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**Article**

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# The Belt and Road Initiative and Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment: Comparison and current status

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## ABSTRACT

The last decade has witnessed the development and implementation of two major infrastructure initiatives: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) by the United States and the G7 countries. The escalating political confrontation between China and the United States made these initiatives crucial for strengthening their geopolitical positions and economic dominance. This paper examines the impact of BRI on competitive strategies of the United States and its partners in response to China's growing influence, thereby enhancing the understanding of contemporary political and economic dynamics. Key factors supporting the thesis of increasing competition and confrontation are considered, demonstrating that U.S. leadership leverages its infrastructure initiatives to oppose and constrain China's influence at both the foreign policy and economic levels. Our analysis identifies factors directly influencing the development of these initiatives and compares the principles of BRI and PGII to objectively evaluate their effectiveness.

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid and ongoing development of globalization, international cooperation, particularly in the economic sector, has become a priority and a rapidly expanding task for developed countries. However, given the current geopolitical situation and the multipolar model of the world system, the opposition between states such as the United States and the People's Republic of China, whose global interests often preclude compromises in the economic, political, and security spheres, is intensifying. Various strategies have been employed to counter China's global ambitions, the most notable being the trade war initiated during Donald Trump's first presidency (2017–2021) with the goal of economic isolation. Despite the signing of the U.S.–China Phase One Trade Deal in 2020, which aimed to ease economic tensions, it has persisted, with the Biden administration maintaining similar policies against China.

Currently, China is the second most significant center of world politics and economy, and according to the Center for Economic and Business Research (United Kingdom), may overtake the United States in economic indicators and become the world's largest economy in 2037 (Breen, 2023). This potential status enables the Chinese leadership to put forward projects aimed at reformatting the entire international economic system in line with the country's growing capabilities and needs. One of these is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). After the decade of implementing the BRI, it became the main instrument for the public

policy of the Chinese Communist Party and one of the largest infrastructure projects China has ever undertaken. This initiative enhances China's global influence, prompting other major actors to take countermeasures. One such response is the policy of the United States and the Group of Seven (G7) countries that seeks to reorient China's partners.

In this paper, we analyze the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) across various contexts, including its global role, geographical impact, and the political competition between the United States and China. In Section 2, we examine the BRI as a primary instrument for creating a new, Sinocentric globalization, highlighting its impact on basic infrastructure and China's increased geopolitical power. In Section 3, we explore the rising competition between the U.S. and the P.R.C., focusing on the establishment of new infrastructure projects aimed at limiting and reducing China's geopolitical influence. In Section 4, we discuss the unique case of Italy, the first and only G7 state to recognize the BRI at the governmental level, and its subsequent decision to cease cooperation with China on this initiative after 2023. In Section 5, we investigate the importance of the Global South to China in the context of the BRI development and the potential conflict of interest between the United States and China over extending China's political influence. Finally, in Section 6, we draw conclusions on the current status of the BRI and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment.

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## 2. Belt and Road initiative as a key instrument of Sinocentric globalization

The BRI is a global strategy for the development of basic infrastructure, which was presented by the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping shortly after coming to power, and subsequently adopted by the government of the Republic in 2013 (Xinhua News Agency, 2016). In 2017, it was embodied into the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (Xinhua News Agency, 2017). Its main goal is to establish and lead a new globalization mechanism by attracting Eurasian countries and companies into the Chinese sphere of influence through Chinese investments and industrial advantages. By 2023, China had engaged 151 countries in the BRI, making it a central component of China's foreign policy and economic course (Nedopil, 2023).

China's development of the BRI focuses on collaborating with developing countries on infrastructure and production facility projects. This collaboration leverages not only China's extensive experience in infrastructure development gained over years of implementing the initiative, but also its financial capacity and production advantages in relevant industries. Partner countries joining the BRI can benefit from participating in China's economic growth and accelerating their own infrastructure development.

The importance of the BRI is manifested in many aspects. It aims to connect Asian, European, and African regions through land and sea networks to facilitate more efficient logistics and trade. By developing infrastructure such as roads, railways, and ports, the initiative enhances regional connectivity and reduces logistics costs. The initiative's scale brings China closer to its goal of transforming the global trade model by opening new routes and collaborating with less economically developed countries. Consequently, this reduces trade barriers, fosters economic integration and growth among partner countries, while positioning China as a leading global economic and political power.

