stärken
28.10.2019	10-28-2019-DEU-BT-WD09419	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Investitionen entlang Chinas „Neuer Seidenstraße“
31.10.2019	10-31-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1914664	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die deutsche Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der OSZE
13.11.2019	11-13-2019-DEU-BT-WD12019	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Beziehungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, der Europäischen Union, der NATO und der OSZE mit der Schanghaier Organisation für Zusammenarbeit
20.11.2019	11-20-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1915326	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Linke" - Deutsche Arktispolitik
28.11.2019	11-28-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1915567	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "FDP" - Förderung der beruflichen Bildung und Zinssubventionen für China beenden
16.12.2019	12-16-2019-DEU-BT-WD13419	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Eurasische Wirtschaftsunion: Aktuelle Entwicklungen, Verhältnis zur EU und der Belt and Road Initiative
19.12.2019	12-19-2019-DEU-BT-BTPP19137	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/137, Förderung der beruflichen Bildung und Zinssubventionen für China beenden
23.12.2019	12-23-2019-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916225	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Frage durch die "AfD" - Chinesische Friedensbemühungen in Afghanistan
08.01.2020	01-08-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916389	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Chinesische Friedensbemühungen in Afghanistan
20.01.2020	01-20-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916620	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Übertragung von nationalen Kompetenzen auf multilaterale Organisationen
28.01.2020	01-28-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1916820	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "AfD" - Neue Seidenstraße – Initiativen der Bundesregierung
20.02.2020	02-20-2020-DEU-BT-	EP	German	Unterrichtung der Bundesregierung -

	BTdrs1923070		Parliament	Gutachten zu Forschung, Innovation und technologischer Leistungsfähigkeit Deutschlands 2020
26.02.2020	02-26-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1917395	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "AfD" - Neue Seidenstraße – Initiativen der Bundesregierung
05.03.2020	03-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19149	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/149, Entwicklungszusammenarbeit zum gegenseitigen Nutzen konzipieren – Rohstoffversorgung der deutschen Industrie sicherstellen
09.03.2020	03-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs17687	PP	German Parliament	Große Anfrage durch "Die Grünen" - Weg zu einer gemeinsamen wertebasierten und realistischen China-Politik der EU
21.04.2020	04-21-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1918673	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "FDP" - Selbstbewusstsein statt Abschottung – Für ein liberales Außenwirtschaftsrecht trotz Corona-Pandemie
11.05.2020	05-11-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1919084	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch "Die Linke" - Aktivitäten der Bundeswehr in der Arktis
13.05.2020	05-13-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1971	PP	German Parliament	Wortprotokoll der 71. Sitzung - Ausschuss für Wirtschaft und Energie
25.05.2020	05-25-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs199632	PP	German Parliament	Deutscher Bundestag: Öffentliche Anhörung „Neustart für die Wirtschaft in Deutschland und Europa“ am 27. Mai 2020
29.05.2020	05-29-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19164	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/164, Sicherheitsgesetz für Hongkong verurteilen Das Prinzip „Ein Land, zwei Systeme“ bewahren
11.06.2020	06-11-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1919883	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Die Menschenrechtspolitik der Volksrepublik China bei den Vereinten Nationen
12.06.2020	06-12-2020-DEU-BT-WD	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Spannungen zwischen Indien und China
15.06.2020	06-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1919973	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Linke" - Aktivitäten der Bundeswehr in der Arktis
17.06.2020	06-17-2020-DEU-Adrs191796	EC	German Parliament	Stellungnahme als Sachverständiger zur öffentlichen Anhörung auf Einladung des Ausschusses für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe des Deutschen Bundestags zum Thema „Menschenrechte und politische Teilhabe im digitalen Zeitalter“, 17. Juni 2020
24.06.2020	06-24-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920346	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage "Die Grünen" - Weg zu einer gemeinsamen wertebasierten und realistischen China-Politik der EU
24.06.2020	06-24-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs199681	SR	German Parliament	Strategische Souveränität in Energiefragen: Überlegungen zur Handlungs- und Gestaltungsfähigkeit Deutschlands in der EU

