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Chinese Development-led Peacebuilding - An Alternative to Liberal Peacebuilding?

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1 - Introduction - Why discuss the Chinese Developmental Model?

“Somebody from a developing country said to me, ‘What we get from China is an airport. What we get from the United States is a lecture.’ ” — Larry Summers, former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury¹

Chinese expansion into the sphere of international peacebuilding, development, and security has remained a relevant, and heated point of discussion among policymakers worldwide throughout the past decade - how threatening is it to the so far dominant liberal peacebuilding methods? Does it in fact have the capacity to build lasting peace through development as China claims it does, or is it a ploy set to deceive would-be recipients of Chinese cash, that emboldens anti-democratic regimes to stay in power while also being a tool used to increase Chinese global political and economic presence, and eventually dominance? Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as the newer Global Security Initiative (GSI) and Global Development Initiative (GDI), are the crowning jewels of Chinese foreign policy, enshrined in the country’s constitution.² They mark a sharp turn from Deng Xiaoping’s policies for China of “staying low and hiding capabilities”(Tao Guang Yang Hui) to Xi Jinping’s more proactive “striving for achievement”(Fen Fa You Wei) strategic policies.³ That these policies are perceived as a threat to the US and its allies is clear from the shift of US policies to counter Chinese influence around the world, with the recent National Security Strategy pivoting and focusing on China as the main competitor to the Western liberal-democratic world order that it represents, and claims to protect.⁴

To begin with, an important question arises whether liberal peacebuilding and development-led peacebuilding are comparable at all. The position of this thesis is that the two approaches are in fact comparable due to their overall similarity of crucial aspects and key ideas,

¹Global Times. “Hegemony-obsessed US further alienates itself from world that chooses ‘airport’ over ‘lecture.’” *Global Times*, (2023).

²Freeman, Carla. “How Should the U.S. Respond to China's 'Global Security Initiative?'” *United States Institute of Peace*. (2022)

³Camilla T. N. Sorensen, ‘The significance of Xi Jinping’s “Chinese dream” for Chinese foreign policy: from “tao guang yang hui” to “fen fa you wei”’, *Journal of China International Relations* 3: 3, (2015), p.53

⁴Biden-Harris Administration. “National Security Strategy.” *The White House*.(2022)

while they differ in the order of importance and precedence. Liberal peacebuilding focuses on state building capacities and institutional reforms in conflict and post conflict societies, which bring about long term peace and stability with a potential for economic prosperity. It is guided by the principle of “democratic peace thesis” and as a result insists that states and societies have to go through a series of thorough political, institutional reforms that focus on democracy, human rights, free market trade and so on, which brings it closer to being an equal democratic member of the global community. In theory, once these states have implemented and accepted liberal reforms, long term peace is more likely to happen and development may occur according to the rules of the free market global economy and the unique economic opportunities that each state has.⁵ In this instance, development is less important and not seen as the main guarantor of peace moving forward, while institutional reforms that create a strong and democratic framework for the state serve as the main basis upon which everything else is built on. Since most peacebuilding interventions and operations are focused on state building as its main tool, they require investment, aid and other means of monetary assistance to the post-conflict state, hence the development aspect of liberal peacebuilding.

Alternatively, development-led peacebuilding assumes that economic development in the same societies and states is far more important to its members in bringing them out of conflict and into a state of peace, taking precedence over any political and institutional reforms that proponents of liberal peacebuilding may require.⁶ Chinese officials, in this case, believe that the desire for economic development and a better life is common to all individuals and that the focus on development in itself may be enough to prevent conflict and achieve long term peace. The two approaches differ in the order of importance of its components (for example whether political reforms are needed) and structure of their approach to peacebuilding. Liberal peacebuilding requires a change of on the ground structures and power relations and seeks to rebuild the state according to the perceived universal principles of man in order to achieve peace and development. To achieve said changes, liberal peacebuilding actors provide funds that often come in form aid or grants, but which are contingent on the successful implementation of

⁵Later on in this thesis, it will become more apparent that part of the problem of instituted neo-liberal economic reforms and equal market participation is that weaker, less stable or post-conflict states aren't able to compete on equal terms in the global market due to various reasons. MacGinty and Richmond point out that this issue is problematic to the extent that the state is in danger of reverting to the activities and policies that are fundamentally un-liberal, and making them more dependent on international aid to the extent that the state would fail without it.

⁶He Yin. “A tale of two “peaces” Liberal peace, developmental peace, and peacebuilding”. in *New Paths and Policies Towards Conflict Prevention: Chinese and Swiss Perspectives*. N.p.: Routledge. (2021). p.47

reforms, proving that there is an important development factor to the liberal peacebuilding approach.⁷ On the other hand, development-led peacebuilding utilizes the already existing power structures and political systems, be they democratic or authoritarian, and seeks to create a solid basis for peace and stability by investing and improving their economic standing through development capabilities. Despite the different approaches, both liberal peacebuilding and development-led peacebuilding share two key ideas and goals - long term peace and development. Their similarity of overall goals and the two important elements they share makes them comparable with each other. This thesis will therefore consider both models to be peace and development oriented, with their respective differences subject to further examination and explanation.

