

A Sturdy Buckle: An Overview of China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Global Implications

written by James Lautens | July 23, 2025

While the Western World focuses on the disruptive influence of Donald Trump, who just passed his controversial [Big Beautiful Bill](#), and the war in Ukraine, the People's Republic of China is seeing rapid gains on the international stage. Most recently, it's been reported by Griffith University in Australia that China's Belt and Road Initiative had [reported](#) its highest engagement to date with USD\$123.3 billion in contracts and investments.

This brings us to several important questions: **what is the Belt and Road Initiative?** How is China using it to expand its influence? Why should it matter to the international community?

For the uninitiated, the **Belt and Road Initiative** started in 2013 by President Xi Jinping as a massive infrastructure [project](#) using rail lines, pipelines, highways, ports, and digital technology to connect parts of the world. In effect, China is looking to expand its global presence through the use of infrastructure. The Government of Canada itself has recognized this, [stating](#) that "these projects can be understood as a form of 'economic power projection.'"

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, a U.S. based think tank, a majority of the nations in Africa, Oceania, and the Indo-Pacific, with some countries in Europe and Latin America, have [signed](#) onto the initiative. Engaging and investing

in each of these regions would allow China to further grow its economy and avoid economic stagnation. Not only that, but by integrating themselves as an important stakeholder in those economies, they have the opportunity to direct policy through economic integration. By providing investment in the form of infrastructure and capital, **China would be able to have an increased say in the affairs on the nations they are building in.** With the increased volatility of the global economy, such stability as sold by China might prove to be tempting. Yet it is important to consider the true cost of joining the Belt and Road Initiative.

As mentioned, by joining the Belt and Road Initiative, nations will have their economies and crucial infrastructure tied to Chinese investment. As such, those economies may come to grow reliant on them, making it difficult to diversify. Militarily speaking, the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) has highlighted the [dual potential](#) of being able to use the Belt and Road Initiative's rail lines and port construction for military projection. If this were to prove true, not only would China have a massive global infrastructure in which to grow its economy, but it would also have a massive military transportation network, using both overland and sea-bound transport, that could pose a serious security threat to some nations if their relations with China were to sour. If China were ever to become as aggressive as Russia in terms of territorial acquisition, it would have the infrastructure, under the guise of economic enrichment, to do so rapidly.

There is also the matter of how the Belt and Road Initiative furthers China's monopoly on the critical minerals market. For example, **the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a recipient of the Belt and Road initiative, has 80% of its critical mineral [production](#) operated or owned by Chinese companies.** As reported by the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, since

“many of the world’s most mineral-rich countries, such as the DRC, lack the infrastructure to transport growing volumes of these materials to major coastal ports.” As such, they will likely be strongly in favour of the Belt and Road Initiative as it provides them with the ability to grow their economy. However, such reliance on China, an authoritarian nation, would mean that they would have to align their national interest with China’s to maintain Chinese investment from the Belt and Road Initiative in their economy.

This should concern Western democracies. China’s monopoly on critical minerals, which the Belt and Road Initiative contributes to, means that they have the ability to control who gets to transition to a green economy. Critical minerals are required for economies to transition to a green economy as they help construct the batteries needed for EVs, solar panels, and a number of other green technologies. With the Belt and Road Initiative, China has seen incredible growth in these [sectors](#). Such dominance means that Western countries would have to rely on a supply of critical minerals from China to ever hope to transition to a green economy.

The possible military application of the Belt and Road Initiative also means that China could threaten developing countries into giving them unequal trade agreements. If the PLA could use the infrastructure for their own purposes as contingent upon its construction, it may mean that those nations would have to compromise their national security to secure the economic benefits that the Belt and Road initiative will bring.

In any event, while the Belt and Road Initiative is incredibly ambitious, this ambition should not blind nations to the fact that engaging with it would mean signing a deal with an authoritarian nation that is intent on upsetting the rules-based international order. As such, caution should be advised to

nations looking to work with China on their initiative. If they aren't careful, they might find that they have lost their economic independence.