25.06.2020	06-25-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920411	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Die Menschenrechtspolitik der Volksrepublik China bei den Vereinten Nationen
29.06.2020	06-29-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA-ST1	PP	German Parliament	Anhörung des Auswärtigen Ausschusses des Bundestages zu „China“ am 29.6.2020
01.07.2020	07-01-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19169	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/169, Europas Bekenntnis zum Freihandel mit einem europäischen Kandidaten für die Welthandelsorganisation
02.07.2020	07-02-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1920714(neu)	PP	German Parliament	Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht des Ausschusses für Wirtschaft und Energie, Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Reduzierung und zur Beendigung der Kohleverstromung und zur Änderung weiterer Gesetze
03.08.2020	08-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1921540	EP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung, Dreiundzwanzigstes Hauptgutachten der Monopolkommission Wettbewerb 2020
01.09.2020	09-01-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922019	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Auswirkungen der Fusion Alstom und Bombardier
03.09.2020	09-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922254	EP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung der Bundesregierung - Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik Deutschland – Europa – Asien: Das 21. Jahrhundert gemeinsam gestalten
07.09.2020	09-07-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922169	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "FDP" - Menschenrechtsverstöße verurteilen – Demokratisierung und Opposition in Kambodscha stärken
09.09.2020	09-09-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19172	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/172, Entwurf eines Gesetzes zu dem Mehrseitigen Übereinkommen vom 24. November 2016 zur Umsetzung steuerabkommensbezogener Maßnahmen zur Verhinderung der Gewinnverkürzung und Gewinnverlagerung
15.09.2020	09-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922482	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Auswirkungen der Fusion Alstom und Bombardier
15.09.2020	09-15-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1922471	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "FDP" - Weltbank-Kreditlinie für China einstellen und verschuldete Entwicklungsländer entlasten
05.10.2020	10-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1923069	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Zweifel der Bundesregierung am EU-Freihandelsabkommen mit dem südamerikanischen Staatenbund Mercosur
06.10.2020	10-06-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1923123	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "FDP" - Herausforderungen begegnen, Chancen nutzen – Die Chinapolitik Deutschlands und der EU

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20.10.2020	10-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD08420	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Aspekte der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit der Volksrepublik China
05.11.2020	11-05-2020-DEU-BT-BTPP19189	PP	German Parliament	Plenarprotokoll 19/189, Schuldenerlass statt Schuldenfälle – Überschuldungskrisen im Globalen Süden mit einem Staateninsolvenzverfahren begegnen
13.11.2020	11-13-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924279	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Wirtschaftliche Kooperation zwischen China und Deutschland im Rahmen der Neuen Seidenstraße und deutscher Entwicklungspolitik
17.11.2020	11-17-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924390	PP	German Parliament	Antrag der "CDU/CSU", "SPD", "FDP", "Die Grünen" - 45 Jahre Schlussakte von Helsinki, 30 Jahre Charta von Paris – Die Organisation für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa für künftige Aufgaben stärken
18.11.2020	11-18-2020-DEU-BT-Adrs1917125	EC	German Parliament	Stellungnahme zur Lage der Menschenrechte in China, Eva Pils
18.11.2020	11-18-2020-DEU-BT-ÖA1966	PP	German Parliament	Wortprotokoll der 66. Sitzung - Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe
20.11.2020	11-20-2020-DEU-BT-WD09420	SR	Research Services	Wissenschaftliche Dienste - Die Haltung der Volksrepublik China zum Konzept der internationalen Schutzverantwortung
03.12.2020	12-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924927	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die deutsche Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der NATO, 65. Jahrestagung der deutsche Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der NATO vom 11. bis 14. Oktober 2019 in London, Vereinigtes Königreich
03.12.2020	12-03-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1924924	PP	German Parliament	Unterrichtung durch die deutsche Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der NATO, Frühjahrstagung der deutschen Delegation in der Parlamentarischen Versammlung der NATO vom 31. Mai bis 3. Juni 2019 in Pressburg, Slowakei
11.12.2020	12-11-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925159	PP	German Parliament	Schriftliche Fragen mit den in der Woche vom 7. Dezember 2020 eingegangenen Antworten der Bundesregierung
14.12.2020	12-14-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925222	PP	German Parliament	Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Anfrage der "FDP" - Wirtschaftliche Kooperation zwischen China und Deutschland im Rahmen der Neuen Seidenstraße und deutscher Entwicklungspolitik
17.12.2020	12-17-2020-DEU-BT-BTdrs1925398	PP	German Parliament	Kleine Anfrage durch die "FDP" - Verhandlungsstand und Zukunft des Investitionsabkommens zwischen der

				Europäischen Union und China
<p>Identifier Structure: MM-DD-YYYY-DEU-SS-IndividualTitle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MM-DD-YYYY: publishing date of the item.</li> <li>- DEU: country of origin is Germany</li> <li>- SS: Source of Publication. BT: German Parliament (Bundestag) or the scientific service of the Bundestag; BR: German Parliament (Bundesrat); AA: Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt)</li> <li>- IndividualTitle: based on title, context, or official document number e.g., "BTdrs192445" or "EurasischeKonnektivität"</li> </ul>				