Additionally, it is important to note that the terms ‘developing states/world’ and ‘post-conflict and conflict state’ which are going to be used in this thesis together and interchangeably due to the nature of the topic and the way that Chinese officials and media link development, or lack thereof, to a society of uncertainty and potential conflict resulting in the lack of peace. It is in light of this connection that developing states appear to be most prone to conflict, war, failure in their ‘responsibilities’ which warrant interventions, and so on, and which justifies the link between developing world/developing countries and conflict and post-conflict states. There appears to be a spectrum of developing states where countries which fall lower on the scale in terms of development may be more prone to conflict (compounded by other factors than development itself), while those which do better, are less prone. With that said, even conflict and post-conflict states fall within the spectrum of ‘developing states’ as they are developing at their own pace dictated by the specific circumstances. China tends to be involved to some capacity in most developing countries, including those with active conflicts like Myanmar and Sudan, and those who are more stable like Pakistan and Egypt, hence the interchangeable use of terms ‘developing state’ and ‘conflict/post-conflict state’ in this thesis.

China has sought to create economic partnerships to export its infrastructure projects and capital dedicated to development. To that end, since the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 as the main vehicle of the Chinese brand of development offered to the world, 165 countries have signed contracts with their total worth amounting to \$843 billion in

⁷Richmond, Oliver, P., “Statebuilding: Failed by Design”. In *Failed Statebuilding*, *Yale University Press*, (2014)

domains of infrastructure, telecommunication, SatNav systems among others.⁸ The extent of the BRI projects in both its financial and geographic scope and more importantly its goal to offer development and peace to its participants have earned it a comparison with the US Marshall plan which successfully rebuilt post-war Europe and instituted a system of values and stability that have protected ‘liberal’ peace on the old continent to this day.⁹ Yet despite these comparisons and the promising nature of development as the main driving force behind the creation of a lasting peace, questions arise regarding the true nature and effect of Chinese BRI projects, loans, grants, and aid. While some states have clearly benefited from them and other deals with China, like most of the oil-rich Gulf states as well as other MENA countries, questions have risen about their cost on human rights, state stability, the ‘universal’ freedoms of individuals, the environment and so on i.e. the primary concerns of liberal peacebuilding projects and its Western liberal democratic sponsors. Yet China has increased its presence in global international organizations and their peacekeeping operations which indicates that the state is willing to participate in liberal peacebuilding projects, while also promoting its own developmental model giving the impression that the two models are in fact complementary and not contradictory.

Chinese emphasis on the state and its rights, instead of the individual, have caused concerns that initiatives like the BRI, Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Development Initiative (GDI), among others, might cater to authoritarian regimes seeking an alternative to traditional liberal peacebuilding methods through international organizations like the UN and lenders like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB).¹⁰ The Chinese state-centric approach has won over regimes that would otherwise find it difficult to cooperate with Western donors on their own terms, and gave them a legitimate alternative for their reasons - ranging from the argument that liberal peacebuilding is a legacy of colonialism and as such an extension of the control that the West wants to exert on the developing world; to arguments that the West is superimposing its values and threatening their all-too-often nascent national identity;

⁸Malik, Ammar A., and Bradley Parks, et al. “Banking on the Belt and Road: Insights from a new global dataset of 13,427 Chinese development projects.” *AidData*, p.1

⁹While the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the current war in Ukraine are indeed cases of war in Europe, the term ‘old continent’ in this instance is political in nature and refers to the regions that found themselves on the western side of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War and that have received direct aid from the US through the Marshall Plan. It also refers to the states that have, as a result of the successful rebuilding of Western Europe and creation of the European Steel and Coal Community, eventually joined the European Union and accepted the values that helped instill liberal democratic institutions and lasting peace. To this extent, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the former Yugoslav Republics are not considered a part of the political ‘old continent’.

¹⁰ Aboudouh, Ahmed, and Jonathan Fulton. “China and Russia are proposing a new authoritarian playbook. MENA leaders are watching closely.” *Atlantic Council*. 2022.

to the anger and remorse some feel towards the US and its allies for participating in wars under the flag of freedom, democracy, and liberal ideals while yielding little benefit for the people they were supposed to help. Developing states, especially the ones that have authoritarian characteristics and tendencies, have found it relatively easy to justify a shift towards China, partially out of spite, but more often than not, to protect their regimes, their relative peace and secure access to Chinese sources of funding that would otherwise be difficult to achieve without institutional changes. However, on the other side of this ‘no-strings-attached’ development model that China offers lies ... strings attached in spheres that China deems important to its global economic and political goals. The question of choice between liberal peacebuilding and Chinese development-led peacebuilding becomes closely tied to which ‘strings’ seem less evil and more favorable to the recipient state. Recipient states look at the potential value that both models provide, and often find the more tangible, and short term results lie in the development-led model, hence its rapid global growth over the last decade. In the words of the former Secretary of Treasury, Larry Summers, while developing states often receive a ‘lecture’ from the US, they receive ‘airports’ from China.¹¹ Herein lies the question: do these ‘airports’ lead to lasting peace, and do they even have the capacity to do so, or is the development-led approach as flawed as its liberal counterpart?