As Benoit (2023), an Adjunct Senior Research Scholar at the Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy, stated, China is a "hybrid superpower" in the world. The implementation of the BRI amplifies China's geopolitical influence, a role rooted in its unique position as both a developing and developed power, which allows it to engage effectively with emerging economies while maintaining influence in advanced markets. This dual status enables China to flexibly leverage economic partnerships across Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America. Through the BRI, China strengthens its soft power by offering infrastructure and economic support that align with the development needs of lower-income countries, often filling gaps left by Western initiatives.

Benoit and Tu (2020) further argue that China's vision for the BRI extends beyond economic transactions, aiming to shape global norms and standards in ways that reflect China's values and governance models. This approach contrasts with U.S.-led projects, such as the Blue Dot Network, the Build Back Better World, and more recently, the PGII, which prioritize sustainable development in global infrastructure. Positioned as an alternative to Western efforts, the BRI allows China to foster strategic alliances that are pivotal to its broader geopolitical ambitions, serving both as a tool of economic outreach and as a means for China to assert itself as a global leader. Benoit and Tu (2020) suggest that by reinforcing its status through initiatives like the BRI, China strategically shapes its identity as a superpower that challenges existing global power structures, positioning itself at the center of a redefined international order.

The BRI is not only a tool for expanding China's economic and political influence but also as a framework for constructing a new model of globalization grounded in Chinese standards and norms. Globalization, as a concept, represents a shift from localized or national paradigms to a global perspective, fostering a growing awareness of belonging to a unified global community and interconnected identity. James and Steger (2014) emphasize that globalization has not only objective aspects, such as economic integration, but also subjective ones – such as changing ideas about the social order and understanding the

interdependence of all participants in the global process. This evolving dynamic has been termed Sinocentric globalization – a system in which China is increasingly emerging as a central hub of power and influence in international relations, offering an alternative to the Western model of globalization. In this framework, China's influence refers to its ability to shape the behavior, decisions, or outcomes of other states or organizations through direct or indirect actions, often carrying economic or political implications. In the context of international relations and political science, influence is frequently associated with "soft power", which entails the capacity to shape others' behavior through the appeal of culture, values, and political ideas, rather than coercive methods of "hard power" (Nye, 1990).

Through the BRI, China can contribute to the geopolitical balance of power in key regions by securing strategic infrastructure, ports, and transport routes, thereby enhancing its capacity for direct involvement in global affairs. Thus, the BRI represents a quintessential example of employing soft power through economic, cultural, and political instruments to create a positive image of China and enhance its appeal to partner countries, all without resorting to direct coercion.

In contrast to Western-led globalization, characterized by trade liberalization and the promotion of democratic governance through institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sinocentric globalization is more state-centered. It emphasizes infrastructure development and strategically aligns regions with China's long-term geopolitical objectives. This approach allows China as a "hybrid superpower" to reinforce its leadership on the global stage while creating a network of partner countries economically reliant on its support and politically aligned with its governance model.

## 3. The factor of U.S.–P.R.C. competition

The development of the BRI allows China to play a more significant role in global foreign policy and economics. Through investment in infrastructure projects, the Chinese government is building and strengthening strategic partnerships, drawing new participants of the BRI into its orbit, thereby increasing its influence. Given the United States' central role in global politics and economics, this influence has significant geopolitical implications.

During Donald Trump's initial years as President of the United States, his administration lacked a clearly articulated strategy toward the BRI. While the Obama administration had maintained a policy of non-engagement with the initiative, the Trump administration appeared conflicted. In 2017, President Trump signaled potential cooperation by sending a National Security Council delegation to China's first Belt and Road Forum, even entertaining discussions of possible U.S. funding through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), an institution the U.S. had previously refrained from joining. This initial openness marked a departure from the previous U.S. policy, suggesting a certain readiness to cooperate constructively with China's initiative (Bittner, 2017).

However, skepticism soon gained traction within the Trump administration, particularly among defense and foreign policy officials. For instance, former Defense Secretary Mattis raised concerns over the strategic implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – a key component of the BRI passing through disputed territories – arguing that no single nation should dominate infrastructure spanning multiple countries. Former Secretary of State Tillerson echoed these concerns by advocating for U.S.-backed alternative financing options for global infrastructure, implicitly challenging China's expanding influence through the BRI (Bittner, 2017).