## Appendix 4: Collected Documents for the UK

Date	Identifier	Type	Originator	Title
24.03.2015	03-24-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol760	PP	House of Lords	Volume 760: EU and Russia (EUC Report)
28.05.2015	05-28-2015-GBR-HL-PDVol762	PP	House of Lords	Volume 762: Queen's Speech
15.07.2015	07-15-2015-GBR-GO-PP-ChinaUpdate	EP	Government	China - in-year update July 2015
12.08.2015	08-12-2015-GBR-GO-A-PhilipHammond	EP	Government	UK-China: a Global Partnership for the 21st Century
22.09.2015	09-22-2015-GBR-GO-SP-GeorgeOsborne	EP	Government	Chancellor: 'Let's create a golden decade for the UK-China relationship'
23.09.2015	09-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-HistoricVisitChina	EP	Government	Chancellor makes historic first visit to China's North West
21.10.2015	10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-CameronXi	EP	Government	Joint press conference: David Cameron and President Xi Jinping
21.10.2015	10-21-2015-GBR-GO-SP-DavidCameron	EP	Government	PM speech at UK-China Business Summit
22.10.2015	10-22-2015-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaJointStatement	EP	Government	UK-China Joint Statement 2015
23.10.2015	10-23-2015-GBR-GO-A-Chinesestatevisit	EP	Government	Chinese state visit: up to £40 billion deals agreed
29.10.2015	10-29-2015-GBR-HC-PDVol601	PP	House of Commons	Volume 601: Green Investment Bank
02.11.2015	11-02-2015-GBR-HC-PD-Order2015	PP	House of Commons	Draft Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2015
19.11.2015	11-19-2015-GBR-GO-SP-SajidJavid	EP	Government	Free trade and unlocking prosperity
01.04.2016	01-04-2016-GBR-GO-R-ChinaasaDevelopmentActor	SR	Government	Rising Powers in International Development - China as a Development Actor in Southeast Asia
05.01.2016	01-05-2016-GBR-HC-PDVol604	PP	House of Commons	Volume 604: UK and Kazakhstan
07.04.2016	04-07-2016-GBR-GO-SP-FionaClouder	EP	Government	London Metal Exchange at World Copper Conference in Chile
19.04.2016	04-19-2016-GBR-GO-SP-WilsonFFA	EP	Government	Consul General's speech at Fund Forum Asia 2016
21.04.2016	04-21-2016-GBR-GO-SP-WilsonQueen	EP	Government	Consul General's speech at Queen's Birthday Party Hong Kong 2016
25.04.2016	04-25-2016-GBR-HC-PD-EUStrategy	PP	House of Commons	EU Strategy in Afghanistan
29.06.2016	06-29-2016-GBR-GO-SP-BlytheLSE	EP	Government	Deputy Consul General's speech at LSE Greater China Forum 2016
26.08.2016	08-26-2016-GBR-GO-SP-NevilleRolfe	EP	Government	Baroness Neville-Rolfe speech at the 2016 UK-China IP Symposium
19.09.2016	09-19-2016-GBR-GO-SP-LiamFox	EP	Government	Liam Fox's speech at Capital Club Dubai
10.11.2016	11-10-2016-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaDialogue	EP	Government	UK-China 8th Economic and Financial Dialogue: financial services
15.11.2016	11-15-2016-GBR-GO-SP-GregHands	EP	Government	Greg Hands' speech at the China-Britain Business Council dinner
30.11.2016	11-30-2016-GBR-GO-SP-KeenofElie	EP	Government	UK-China legal cooperation along the Belt and Road

02.12.2016	12-02-2016-GBR-GO-A-AlokSharma	EP	Government	Minister Sharma writes on UK-Hong Kong relationship in the Asian Century
02.12.2016	12-02-2016-GBR-GO-SP-AlokSharma	EP	Government	Alok Sharma's speech to British Chamber of Commerce, Hong Kong
10.01.2017	01-10-2017-GBR-GO-A-Healthcare	EP	Government	UK delegation explores collaboration on healthcare with Northwest China
19.01.2017	01-19-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol619	PP	House of Commons	Volume 619: Kashmir
26.01.2017	01-26-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol778	PP	House of Lords	Volume 778: Brexit: UK International Relations
16.02.2017	02-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-UKChinaTies	EP	Government	Alok Sharma marks 45 years of UK-China Ambassadorial ties
08.03.2017	03-08-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779	PP	House of Lords	Volume 779: UK Exports
16.03.2017	03-16-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol779	PP	House of Lords	Volume 779: Commonwealth
28.03.2017	03-28-2017-GBR-GO-A-maritimetrademissionChina	EP	Government	UK government ministers attend first maritime trade mission in China
29.03.2017	03-29-2017-GBR-GO-A-UKShowcases	EP	Government	UK showcases expertise and explores commercial ties with Henan
05.04.2017	04-05-2017-GBR-GO-A-DITroundtable	EP	Government	DIT roundtable boosts UK business opportunities in Pakistan
12.05.2017	05-12-2017-GBR-GO-A-VisitChina	EP	Government	UK choice for World Health Organisation Director-General visits China
14.05.2017	05-14-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond	EP	Government	Belt and Road Forum in Beijing: Chancellor's speech
22.06.2017	06-22-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783	PP	House of Lords	Volume 783: Queen's Speech
12.07.2017	07-12-2017-GBR-HL-WA745	PP	House of Lords	East Kent Housing: Dismissal, Question for Department for International Trade
18.07.2017	07-18-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol783	PP	House of Lords	Volume 783: Brexit: Trade in Goods (EUC Report)
20.07.2017	07-20-2017-GBR-GO-SP-LiamFox	EP	Government	Beyond Brexit: Britain and the global economy
05.09.2017	09-05-2017-GBR-GO-SP-AlanDuncan	EP	Government	Sir Alan Duncan speaks at the First President Library in Astana
20.09.2017	09-20-2017-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond	EP	Government	Hong Kong Trade Development Council Dinner: Chancellor's speech
23.11.2017	11-23-2017-GBR-GO-A-ISCG2017	EP	Government	International Sustainability Conference held in Shenzhen
27.11.2017	11-27-2017-GBR-HC-PDVol632	PP	House of Commons	Volume 632: Budget Resolutions
27.11.2017	11-27-2017-GBR-HL-PDVol787	PP	House of Lords	Volume 787: Exports: Africa and the Commonwealth
07.12.2017	12-07-2017-GBR-GO-PP-CreativePartnership	EP	Government	Creative partnerships strengthen trade ties between UK and China
11.12.2017	12-11-2017-GBR-GO-SP-MarkGarnier	EP	Government	UK and Kazakhstan strengthen trade ties
11.12.2017	12-11-2017-GBR-GO-PP-JointStatementFifth-MeetingofUKChina	EP	Government	Joint Statement of the Fifth Meeting of the UK-China, High-Level People to People Dialogue
16.12.2017	12-16-2017-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalks	EP	Government	Economic talks herald Golden Era in UK-China relations
18.12.2017	12-18-2017-GBR-GO-R-HongKong-London	EP	Government	Hong Kong-London Financial Services Forum 2017