While some states have found relative success, having had the ability to bear the price of Chinese development projects, other states found it very difficult to repay said loans and their particularly high interest rates which make up the contract and are often signed in secret, without being recorded by international organizations that follow foreign debt. Countries like Sri Lanka have had to default on their loans and in return, China often pulls the strings that are attached to the other side of their development offer. These strings vary between indebted states' support for the One China policy; allowing concessions on mining raw materials; access to and concessions for ports; military bases on their land and so on, but are invariably related to Chinese interests in maximizing gains in the region in question. The international community and western policy makers have dubbed this form of deal as debt-trap diplomacy, where China offers lucrative deals to states that need it most, knowing, or at best not caring, if the recipient state has the capabilities both economic and political, to repay these projects. It is precisely because of the no strings attached appearance of these development projects that developed and developing states, whose

¹¹Global Times. “Hegemony-obsessed US further alienates itself from world that chooses ‘airport’ over ‘lecture.’” *Global Times*, (2023).

regimes are often corrupt, inept, weak, or unable, seek to improve their economic standing. The fear is that Chinese development projects in fact might destabilize the state, perhaps the region as well if it is volatile, and have an overall opposite effect to what the indebted states aimed to achieve while China, on the other hand, would be gaining a strategic advantage over them and their resources, reflecting it on the global stage.

The primary goal of this thesis, therefore, is to examine the effect and effectiveness of Chinese projects and initiatives in building peace and achieving development by analyzing the characteristics that set it apart from liberal peacebuilding models. With this in mind, the secondary objectives are to uncover the plausible reasons as to why underdeveloped and developing states look towards China for grants, loans, and aid as opposed to the tried and tested liberal peacebuilding methods, its representatives and their institutions. Finally, the thesis will gauge whether development-led peace has the capacity to replace its 'Western' counterpart, and whether it is a sustainable option for states seeking to capture a level of development like China - the self-proclaimed representative of developing nations in the world. The question guiding the research of the thesis is, therefore, can Chinese development-led peace and security replace liberal peacebuilding efforts in the same field?

The first section of this thesis is going to analyze liberal peacebuilding, as the current status quo in global peace and development efforts, as well as its criticism which is going to provide a basis to further explore why developing and post-conflict states seek an alternative to Western liberal-democratic in the form of Chinese development-led peace. The second section is going to explore Chinese development-led peace as an emerging alternative in the 21st century, its doctrine, approach, and continuous evolution in providing development as an assurance for future peace. The third section is going to analyze the Chinese development-led peace model by examining two cases, Myanmar and Pakistan both with varying levels of political and economic instability and security issues and both cases where China is heavily involved in economic development and by extent, their peace. Finally, an evaluation of the Chinese development-led model and a conclusion will close off the thesis.

2 - Liberal Peacebuilding as the Status Quo

The natural starting point for analyzing the impact of Chinese Development-led peacebuilding, the “challenging” concept, would be to look at the current status quo in global conflict prevention and peacebuilding - liberal peacebuilding and its criticism - in order to establish and understand why alternative approaches are gaining momentum. Liberal peacebuilding is a complicated nexus of national, international, governmental, economic, and normative interests that converge and through the use of aid, consultancy, and intervention and statebuilding as a last resort, form an approach where international and national conflicts are to be prevented and resolved in such a way that they do not reoccur. Following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, at the time the strongest representative of the communist and socialist ideologies, Western normative and ideological approach in the form of liberalism was understood to be the best solution to state and economic organizations that the world can, and according to Fukuyama,¹² will ever have. Since, at the time, there was no state capable of challenging liberalism, it became the *status quo* in international relations, conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding efforts. International institutions like the UN absorbed the principles and norms of liberal democracies such as universal human rights, political and media freedom, among others.