Under Trump administration, a key strategy to counter China's growing influence involved strengthening alliances with partners in the Indo-Pacific region and Europe. Central to this approach was enhanced collaboration with countries vulnerable to China's economic pressure, such as India, Australia, and Japan, which contributed to strengthening

projects like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). This strategy contributed to the formation of a broader approach to geopolitical competition with China, combining the efforts of allies to maintain regional stability.

The policy of “economic pressure” has become another significant element of President Trump’s approach to the BRI. The trade war initiated by his administration aimed to reduce the U.S. trade deficit with China while limiting China’s capacity to fund the BRI. Considering China as the main economic and strategic competitor, the Trump administration introduced tariffs on Chinese goods and restrictions on the activities of Chinese companies in the United States, which was supposed to weaken China’s position in the world market. The escalating tensions between the U.S. and China significantly influenced China’s strategic posture. President Trump’s tariffs indirectly encouraged China to strengthen economic ties with BRI member countries, mitigating the economic impact of U.S. trade measures by deepening intra-BRI trade networks.

In order to oppose the BRI, the United States, along with Japan and Australia, launched the Blue Dot Network (BDN). The name refers to the Earth, appearing as a small blue dot in space (Arha, 2021). The BDN was officially introduced in November 2019 at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum, part of the 35th Southeast Asia Association Summit in Thailand. The BDN is a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at uniting the efforts of governments, the private sector, and civil society to advance dependable standards for global infrastructure development, ensuring project assessment and certification based on financial transparency, environmental sustainability, and economic impact (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

The BDN can be seen as a universal solution to curb China’s infrastructure policy. This perspective is supported by White House National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien, who compared in one of his speeches the project to the “Michelin guide”, a restaurant rating, suggesting it as a counter to what he termed China’s “debt-trap diplomacy,” a common criticism of the BRI (ABC News, 2019).

Since assuming office, former U.S. President Biden has also identified China as the United States’ “most serious” competitor to the U.S., framing U.S.-China relations within the context of strategic rivalry. The Biden administration has pursued “pragmatic and results-oriented” diplomacy, leveraging alliances to reinforce America’s position and aiming for long-term success in this competition. Notably, as a Democrat, former President Biden’s perspective is heavily influenced by ideological considerations, presenting U.S.-China competition as a contest between different political systems. This perspective forms a central pillar of the so-called long-term strategic competition, wherein the United States seeks to restore confidence in its democratic model, address internal divisions, and emphasize the superiority of its governance system in its rivalry with China (Zhao, 2021).

The Biden administration’s stance on the BRI has been decidedly negative. During his 2020 presidential campaign, former President Biden explicitly criticized the initiative (Swaminathan, 2020). In April 2021, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released its Annual Threat Assessment, which identified China’s push for global power as the preeminent threat and suggested that China’s growing influence is one of the biggest threats the U.S. faces. It asserted that “China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas – especially economically, militarily, and technologically – and is pushing to change global norms” (Zhao, 2021).

In June 2021, during the 47th G7 Summit in the United Kingdom, the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative was announced (Holland and Faulconbridge, 2021). Led by the United States, the B3W aims to address the \$40 trillion infrastructure gap in developing countries by 2035 (HM Government, 2021). It is seen as an extension of the BDN, focusing on creating a global infrastructure network with credit financing for roads, bridges, airports, ports, and power plants. In June 2022, the initiative was rebranded as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) at the 48th G7 Summit in the United Kingdom (The White

House, 2022).