18.12.2017	12-18-2017-GBR-GO-A-EnergyDialogue	EP	Government	UK-China Energy Dialogue
02.01.2018	01-02-2018-GBR-GO-PR-InternationalTradeChina	EP	Government	International Trade Secretary Dr Fox visits China
08.01.2018	01-08-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788	PP	House of Lords	Volume 788: Industrial Strategy
18.01.2018	01-18-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788	PP	House of Lords	Volume 788: Green Finance
23.01.2018	01-23-2018-GBR-HC-PD	PP	House of Commons	Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill (Second sitting)
23.01.2018	01-23-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol635	PP	House of Commons	Volume 635: Democracy in Hong Kong
30.01.2018	01-30-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol788	PP	House of Lords	Volume 788: European Union (Withdrawal) Volume: Bill
31.01.2018	01-31-2018-GBR-SP-MayKeqiang	EP	Government	Prime Minister's press conference with Premier Li: 31 January 2018
01.02.2018	02-01-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi	EP	Government	PM meeting with President Xi: 1 February 2018
05.02.2018	02-05-2018-GBR-GO-PR-LiamFoxChina	EP	Government	Prime Minister and Dr Liam Fox's China visit boosts trade and jobs
07.02.2018	02-07-2018-GBR-HL-WA5483	PP	House of Lords	China, Overseas Trade: Question for Department for International Trade
22.02.2018	02-22-2018-GBR-GO-A-DayDiplomaticWorkers	EP	Government	Day of Diplomatic Workers were celebrated in Ashgabat in February
22.02.2018	02-22-2018-GBR-GO-A-Abbott-WattTKM	EP	Government	HMA praises Britain and Turkmenistan relations
21.03.2018	03-21-2018-GBR-GO-A-HongKongUK	EP	Government	Hong Kong and UK announce closer collaboration on trade and economic matters
22.03.2018	03-22-2018-GBR-GO-PP-UKandHongKong	EP	Government	Joint statement by the UK and Hong Kong on trade collaboration
28.03.2018	03-28-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol638	PP	House of Commons	Volume 638: Leaving the EU: Legal Services
29.03.2018	03-29-2018-GBR-GO-PR-TradeAcademyProgramme	EP	Government	National Trade Academy Programme launched to mark one year countdown to Brexit
09.04.2018	04-09-2018-GBR-GO-PR-Asia-UK	EP	Government	Asia-UK collaboration awards winners announced
11.04.2018	04-11-2018-GBR-GO-SP-DavidLidington	EP	Government	Writing a new chapter in the Global Era
18.04.2018	04-18-2018-GBR-HL-WA7069	PP	House of Lords	China: Belt and Road Initiative, Question for Foreign and Commonwealth Office
19.04.2018	04-19-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol790	PP	House of Lords	Volume 790: National Security Situation
19.04.2018	04-19-2018-GBR-GO-PR-PMXi	EP	Government	PM call with President Xi on 19 April 2018
11.05.2018	05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-PledgeProgress	EP	Government	Be Yourself: Pledge for Progress launches nationwide
11.05.2018	05-11-2018-GBR-GO-PR-BaronessFairhead	EP	Government	Baroness Fairhead opens UK pavilion at Silk Road Expo
11.05.2018	05-11-2018-GBR-GO-SP-Fairhead	EP	Government	Celebrating trading opportunities between China and the UK
11.05.2018	05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-SRIEReport	EP	Government	UK-China Cultural links and trade boosted at the Silk Road International Expo
11.05.2018	05-11-2018-GBR-GO-A-SRIEOpening	EP	Government	UK takes centre stage at the Silk Road International Expo, as Country of Honour