First of all, Western liberal-democratic states are defined by the Webberian concept of state; that a state is defined as a community of people who have successfully claimed the monopoly over the use of force over a territory that is defined by a physical border. Furthermore, this community is defined by the Hobbesian and Lockean proto-liberal notions of social contracts where individual members give up their natural right to self defense to the sovereign state in order to escape a state of insecurity and constant chaos. The sovereign state in turn is responsible for protecting its citizens, and their properties.¹³ The importance of a stable state in protecting and promoting the rights of their citizens will be transposed into the international

¹²Cooper, Neil, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh. "The end of history and the last liberal peacebuilder: a reply to Roland Paris." *Review of International Studies*

¹³Hobbes was the first to define the concept of social contract under which the subjects of the sovereign were to give up their right to self defense for the protection, under law, of the sovereign. Locke later expanded on the social contract theory to include the right to property and its protection, as well as the circumstances under which a sovereign may be replaced. J.J. Rousseau contributed to the nascent liberal theory by outlining how an enlightened individual member of the society ought to think in order for the state to prosper i.e. the common good, and the reformability of individuals. All three theorists are crucial to the understanding of liberalism as a political, economic, and social phenomenon and its shortcomings.

peacebuilding sphere, as proponents of liberalism, and liberal institutions like the IMF or the WB view the state as the main channel of a successful cooperation in terms of economic growth and development due to its ability to provide security.¹⁴ Roger MacGinty points out six main characteristics that seem to be common to all definitions of liberalism i.e.; individual people as the first and most important factor around whom other factors are built; notions of tolerance, diversity, and peace among people and states; promotion and protection of individual freedoms and rights; reformability of individuals and institutions to fit the interests of society; the rationality of individuals which will help them come to the best conclusions for themselves and society in a manner that will reduce harm and maximize benefits; and finally, the right to own, and defend property regulated by laws and judicial systems.¹⁵

These characteristics are best manifest in Western democratic states, where the sovereign state is responsible for protecting and promoting said rights not only to its citizens but globally as well, and where the economic system of a free trade market, in theory seldom regulated by the state, is the best system that leads to stability and consistent development. States that employed these characteristics had a far better outlook at lasting peace than those which did not - in theory.¹⁶ If we consider that after the Cold War, there was no one, or no system credible to challenge liberalism, its proponents supposed the universality of their norms and principles and that all states will eventually copy-and-paste these characteristics and norms, and will change accordingly. Those that did not were deemed dangerous states, failing, failed, terrorist and so on, and posed a direct threat to the liberal-democratic order that became the status quo.¹⁷ This perceived universality had allowed states like the US, UK, France among others, to influence the UN system and slowly direct it towards accepting liberal values and instilling them in the UN global value system. Since liberalism is effectively zero sum, meaning that other systems that are not aligned with it, or do not acknowledge liberal democracies and its free market economies as superior, pose a direct threat, they should therefore be dealt with appropriately with a righteousness that is warranted for by its superiority and universality. Following several global incidents and civil wars in the 1990s, and several poorly planned and unsanctioned Western interventions which caused concern in the international community, the turn of the 21st century

¹⁴Richmond, Oliver, P., "Statebuilding: Failed by Design". In *Failed Statebuilding*, Yale University Press, p.65-67

¹⁵Mac Ginty, Roger. "International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace." *Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan*. (2011), p.26

¹⁶Richmond, Oliver, P., "Statebuilding: Failed by Design". p.70-71

¹⁷Ibid.

saw the formal institution of liberal ideals into the global peace agenda through documents like the “*The Responsibility to Protect*” by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) specifically created to address the circumstances under which the global community has a *duty* to intervene in designated states, and the “*2005 World Summit Outcome*” in the UN General Assembly, which underscored the duties and values of states towards their citizens, as well as those of the international community should the state “fail” to uphold its obligations.

For example, looking at some of the statutes from the aforementioned documents, one can better understand the claimed goals of Western liberal-democracies and the framework within which they operate to achieve those claimed goals. The guidelines within the “*Responsibility to Protect*” by the ICISS, outline three main concepts for the international community and all sovereign states: the responsibility to prevent, responsibility to protect, and responsibility to rebuild. The sovereign state is responsible for the protection of human rights of its citizens, and for the human security, well being and individual freedoms (paragraphs 2.16 and 2.21).¹⁸ Yet should the state fail in upholding its obligations as defined in the guidelines, the international community has a responsibility to react and, according to paragraph 2.25, may intervene if and when “human rights and harm to civilians is happening or imminent”. This does not necessarily mean military intervention and the use of coercive force, however it allows for such a possibility should the other, more peaceful means fail. More importantly, the document outlines that, should the preventative measures fail, and should there be a military intervention in order to remove the violent regime, the international community (states, INGOs, and NGOs) have a responsibility to rebuild the state in question. This introduces the developmental aspect of liberal interventions and peacebuilding, with statebuilding being the most common tool used to achieve said reforms and changes.¹⁹

Finally, paragraphs 3.21-3.24 emphasize that prevention efforts as well as rebuilding projects must work towards achieving the following: democratic institution building and adequate power sharing mechanisms, economic improvement through adequate adjustments to its industry and market approach, strengthening the rule of law with an emphasis on minority