Comparison of the PGII with the BRI reveals the following key aspects:

1. First of all, the BRI follows a hierarchical governance model with significant involvement from the Chinese government and state-owned enterprises: on the top of the model the control and coordination is provided by the PRC State Council and subordinate governmental structures. PGII, at same time, emphasizes a collaborative approach involving both public and private sectors focusing on adherence to international standards and project implementation experience. (Moses and Zhu (2022)
2. Critics of the BRI often cite concerns about the lack of transparency in project contracts and potential debt traps for participating countries, even using the specific term “debt-trap diplomacy” (DTD). The PGII, in contrast, plans to place a strong emphasis on transparency, accountability, and sustainable funding to avoid such issues. (Chellaney, 2017; Roland, 2021).
3. The geopolitical implications of infrastructure initiatives are significant. The extensive network of infrastructure projects under the BRI has sparked debates about its geopolitical impact, particularly in regions where China’s economic interests are concentrated. Conversely, PGII aims to promote balanced and equitable development without geopolitical pressure.
4. The PGII prioritizes environmentally sustainable infrastructure, aligning with global efforts to combat climate change, as well as addressing health, digital technologies, income inequality, and gender equality. Although the BRI has faced criticism for its environmental impact, China expresses increasing interest in integration of environmental practices into its initiatives (Hawkings and Cheung, 2023).

Ultimately, the BRI focuses on basic infrastructure, energy, and technology, while the PGII, apart from these factors, seeks to address different issues, being a more complex task (see Table 1). The BRI is pragmatic in tackling short-term challenges in many low- and middle-income countries, with clear credit and logistics capabilities. Notably, China’s “Silk Road of Health” initiative, involving vaccine donations, was a diplomatic effort during the pandemic to enhance Beijing’s global image and strengthen partnerships (Mardell, 2020).

It is important to note that projects under the BRI are primarily financed through loans from government-backed banks, such as the AIIB, the China Development Bank, and the Export-Import Bank of China. These loans are provided under terms that require member countries to repay their debts, potentially leading to debt dependence and fueling critics’ characterization of the BRI as an example of “debt-trap diplomacy” (Horn et al., 2021).

In contrast, the PGII is presented as a sustainable and transparent

**Table 1**

A comparative table of the BRI and the PGII infrastructure initiatives according to data from Moses and Zhu (2022), Curtis and Mayer (2020).

|                                     | BRI                                                                                               | PGII                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Year of announcement</b>         | 2013                                                                                              | 2022 (B3W - 2021)                                                                                                   |
| <b>Target completion date</b>       | 2049                                                                                              | Final date is not announced<br>2027 – target of mobilizing \$ 600 billion                                           |
| <b>Sphere of development</b>        | Hard infrastructure: roads, railways, ports; digital, green, health sphere, energy and technology | Soft infrastructure: climate, health and health security, modernized digital technology, gender equity and equality |
| <b>Predominant financing scheme</b> | State finance                                                                                     | Private sector finance                                                                                              |
| <b>Current status</b>               | Ongoing                                                                                           | Under development                                                                                                   |

alternative to the BRI, aiming to avoid such challenges by incorporating private sector resources. According to the Quality Infrastructure Investment Annual Report of 2022, the PGII seeks to mobilize \$ 600 billion in private and public funding over five years to support developing countries (World Bank, 2023). This may serve as evidence of the G7's plans to establish a funding mechanism for the PGII, highlighting a significant divergence in the financial principles underpinning the BRI and PGII.

Undoubtedly, the PGII has the potential to become Washington's primary investment tool, influencing countries that view China as a significant diplomatic, trade, and investment partner, thereby shifting their alignment from China to the United States. While the BRI represents a pragmatic global infrastructure plan covering a third of the world's GDP and two-thirds of its population, the PGII positions itself as a transparent infrastructure partnership based on values and high standards. Despite their differences, there is potential for the PGII and the BRI to become complementary, though this would require substantial compromise between Beijing and Washington.

The PGII initiative will need to garner support from various stakeholders. Some European countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, have already signed agreements under the BRI, raising questions about the PGII's potential impact on international commitments and the broader consolidation of the international community. Additionally, the PGII's reliance on private capital poses a challenge, contrasting with the BRI's P.R.C.-funded model of bilateral negotiations. These differences in financing approaches underscore the distinctions between the PGII and the BRI: on the one hand, China and U.S. could join forces to establish a common economic zone. However, given prevailing geopolitical tensions, a potential partnership between the two nations within the framework of infrastructure initiatives is highly improbable.