15.05.2018	05-15-2018-GBR-GO-A-ChinaBeltRoadUKOpportunities	EP	Government	Why China's Belt and Road offers the UK huge opportunities
19.06.2018	06-19-2018-GBR-GO-A-FoxUKCHinatradederelations	EP	Government	Liam Fox on UK-China trade relations
20.06.2018	06-20-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField	EP	Government	Minister Mark Field speech at the Prosperity Fund Business Forum
20.06.2018	06-20-2018-GBR-GO-SP-LiamFox	EP	Government	International trade benefits us all and we should respect its rules
26.06.2018	06-26-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792	PP	House of Lords	Volume 792: NATO Summit 2018
27.06.2018	06-27-2018-GBR-GO-A-ChinaUK	EP	Government	China and the UK – committed partners to open trade and free markets
28.06.2018	06-28-2018-GBR-GO-A-UKbusinesses	EP	Government	UK businesses urged to benefit from belt and road opportunities
29.06.2018	06-29-2018-GBR-GO-SP-AldermanCharlesBowman	EP	Government	The City of London's Offer to Nigeria
02.07.2018	07-02-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792	PP	House of Lords	Volume 792: Brexit: UK-EU Relations (EUC Report)
12.07.2018	07-12-2018-GBR-HL-WA9529	PP	House of Lords	China: Belt and Road Initiative, Question for Foreign and Commonwealth Office
14.08.2018	08-14-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MarkField	EP	Government	The UK and All of Asia, a modern partnership: Mark Field's speech
16.08.2018	08-16-2018-GBR-GO-PP-PakistanTradeExport-Guide	EP	Government	Doing business in Pakistan: Pakistan trade and export guide
21.08.2018	08-21-2018-GBR-GO-PP-ExportStrategy	EP	Government	Export Strategy, supporting and connecting businesses to grow on the world stage
06.09.2018	09-06-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol646	PP	House of Commons	Volume 646: Global Britain and the International Rules-based Order
11.09.2018	09-11-2018-GBR-HL-PDVol792	PP	House of Lords	Volume 729: Trade Bill
28.09.2018	09-28-2018-GBR-GO-SP-MelStride	EP	Government	FST speech to the Hong Kong Trade Development Council Dinner: 27 September 2018
11.10.2018	10-11-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol647	PP	House of Commons	Volume 647: Freeports
31.10.2018	10-31-2018-GBR-GO-R-K4DSDG	SR	Government	The impact of BRI investment in infrastructure on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals
08.11.2018	11-08-2018-GBR-GO-A-ISCG2018	EP	Government	International conference in Shenzhen promotes sustainable business along Belt and Road
12.12.2018	12-12-2018-GBR-HC-WA201602	PP	House of Commons	China: Belt and Road Initiative, Question for Foreign and Commonwealth Office
20.12.2018	12-20-2018-GBR-HC-PDVol651	PP	House of Commons	Volume 651: Rohingya Refugee Crisis
24.01.2019	01-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol795	PP	House of Lords	Volume 795: Climate Change
29.01.2019	01-29-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol653	PP	House of Commons	Volume 653: Human Rights: Xinjiang
06.02.2019	02-06-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol654	PP	House of Commons	Volume 654: UK as a Financial Services Hub