¹⁸International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. “The Responsibility to Protect”. Canada: *International Development Research Centre*. (2001), p.13-14

¹⁹International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. “The Responsibility to Protect”. Canada: *International Development Research Centre*. (2001), p.16

rights protection, and security apparatus reform.²⁰ Bearing in mind that these guidelines are informed by the western liberal-democratic norms, it stands that these efforts and responsibilities ought to spread the liberal approach globally, in order to establish long term peace and development. To emphasize the importance of spreading liberal peace and ideals worldwide, paragraph 3.34 explains that states in question ought to open up to prevention efforts (which as earlier established, serve to reform and resolve non functioning parts of the state in question according to the responsibility to protect template), regardless of the state's fear of internationalization of the issue or interference and infringement on the sovereignty of the state.²¹ It is argued that the conflicted state does not have much choice regarding prevention efforts, as their non-compliance will in fact reflect poorly on them on the global stage and may eventually bring to military intervention should the situation further deteriorate.²²

Developing the 2001 document on the responsibility to protect, the “*2005 World Summit Outcome*” and the subsequent resolution accepted by the UN General Assembly provide similar guidelines for the global community. Paragraph 11 of the resolution declares that good governance and the rule of law are paramount to peace, security and the sustained development of the state, and international community. This is crucial since the main reference point and actor in international relations, according to western liberal-democratic states, is the sovereign state which is the only entity that has the capacity and legitimacy to deal with other states and international organizations. It is the individual sovereign state that ought to uphold its duties and act according to global (or liberal since the two terms are synonymous to its proponents) norms which are outlined in paragraphs 12 and 13, for example. They declare that human rights are universal and indivisible to all individuals and that gender equality, human security, and personal freedoms are essential in advancing global peace, security and development.²³ The failure to fulfill its duties, means that the international community has the responsibility to prevent, intervene, and rebuild according to the statutes previously outlined - as was the case in Iraq and more recently Afghanistan for example.

²⁰International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. “The Responsibility to Protect”. Canada: *International Development Research Centre*.(2001) p.23-24

²¹International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. “The Responsibility to Protect”, p.25

²²*Ibid*, p.25

²³United Nations General Assembly. “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005”. *United Nations General Assembly*. Sixtieth Session. (2005), p.2

Oliver Richmond denotes that despite the liberal intentions of securing the rights and freedoms of individuals, civil society, and minorities among others, western states, and international organizations tend to work with legitimate states first and foremost.²⁴ The goal being to create capacity for previously failing states to fulfill their duties to their citizens instead of foreign interveners, INGOs and NGOs. The WB and IMF, for example, only deal with and on the level of state governments when it comes to loans, aid and other monetary and fiscal reforms. Hence, Richmond concludes that liberal peacebuilding efforts and projects more often than not come down to statebuilding projects which involve reforms, institution building, capacity building and the reform of the economic system according to neoliberal economic standards i.e. little state interference in terms of tariffs, price control and so on, and opening the state to the global market.²⁵ States and societies which are the subject to liberal interventions and peacebuilding efforts ought to accept that liberal norms are universal, as noted in “*The Responsibility to Protect*”, and to copy-and-paste the state system of successful Western liberal-democratic states in order to achieve their own long term peace and eventually develop into independent sovereign having employed liberal norms and values. This is paramount given that in the current global setting, the state is the main representative of its citizens and actor on the global stage, and according to proponents of liberalism, the only capable actor to achieve peace, security and development for its citizens.²⁶ As Richmond described, liberal peacebuilding projects are comparable to IKEA and its products where the product (in this case functioning state, peace and development according to liberal norms) are designed and created by IKEA (Western states), deconstructed and shipped wherever interventions happen, and finally rebuilt by its new user and with the help of the designer, to be used and to replace the old dysfunctional systems and power relations.²⁷

The economic aspect of liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding is a significant factor in the process of its implementation and realization. The end of the Cold War not only signified the triumph of liberal-democracies over the one-party communist state, but also of the liberal economic, capitalist system over the marxist communist understanding of the USSR and its allies. It was understood that liberal capitalism was far superior to any other economic order,

²⁴Richmond, Oliver, P., “Statebuilding: Failed by Design”. In *Failed Statebuilding*, Yale University Press, p.64-65

²⁵Ibid, p.64-65

²⁶Mac Ginty, Roger. “International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace.” *Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan*. (2011), p.40

²⁷Mac Ginty, Roger. “International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace.” p.39

having beaten its main alternative in a communist, state dictated economy. It was also better than other options such as Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) employed by many Latin American countries between the 1960s and 1980s. Main financial institutions of the liberal economic order, like the IMF and the WB, had a template of reforms that states that wanted loans had to fulfill in order to secure financial aid. Arguably those reforms were much more favorable to foreign companies and states, however, the presumption was that if states that found themselves in need of loans, aid, or other forms of financial assistance were to employ the reforms required by the IMF, they would eventually achieve capable economies able to compete on the world market. Neoliberal economic requirements for financial assistance followed liberal interventionist states wherever peacebuilding and statebuilding projects occurred and were in part the force behind the requirement to reform the state, as previously mentioned, since international financial institutions work only with legitimate states. It is clear then, that neoliberal reforms like cuts to state subsidies, healthcare, privatization of different sectors including pension funds, while likely draconian to the recipient state in the short term, were understood to be a necessary component of the successes of liberal-democratic states, hence the requirement to have them transposed into societies and states where there are peacebuilding and statebuilding projects.²⁸ Yet, for all its claimed normative superiority and universality of principles, liberal peacebuilding is marred by a lot of contradictions within its own approach.