The expanding influence of the BRI, encompassing countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as shown on Fig. 1, provides China with opportunities to attract a significant portion of the global community. It has prompted various countermeasures from the United States, aimed at curbing China's interests through opposing strategies and political statements. A recent example illustrates this dynamic: in October 2024, Brazil's Minister of Agriculture Favaro, publicly endorsed implementation of the BRI, highlighting its potential to help Brazil overcome trade barriers imposed by Western countries. In response, U.S. Trade Representative Tai cautioned Brazil, advising it to carefully consider the risks of joining the BRI and suggesting that "Brazil should really think about the best way to make the Brazilian economy more sustainable." The Embassy of the P.R.C. in Brazil criticized Tai's remarks, calling them

"irresponsible" and asserting that Brazil's sovereignty in choosing trade partners should be respected (Patrick, 2024).

#### 4. The question of Italy

Italian-Chinese cooperation within the context of the BRI holds notable historical significance, deeply rooted in the legacy of the ancient Silk Road. During the Han and Tang dynasties, this extensive caravan route served as a key component of Chinese diplomacy, facilitating the exchange of goods between Asia and Europe, uniting diverse civilizations, and producing profound transformations along its path (Xiao and Parenti, 2022). According to Silk Road scholars, its influence contributed to the development of the Renaissance, the formation of modern capitalism, and the establishment of diplomacy (Fairbank and Goldman, 2006; Kim, 2018). Since Rome marked one of the termini of the ancient Silk Road, the modern BRI would be incomplete without Italy's participation, as would the revival of its historical status as a bridge between East and West (Marinelli, 2010).

Advancing cooperation with China reflects a considerable shift in Italian foreign policy. Over the past two decades, countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom and France, as well as countries of Eastern Europe, have overtaken Italy in strengthening ties with China. Italy is now encouraged to renew its Asian strategy, particularly its relationship with China (Coralluzzo, 2008), and to take the lead among Western countries in joining the BRI, potentially capturing a first-mover advantage similar to the UK's early involvement in the AIIB (Casarini, 2019). Additionally, cooperation with China could enhance Rome's influence in Brussels, especially as the Italian economy has been in a prolonged recession marked by limited public investment and high unemployment (Xiao and Parenti, 2022).

In 2019, a meeting was held between the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, and Italy's former Prime Minister Conte, which resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation within the BRI. Both parties committed to collaboration in various fields, including environment and sustainable energy, agriculture, sustainable urbanization, health, aviation, space technology, infrastructure, and transportation (Italian Government, 2019). For all that time, Italy became the first and only Group of Seven country to officially join the Belt and Road Initiative. However, according to Pugliese et al. (2022), Italy's participation in the BRI appears as an important case of populist foreign policy against the background of the influence of the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the League on foreign policy course of the country. Researchers emphasize that Italy's decision

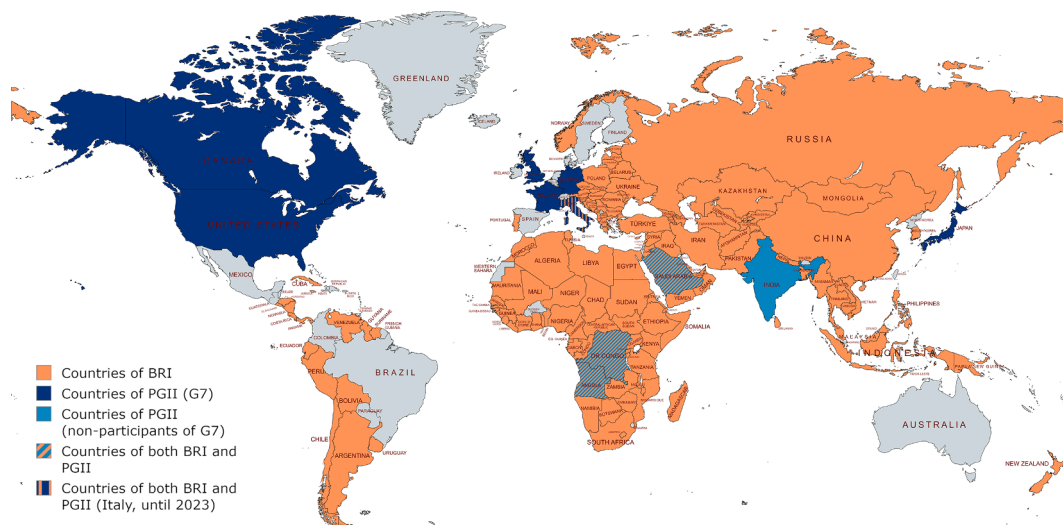


Fig. 1. A map of supporters of the BRI and the PGII infrastructure initiatives according to data from Nedopil (2023), G7 Italia (2024a). The figure is created with MapChart.

to join the BRI in 2019 was more political marketing aimed at a domestic audience than a profound change in international orientation.