11.02.2019	02-11-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol795	PP	House of Lords	Volume 795: China: Uighur Muslims
19.02.2019	02-19-2019-GBR-GO-A-EstlinHK	EP	Government	The Lord Mayor of the City of London further cements financial and business ties with Hong Kong
21.02.2019	02-21-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol654	PP	House of Commons	Volume 654: Future Free Trade Agreements
25.02.2019	02-25-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol796	PP	House of Lords	Volume 796: China: Freedom of Religion and Belief
25.02.2019	02-25-2019-GBR-GO-SP-UK-ChinaIn2019	EP	Government	UK-China in 2019: How can diplomacy rise to the challenges of the 21st century
08.03.2019	03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-DigitalSilkRoad	SR	Government	Achieving complex development goals along the digital Silk Road
08.03.2019	03-08-2019-GBR-GO-R-ImpactofBeltandRoad	SR	Government	The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative Investment in Digital Connectivity and Information and Communication Technologies on Achieving the SDGs
20.03.2019	03-20-2019-GBR-HC-WA234652	PP	House of Commons	China: Belt and Road Initiative, Question for Foreign and Commonwealth Office
21.03.2019	03-21-2019-GBR-GO-SP-EmmaHowardBoyd	EP	Government	Steady investments in a changing climate
01.04.2019	04-01-2019-GBR-HL-WA14946	PP	House of Lords	China: Belt and Road Initiative, Question for Department for International Trade
04.04.2019	04-04-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol657	PP	House of Commons	Volume 657: Foreign Affairs Committee
04.04.2019	04-04-2019-GBR-HC-R-HC612	PP	House of Commons	China and the Rules-Based International System
10.04.2019	04-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol658	PP	House of Commons	Volume 658: Hong Kong: Pro-Democracy Activists
11.04.2019	04-11-2019-GBR-GO-R-WorldBank	SR	Government	Assessing the Value of Market Access from Belt and Road Projects
24.04.2019	04-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA247096	PP	House of Commons	Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Question for Treasury
25.04.2019	04-25-2019-GBR-GO-A-EconomicTalksChina	EP	Government	Economic talks to further strengthen UK-China relations
26.04.2019	04-26-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipHammond	EP	Government	Belt and Road Forum: Philip Hammond's speech
01.05.2019	05-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659	PP	House of Commons	Volume 659: Future International Trade Opportunities
07.05.2019	05-07-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol659	PP	House of Commons	Volume 659: China: UK policy
15.05.2019	05-15-2019-GBR-GO-SP-PhilipJones	EP	Government	RUSI Sea Power Conference 15 May 2019
20.05.2019	05-20-2019-GBR-GO-SP-JohnGlen	EP	Government	Economic Secretary speech to CityWeek 2019
21.05.2019	05-21-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol797	PP	House of Lords	Volume 797: UK Foreign Policy in a Shifting World Order (International Relations Committee Report)
05.06.2019	06-05-2019-GBR-HC-Com2243	EP	House of Commons	International Trade Committee, Oral evidence: The Belt and Road Initiative, HC 2243
10.06.2019	06-10-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661	PP	House of Commons	Volume 661: Hong Kong
13.06.2019	06-13-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol661	PP	House of Commons	Volume 661: Hong Kong
12.09.2019	09-12-2019-GBR-GO-PP-UKChinaDialogue	EP	Government	Policy Outcomes of the 10th UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue

18.06.2019	06-18-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662	PP	House of Commons	Volume 662: Hong Kong
21.06.2019	06-21-2019-GBR-GO-SP-JohnGlen	EP	Government	John Glen speaks at the RMB Global Cities Dialogue in London
24.06.2019	06-24-2019-GBR-HC-WA268527	PP	House of Commons	Belt and Road Initiative: China, Question for Department for International Trade
01.07.2019	07-01-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol662	PP	House of Commons	Volume 662: Department for International Development
03.07.2019	07-03-2019-GBR-GO-SP-RoryStewart	EP	Government	Climate Resilience
16.07.2019	07-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol799	PP	House of Lords	Volume 799: Brexit: European Investment Bank (European Union Committee Report)
23.07.2019	07-23-2019-GBR-HC-PDVol663	PP	House of Commons	Volume 663: UK Trade and Investment Strategy
31.07.2019	07-31-2019-GBR-GO-PR-BeijingExpo	EP	Government	Beijing Expo 2019 UK Garden and Pavilion partners announced
25.09.2019	09-25-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol799	PP	House of Lords	Volume 799: Spending Round 2019
16.10.2019	10-16-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800	PP	House of Lords	Volume 800: Queen's Speech
24.10.2019	10-24-2019-GBR-HL-PDVol800	PP	House of Lords	Volume 800: Hong Kong
30.01.2020	01-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol670	PP	House of Commons	Volume 670: Global Britian
12.03.2020	03-12-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol802	PP	House of Lords	Volume 802: Green Economy
28.04.2020	04-28-2020-GBR-HC-WA41169	PP	House of Commons	China: Belt and Road Initiative, Question for Foreign and Commonwealth Office
02.06.2020	06-02-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol676	PP	House of Commons	Volume 676: Hong Kong National Security Legislation: UK Response
29.06.2020	06-29-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804	PP	House of Lords	Volume 804: Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill
01.07.2020	07-01-2020-GBR-HL-PDVol804	PP	House of Lords	Volume 804: China: Supply Chains
20.07.2020	07-20-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol678	PP	House of Commons	Volume 678: China
17.11.2020	11-17-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol684	PP	House of Commons	Volume 684: National Security and Investment Bill
30.11.2020	11-30-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685	PP	House of Commons	Volume 685: Telecommunications (Security) Bill
01.12.2020	12-01-2020-GBR-HC-PD	PP	House of Commons	National Security and Investment Bill (Sixth sitting)
07.12.2020	12-07-2020-GBR-HC-PDVol685	PP	House of Commons	Volume 685: Hong Kong: Sentencing of Pro-democracy Activists
17.12.2020	12-17-2020-GBR-GO-SP-NickCarter	EP	Government	Chief of Defence Staff speech RUSI Annual lecture
<p>Identifier Structure: MM-DD-YYYY-GBR-SS-(TT)-IndividualTitle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MM-DD-YYYY: publishing date of the item.</li> <li>- GBR: Country of origin is Great Britain</li> <li>- SS: Source of Publication. HL: House of Lords; GO: Government; HC: House of Commons</li> <li>- TT: Type of Publication, only included if applicable. PP: policy paper; A: article; SP: speech; R: report; PR: press release. Parliamentary debates (PD) and written answers (WA) were not assigned as a type when this was already included in their individual title</li> <li>- IndividualTitle: based on title, context, or official document number of source, e.g. "PDVol788" or "UKChinaDialogue"</li> </ul>				