²⁸Cooper, Neil, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh. "The end of history and the last liberal peacebuilder: a reply to Roland Paris." *Review of International Studies*, p.2001

3 - Liberal Peacebuilding Criticism

The criticism of liberal peacebuilding approaches is founded on both normative inconsistencies and on-the-ground empirical failures to achieve the supposed goals of peacebuilding. Critical studies accuse it of neo-colonialism whereby the interventions and power relations following the rebuilding phase resemble the old colonial relationship many of the current Western liberal-democratic states had with much of Africa, the MENA and Asia, where most of the failed, unstable, or authoritarian states with records of human rights abuse, wars, genocides and political repressions are located. There are several inconsistencies worth looking at to understand why states are turning towards a, what used to be an uneasy but now seemingly profitable relationship with China. Normatively speaking, liberalism has failed to persuade other cultures of its universality and the positive impact on human society. The issue being that liberalism is theoretically founded on the experience of Western liberal-democratic states, to address their woes and needs, and to create a stable and peaceful environment according to their cultural and historical perspectives. With that said, the claim that liberal norms and values are universal are directly exclusive to all other norms and values that may exist among other cultures, created according to their own needs, cultural values and historical developments. According to MacGinty, the universalistic approach of liberal peacebuilding in terms of human rights, reformability of individuals and by extension states (among others outlined in the previous section) provide a basis for intervention in the affairs of other sovereign states by Western liberal-democratic actors and INGOs.²⁹ This is to say that the interventionist approach is prescriptive by nature, in that it dictates what other states ought to do to align with the universal norms and values, disregarding local customs, experiences, culture, and history which eventually leads to the overall failure of liberal peacebuilding projects as was the case with Iraq and Afghanistan.

Case in point, in Afghanistan following the initial military intervention against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the western coalition and responsible INGOs started implementing the standard template of building a liberal-democratic state in a post conflict society. The projects focused on creating a secular state in which the government institutions represented liberal democratic

²⁹Mac Ginty, Roger. "International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace." p.26

values, and not the local norms and relations.³⁰ The new Afghan state would be able to administer and enforce peace around a country that was historically divided into tribes, or clans, and therefore de-centralised, and deeply religious. However, due to the nature of liberal values, they failed to take into account how significant those cultural and historical local norms were to the Afghan society. For example, one of the more significant reforms was to the judicial system, which in pre-intervention Afghanistan was on a more personal level, arguably clientelistic, or tribal according to the region where the people resided.³¹ However, to the local population it served its purpose of administering justice according to the values and norms they held. On the other hand, despite more than \$1 billion in investment into a more modern institutionalized judicial system, the Afghan society distrusted it for its bureaucratic approach, formality and the fact that it was foreign.³² This was the case in many statebuilding and peacebuilding projects led by Western countries and INGOs. The state had to be centralized in order to consolidate power over its territory, according to the Webberian definition, and most of the institutional reforms, financial assistance, and focus was on the capital city of the state in question.³³

However, this posed a major problem in that it slowed down the process of administration, and trade having been replaced with the new liberal versions, and lowered trust between citizens and the government due to how foreign the process was. Mac Ginty shows how important the outreach and impact of the centralized government is with an example of how agreements between the state and INGOs in the sphere of pharmaceuticals regulation impact the administration of medicines to remote areas. Namely, prior to such agreements, the civil society would have acquired medication through the informal economy. With the new agreements to regulate medicine distribution, this not only reduced the number of locations where medicine can be bought, but also increased their price making it less affordable to a majority of the population.³⁴ Another area where the imposition of liberal normative values posed an issue with the local society was the administration of human rights, freedoms and equality. In traditionally conservative, religious, and patriarchal societies like that of Iraq and Afghanistan among others,

³⁰Mac Ginty, Roger. "International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace." p.41

³¹Ibid, p.40

³²Sopko, John F. "What we need to learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction." *SIGAR, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*. (2021), p.74

³³Mac Ginty, Roger. "International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace." p.35, 41