The growing geopolitical rivalry between China and the U.S. is placing increased pressure on Italy. As a NATO member with a critical strategic position and deeply integrated military structures with the U.S., Italy's foreign policy is heavily influenced by American interests. Prior to Italy's signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the BRI, the U.S. leadership warned that the agreement might not deliver economic benefits to Italy and could potentially harm its international standing (Kynge, 2019; Xiao and Parenti, 2022).

Regarding potential cooperation with China, former U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo urged European allies to avoid engaging with Huawei and other Chinese telecommunications firms, warning that such partnerships could result in "curtailing intelligence sharing" (Barnes and Satariano, 2019). An anonymous source in Rome confirmed that the United States actively intervenes in matters involving foreign investment, particularly from China, in Italy's technology and infrastructure sectors. Brussels has also exerted pressure on Italy regarding its ties with China. While the EU supports cooperation with China on climate change and multilateralism, it has increasingly opposed Beijing on a range of issues (Xiao and Parenti, 2022). In 2019, the European Council introduced a foreign investment screening mechanism aimed at limiting China's "influence on the EU's strategic industrial sectors". The EU-China Strategic Outlook 2019 identifies China as a "partner in global affairs", a "competitor seeking technological leadership" and, for the first time, as a "systemic governance challenger" (Esteban et al., 2020).

Upon the formation of Giorgia Meloni's government and its support for the competing PGII project, Italy withdrew from the BRI in 2023. According to Mazzocco and Palazzi (2023), the primary reason for this decision was the lack of economic benefits. Prior to signing the Memorandum of Understanding, the Italian government anticipated significant opportunities to export its goods to China and had high expectations to realize them. However, over four years, Italy's exports to China remained minimal compared to other major European economies like Germany and France, which never engaged with the BRI. Additionally, from 2019 to 2023, high-level Chinese investments in Italy remained limited, while imports from China grew disproportionately.

This precedent could lead to withdrawal of other BRI participants, who may also face increased competitive pressures spread by the intensifying rivalry between the U.S. and China (Brands and Gaddis, 2021). Beyond refusal to participate in the BRI, the Italian government publicly supported the PGII. During the June 2024 G7 Summit, Italy's Prime Minister Meloni and former U.S. President Biden, along with other G7 leaders, met with private-sector representatives from Italy's financial, energy, and technology sectors. The Chairs discussed the Italian initiative "Matteo Plan for Africa" (MPA) and its relationship with the PGII. The G7 leaders also welcomed Italy's efforts as host of the G7 summit to establish a Secretariat to improve the coordination of PGII investments and the implementation of infrastructure initiatives in countries of the Global South (G7 Italia, 2024b).

This shift appears to signal a decisive and inevitable polarization of Italy. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Meloni pointed out that after the exit from the BRI, the relationship between China and Italy needs a "reset", raising hopes for a potential intermediary position between the P.R.C. and the interests of G7 countries (Mancini, 2024). It was further signaled in November 2024, when President of Italian Republic Mattarella met with Chinese officials. He stressed that Italy's trade with China needs "re-balancing" between import and export, while Italy "cherishes" Chinese investment in the country and encouraging greater Italian investment in China, which reached € 15 billion in 2023 (Micheletti, 2024).

The potential for normalizing the economic partnership between Italy and China also aligns with the data provided by Andornino (2024) from the University of Turin. In a comprehensive survey, the author examines the perspectives of 1,072 respondents on China's role in Italy. One question explores Italians' views of China's future role, with a majority (63.1%) identifying China as an economic partner, indicating a

strong preference for perceiving the relationship primarily through an economic lens rather than a political one. Part of the respondents were uncertain (19.6%), while 11.3% viewed China as an "economic competitor". Political antagonism toward China received minimal support (3.5%), as did the idea of China as a "political ally" (2.4%) (see Fig. 2). This suggests that support for renovation of the China-Italy economic partnership extends beyond Italy's leadership to include the Italian public.