## Appendix 5: Composition of German and British Documents

Type	Explanation	UK	Germany	Sum
<b>PP: Parliamentary Procedure</b>	All documents that are part of the parliamentary process. This includes parliamentary debates, minor and major inquiries, as well as the government responses to parliamentary inquiries.	68	116	184
<b>EP: Executive Positioning</b>	All documents, in which the government positions itself on a topic. These can be official government briefings presented to the parliaments, speeches and authored articles by government representatives.	79	10	89
<b>SR: Scientific Report</b>	These are all scientific reports presented to the parliament and government as republished on their websites. These include the studies by the Parliamentary Scientific Services and consulted non-parliamentary research entities.	5	18	23
<b>EC: Expert Consultation</b>	Consultation documents include hearing protocols or written statements, in which the parliament is briefed by or is itself interviewing external experts.	0	8	8
<b>Total Number of Collected Documents</b>		152	152	304

## Appendix 6: Coding Statistics and Results for Germany and the UK

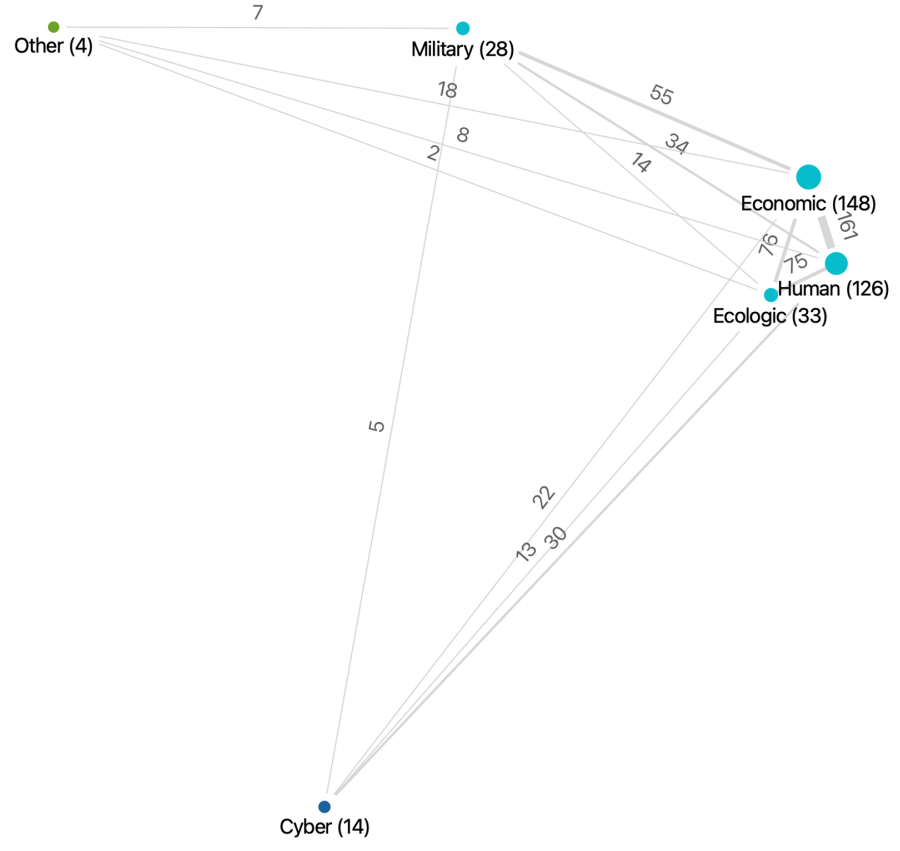
Coding Figures: Germany														
	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		Total	
BRI Autocoded	4	100%	53	100%	16	100%	101	100%	251	100%	181	100%	606	100%
Tone	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		Total	
Negative	0	0%	0	0%	2	18%	43	42%	99	39%	73	39%	217	36%
Neutral	3	60%	37	80%	7	64%	38	37%	124	49%	102	54%	311	51%
Positive	2	40%	9	20%	2	18%	21	21%	30	12%	13	7%	77	13%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Sum Tone	5	100%	46	100%	11	100%	102	100%	253	100%	188	100%	605	100%
Code Density Tone	1,25		11,50		2,75		3,52		3,72		4,37		3,98	
Security Issue	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		Total	
Military	0	0	0	0	0	0%	9	19%	5	5%	3	4%	17	7%
Economic	0	0	0	0	2	100%	23	48%	48	44%	36	44%	109	46%
Ecologic	0	0	0	0	0	0%	4	8%	6	6%	9	11%	19	8%
Human	0	0	0	0	0	0%	11	23%	46	43%	31	38%	88	37%
Cyber	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	2	1%
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0%	1	2%	3	3%	0	0%	4	2%
Sum Security Issue	0	0	0	0	2	100%	48	100%	108	100%	81	100%	239	100%
Code Density Security Issue	0		0		0,5		1,66		1,59		1,88		1,57	
<b>SUM TOTAL</b>	<b>9,00</b>		<b>99</b>		<b>29</b>		<b>251</b>		<b>612</b>		<b>450</b>		<b>1450</b>	
<b>Documents</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>29</b>		<b>68</b>		<b>43</b>		<b>152</b>	