³⁴Ibid, p.35

the involvement of women, for example, in politics and the government was not socially acceptable. Neither was the participation of certain parts of the civil society that represented minorities viewed favorably. INGOs, NGOs and intervening states sought to increase the representation of underrepresented groups, however, that was not always welcome. Women in Afghanistan only had so much influence over politics and economy, usually with the help and backing of foreign forces. During the negotiations with the Taliban, the government of Afghanistan had sent several female negotiators as a part of a larger group, however, they had limited outreach, if any, when negotiating with tribes and groups like the Taliban that did not accept them as legitimate power holders and brokers therefore diminishing their role in any peace process and reduced their realistic impact to the capital city.³⁵ The pressing issue becomes more clear considering the events following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, when they abolished all the progress made by INGOs and other actors responsible for peacebuilding in the state regarding human rights and freedom, specifically women's education, their involvement in government, as well as other minorities.

Such failures provide authoritarian regimes an excuse to criticize Western countries of neo-colonialism, double standards, and self interest which provides a basis for rejecting the “responsibilities to prevent, intervene, and rebuild” while turning towards new alternatives like China. Critics of liberal peacebuilding claim that it is an example of a “civilizing mission” whereby intervening states aim to provide tutelage, to give it a certain level of self sufficiency and to open up the territory to profit.³⁶ In other words, western liberal-democratic states have geostrategic and geo economic interests in intervening, which they can achieve through intervention, prevention, reforms in other states and under the guise of liberal norms and values while hiding their ‘true’ interests.

Within this issue lies another contradiction that causes criticism and that is that state sovereignty isn't as central to as it seems to be, or that the only circumstances in which state is important is when it's being rebuilt according to liberal norms, while its sovereignty holds little significance when it employs any other political structure and system other than that of a liberal democratic state. In this case, liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and interventionism are contrasted with the hard realities of geopolitics which take precedence over their normative

³⁵Dostyar, Aref, and Zmarai Farahi. “Why the Afghan peace process failed, and what could come next?” Middle East Institute.(August 18, 2022)

³⁶Richmond, Oliver, P., “Statebuilding: Failed by Design”. In *Failed Statebuilding*, Yale University Press, p.68

values where certain states receive preferential treatment regardless of the pressing issues of human rights, authoritarian regimes, and preferred economic configurations. It is questionable that Afghanistan, Rwanda, Iraq, or Yemen should get reprimanded for their human rights records which may serve as a key reason for intervention, while Saudi Arabia, Qatar with its own poor human rights records, or Argentina during the 1970s in which an estimated 30,000 people disappeared in anti-communist campaigns, receive little to no attention. And yet, looking from afar, it makes sense from a geopolitical perspective - Saudi Arabia and Qatar are key US allies and energy hubs, while the anti-communist campaigns in Argentina were in line with US interests. Within this issue lies another contradiction that causes criticism and that is that state sovereignty isn't as central to as it seems to be. It seems that the only circumstance in which a state by itself is important is when it's being rebuilt according to liberal norms, while its sovereignty holds little significance unless the state aligns with the interest of its donors.³⁷ This situation complicates the relationship with elites in what remains of the state who might use the opportunity to claim legitimacy through international intervention, while usurping the institutions, as was the case in Afghanistan and Iraq, and profiteering off foreign aid and privatization of industries.³⁸ As Richmond points out, liberal peacebuilding becomes a question of compromise between the intervening countries and local elites rather than actual liberal normative values.³⁹ This clear dissonance between the normative values of liberal-democracies and their on-the-ground actions appropriately fuels distrust and distaste in local people whom the reforms and peacebuilding is supposed to eventually help.

On the question of economy, the neoliberal reforms have in many cases failed to serve the state and society they ought to help. Instead, they provide profits to liberal institutions and governments and a select few elites that deal directly with them while the stringent economic reforms, cuts to subsidies, rapid privatization of natural resources and industries implemented by the state have all contributed to a poorer and less secure society.⁴⁰ Yet these same neoliberal economic reforms would hardly be accepted in the societies whose governments prescribe them to others. This is evident from the remarks by the former OHR to Bosnia, Paddy Ashdown, who admitted that he advocated against neoliberal reforms while being an MP during Margaret

³⁷Richmond, Oliver, P., "Statebuilding: Failed by Design". In *Failed Statebuilding*, Yale University Press, p.71

³⁸Richmond, Oliver, P., "Statebuilding: Failed by Design". p.71

³⁹Ibid, p.79

⁴⁰Cooper, Neil, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh. "The end of history and the last liberal peacebuilder: a reply to Roland Paris." *Review of International Studies*, p.2001-2002

Thatcher's government, while enforcing the same ones during his mission in Bosnia.⁴¹ Neoliberal economic institutions require as little government input into the economy as possible, requiring the market to dictate the flow of goods and capital. However, during the 2008 financial crisis, it was western governments who introduced counter-cyclical financing in order to justify interfering and bailing out several industries and banks, as well as subsidizing other industries in order to keep them afloat.⁴² On the other hand, those same western governments advised developing countries and states which requested financial assistance to use pro-cyclical strategies i.e. not to subsidize their industries, and for their governments not to interfere and try to counter their slowing economies or inflation directly increased unemployment, deteriorating social services and increasing political instability.⁴³