## 5. Global South as the potential U.S.-China political battlefield

Italy's withdrawal from cooperation in the framework of the BRI could negatively affect China's reputation and potentially lead to a broader trend of the BRI abandonment. Nonetheless, China remains committed to multifaceted cooperation with countries of the "Global South", a term which broadly refers to regions in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The countries of the Global South have become a focal point in the strategic competition between China and the United States.

The concept of the Global South is rooted in socio-economic and political contexts, typically referring to countries with lower levels of economic development, greater social inequalities, and historical experiences of colonization, imperialism, neo-imperialism, and unequal global power relations (Kloß, 2017). During the Cold War, these regions were often labeled as the Third World, distinct from the influence of the United States or the Soviet Union. The establishment of the Group of 77 (G-77) in the 1960s marked their attempts to pursue an independent path in global politics (Zhao, 2024).

In the post-Cold War era, the term "Global South" represents a collective of developing countries striving for greater influence in international affairs. This shift reflects a recognition of the significant economic and political roles these countries play on the global stage. According to Mahbubani (2024) from the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore, 88% of the world's population resides in the Global South. By 2050, India's GDP is projected to surpass that of the United States, with China, India, and Indonesia together accounting for nearly half of the global GDP by 2060.

Ikenberry (2024), a professor of international relations at Princeton University, delineates the world into three regions: the Global West, led by the United States and Europe; the Global East, led by China and Russia; and the Global South, which comprises developing countries and currently lacks a clear leader. Ikenberry (2024) emphasizes that the Global West and the Global East will compete for influence over the Global South, and a potential alliance between the Global West and the Global South could be a kind of "nightmare coalition" for China. Consequently, the United States has prioritized weakening China's relationships with developing countries as part of its broader strategy to counter Chinese influence, placing increased emphasis on distinguishing between China and the Global South (Ikenberry, 2024).

For China, maintaining and strengthening cooperative relations with the Global South is essential for its peaceful rise and sustained influence in global institutions such as the United Nations. The BRI represents a new model of South-South cooperation (Gülseven, 2022). Economically, the Global South is vital for China's foreign trade, with an increasing share of trade among developing countries driving global economic growth. Conversely, the United States seeks to limit the BRI, regain the trust of the Global South, and incorporate these countries into Western-dominated value chains through initiatives like the PGII. This strategy involves addressing the long-standing grievances of the Global South regarding the Western-dominated international order and demonstrating a commitment to meeting their developmental needs (Zhao, 2024).

As Abels and Bieling (2024) mention, the governance of P.R.C. is shaping the BRI to increase the power of the state: China is using it to establish a presence in different strategic regions, creating an alternative to Western development models and foreign policy. In response, the U.S.

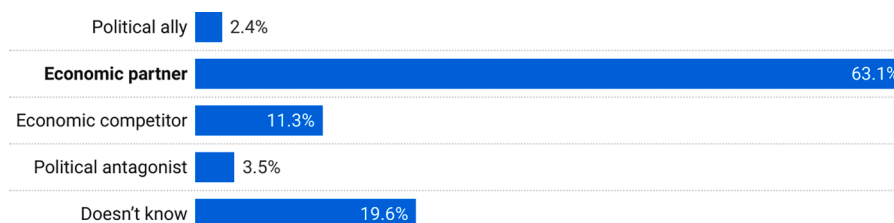


Fig. 2. A survey on the opinions on the expected role of China in its future relations with Italy according to data from [Andornino \(2024\)](#). The figure is created with DataWrapper.

is promoting its own infrastructural projects, such as the PGII. The authors also noted the forming of the European Commission's "Global Gateway" program, which aims to strengthen ties with the countries of the Global South too, but under conditions that meet European standards of sustainable development. This "new triad" illustrates different approaches to international cooperation, which emphasize both competition and the possibility of strategic interaction.

Maintaining influence in the Global South is of strategic and ideological significance for China. However, certain developments pose potential risks to the Chinese influence, as exemplified by the situation in Bangladesh. For a long time, Bangladesh has supported and participated in the BRI. In July 2024, following Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina's official visit to Beijing and the signing of a series of agreements, bilateral relations were elevated to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership ([Qi, 2024](#)). This move, however, complicates Bangladesh's relations with India, whose leadership views China's regional activities with considerable suspicion. This creates a delicate situation, given India's geopolitical interests, historical and strategic ties with Bangladesh, and the United States' likely opposition to any enhancement of China's position in the Global South. Concurrently, Bangladesh faces a political crisis that escalated into the July Revolution, leading to the formation of a provisional government whose strategic priorities remain uncertain.