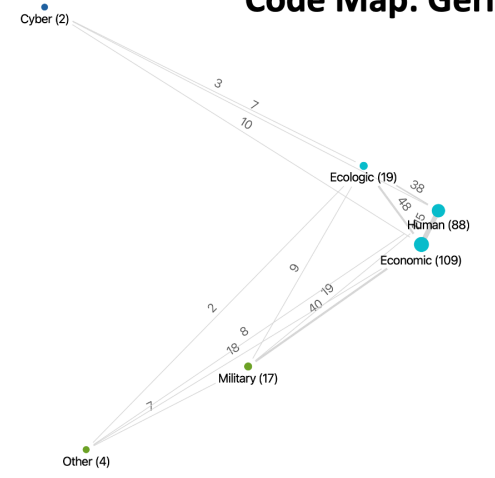
<b>Coding Figures: UK</b>														
	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>Total</b>	
<b>BRI Autocoded</b>	24	100%	43	100%	53	100%	422	100%	451	100%	20	100%	1013	100%
<b>Tone</b>	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Negative	0	0%	2	4%	3	5%	25	9%	39	10%	13	59%	82	10%
Neutral	4	19%	21	45%	9	15%	158	54%	264	70%	9	41%	465	57%
Positive	17	81%	24	51%	48	80%	108	37%	72	19%	0	0%	269	33%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Sum Tone	21	100%	47	100%	60	100%	291	100%	375	100%	22	100%	816	100%
Code Density Tone	1,62		3,36		2,31		6,19		9,38		1,83		5,37	
<b>Security Issue</b>	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Military	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	5	13%	5	9%	1	6%	11	10%
Economic	0	0	1	50%	3	100%	15	38%	14	26%	6	38%	39	34%
Ecologic	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	7	18%	7	13%	0	0%	14	12%
Human	0	0	1	50%	0	0%	10	26%	22	41%	5	31%	38	33%
Cyber	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	2	5%	6	11%	4	25%	12	11%
Other	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Sum Security Issue	0	0	2	100%	3	100%	39	100%	54	100%	16	100%	114	100%
Code Density Security Issue	0,00		0,14		0,12		0,83		1,35		1,33		0,75	
<b>SUM TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>		<b>92</b>		<b>116</b>		<b>752</b>		<b>880</b>		<b>58</b>		<b>1943</b>	
<b>Documents</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>26</b>		<b>47</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>152</b>	

<b>Combined Coding Figures: Germany and UK</b>														
	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>Total</b>	
DEU Auto.	4	14%	53	55%	16	23%	101	19%	251	36%	181	90%	606	37%
UK Auto.	24	86%	43	45%	53	77%	422	81%	451	64%	20	10%	1013	63%
Sum	28	100%	96	100%	69	100%	523	100%	702	100%	201	100%	1619	100%
<b>Tone</b>	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Negative	0	0%	2	2%	5	7%	68	17%	138	22%	86	41%	299	21%
Neutral	7	27%	58	62%	16	23%	196	50%	388	62%	111	53%	776	55%
Positive	19	73%	33	35%	50	70%	129	33%	102	16%	13	6%	346	24%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Sum Tone	26	100%	93	100%	71	100%	393	100%	628	100%	210	100%	1421	100%
Code Density Tone	1,53		5,17		2,37		5,17		5,81		3,82		4,67	
<b>Security Issue</b>	<b>2015</b>		<b>2016</b>		<b>2017</b>		<b>2018</b>		<b>2019</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Military	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	14	16%	10	6%	4	4%	28	8%
Economic	0	0	1	50%	5	100%	38	44%	62	38%	42	43%	148	42%
Ecologic	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	11	13%	13	8%	9	9%	33	9%
Human	0	0	1	50%	0	0%	21	24%	68	42%	36	37%	126	36%
Cyber	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	6	4%	6	6%	14	4%
Other	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	3	2%	0	0%	4	1%
Sum Security Issue	0	0	2	100%	5	100%	87	100%	162	100%	97	100%	353	100%
Code Density Security Issue	0,00		0,11		0,17		1,14		1,50		1,76		1,16	
<b>SUM TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>		<b>191</b>		<b>145</b>		<b>1003</b>		<b>1492</b>		<b>508</b>		<b>3393</b>	
<b>Documents</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>18</b>		<b>30</b>		<b>76</b>		<b>108</b>		<b>55</b>		<b>304</b>	

Code Map: Germany and UK Combined



Code Map: Germany



Code Map: UK