## 6. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can state that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) led by China and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) led by the United States are manifestations of competing strategies in the quest for global economic and political influence. China's BRI is a policy focused on expanding infrastructure and trade routes to create new economic opportunities through substantial investments in infrastructure projects. On the other hand, the United States, responding to the expansion of China's interests within the BRI, developed its own PGII project alongside the countries of the Group of Seven. This initiative aims to provide an alternative to Chinese influence while promoting sustainable development in partner countries.

Italy serves as a notable example of the complex decision European countries face when choosing between participation in the BRI and the PGII. This decision is often influenced by a combination of political orientation and economic priorities. Similarly, Asian nations, where China's presence is particularly pronounced, must weigh the immediate benefits of Chinese investment against the potential advantages of closer collaboration with Western partners. The BRI promotes the expansion of China's influence and its development model, which contrasts with the Western approach emphasizing liberal values and transparency. This distinction plays a critical role in shaping the choices of countries that remain undecided between aligning with the BRI or the PGII.

The implementation of infrastructure initiatives by the United States and its partners, such as the PGII, is still evolving, unlike the more established and instrumental BRI. In particular, the launch of the initial B3W initiative was planned for 2022; however, it has undergone significant revisions and substituted by the PGII since then. Its strong declarative and financial backing from the United States exhibits further

future challenges including ensuring sustained support and effective implementation. In particular, the future policies of Donald Trump's second presidency (often referred as "Trump 2.0") remain a subject of debate, with indications that his administration may pursue a more aggressive stance on trade and continuation of the trade war. Citing concerns over fentanyl entering the U.S. via China, Mexico, and Canada, President Trump has already suggested the possibility of a crackdown on Chinese exports to the United States implementing additional 10% tariff on Chinese goods ([Lawder and Shalal, 2025](#); [The White House, 2025](#)). While primarily targeting China, the trade war is also believed to extend to other Asian countries that maintain economic ties with Beijing, potentially drawing them further into China's sphere of influence and distancing them from the United States ([Rosenberger, 2024](#)). In the realm of global policy, an intensification of isolationist principles under Trump administration is anticipated, potentially leading to weakening and diminished trust in international organizations such as the World Trade Organization ([Klingebiel and Baumann, 2024](#)). This shift could heighten the risk of global political instability, and U.S.-China relations are likely to face new challenges and periods of heightened tension.

China, too, may face challenges in implementing the BRI, exemplified by Italy's recent withdrawal and ongoing political rivalry with United States. This move might inspire other countries partnered with China to reconsider their commitments, potentially undermining China's strategic and geopolitical ambitions. The second Trump administration could seek to strengthen U.S.-India relations, leveraging India's strategic significance in the Indo-Pacific to counterbalance China's influence ([Basu, 2025](#)). This trend may continue as part of efforts to counter the BRI, fostering new strategic partnerships in the Middle East – particularly with Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates – as well as with Japan and Taiwan, reflecting the U.S. development policy under the first Trump administration ([Klingebiel and Baumann, 2024](#); [Primorac, 2023](#)).

At the same time, the United States and China are engaged in a competition for technological leadership. Donald Trump's second presidency coincides with the rapid technological advancements marking the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution ([Schwab, 2017](#)). Historical precedents from previous industrial revolutions suggest that a widening disconnect between productive capacities and political frameworks presents a major challenge in this new phase ([Brada and Park, 2024](#)). Therefore, success in the technological competition will depend on the ability of the United States and China to adapt their political and economic systems to emerging realities. The future of global infrastructure initiatives, including the BRI and the PGII, will depend on the extent to which they integrate elements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, such as artificial intelligence. Such integration could drive significant strategic advancements and reshape the competitive landscape of global infrastructure initiatives. The current implementation of infrastructure initiatives by both China and the United States, coupled with increasing political tensions and confrontations, provides a fertile ground for further research.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Mykyta Simonov:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review &

editing, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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