This causes another issue whereby international financial institutions that claim to represent and promote liberal normative values, in fact place more emphasis on economic growth through a stable and secure state, which means normative values like poverty reduction and human rights become secondary goals, as long as the state can be kept in relative, or negative peace.⁴⁴ A report by UNDP economic analyst, Salome Ecker, outlines that while many countries experience economic growth represented through yearly GDP increase, their poverty rates did not improve and often deteriorated at the same rate the economy grew.⁴⁵ Various factors contribute to this, like corruption, poorly managed social services, however the stringent reforms that many borrowing states have to follow in order to repay their debts play an important role. Countries like the DR Congo, South Sudan, CAR that have current and ongoing UN peacekeeping missions have outstanding debts with the IMF often to prop up the devastated state and its people, however, due to the stipulations of their loans, welfare programs do not have the effect that they should have.⁴⁶

Neoliberal economic reforms which emphasize opening up the state to global trade and markets do not take into account that most post conflict, developing or weak states that seek comprehensive financial assistance and aid do not have the capacity to equally compete in the

⁴¹Cooper, Neil, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh. "The end of history and the last liberal peacebuilder: a reply to Roland Paris." *Review of International Studies*, p.2001

⁴²Cooper, Neil, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh. "The end of history and the last liberal peacebuilder: a reply to Roland Paris.", p.2004-2005

⁴³Ibid, p.2005

⁴⁴Richmond, Oliver, P., "Statebuilding: Failed by Design". In *Failed Statebuilding*, Yale University Press, p.71

⁴⁵Ecker, Salome. "Growth without gains." *United Nations Development Programme*. 2023

⁴⁶IMF. "Member Financial Data." *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

global economy.⁴⁷ As a result their national economy has no room to expand by its own means as it likely gets stuck in the primary source, low profit yielding industries, while their national companies and sectors of economy get decimated by their inability to compete with other states. This eventually leads to foreign corporations bailing them out through loans, buyouts or other means of privatization where only a small percentage of the population, likely state elites, profit while the majority remains in relative poverty and insecurity. According to critics of neoliberal economic reforms, international financial organizations either do not take this concerning issue into account, or purposely overlook it in order to secure their core interests which range from keeping relative inequality among states to working in favor of multinational corporations and countries like the US, UK, France etc. This seems to be the case in the statebuilding and neoliberal economic reforms in Iraq following the period of military intervention, when the oil industry was subject to corruption and profiteering and where the government, under the tutelage of the US and INGOs, offered preferential contracts to US companies through neoliberal economic reforms.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Richmond, Oliver, P., "Statebuilding: Failed by Design". In *Failed Statebuilding*, Yale University Press, p.70-71

⁴⁸Cooper, Neil, Mandy Turner, and Michael Pugh. "The end of history and the last liberal peacebuilder: a reply to Roland Paris.", p.2002-2003

4 - China as a Development and Peace provider

In the last 30 years, China has emerged as a significant player in the field of international peacekeeping and development efforts. Its approach of “peaceful development” implemented by previous premiers, notably Hu Jintao and Deng Xiaoping who promoted an opening up of China to the rest of the world, has China set itself up as a significant actor following the 2000s, especially after president Xi Jinping assumed power and changed the emphasis from “hiding own capabilities” to becoming a global, responsible power, announcing that the country will aim to expand its involvement in international affairs.⁴⁹ To that end, since the 2000s China has involved itself in peacekeeping operations and equally importantly, increased its funding of the UN while at the same time, promoting its own version of peacebuilding in a) the region, through multilateral organizations, and b) globally, through the UN system as well as its own development initiatives, most notably the BRI, in an effort to promote sovereign equality and tackle the root cause of conflict, which is underdevelopment and poverty.⁵⁰

China does not have a defined and formal peacebuilding policy, not in the sense defined by its western counterparts. This is mostly due to the nature associated with the terms peace-building and peace-keeping i.e. that they are colonial, hegemonic, and by that extent, intrusive and potentially violent and which are crucial to understanding how and why China offers an alternative approach. The reason for this dissociation is primarily related to the “century of humiliation” and later the Cold War. The “century of humiliation” was a period between the 19th and 20th centuries during which China was colonized by western powers, namely Great Britain, and subjected to British colonial rule, where, under the guise of spreading the values and ideas of liberalism, China fell into chaos economically, politically, and socially.⁵¹ From the Chinese perspective, western powers involved in the restructuring of China, brought the country into the Westphalian system while also breaking the primary rules of said system by not only interfering in the internal affairs of the state, but by reshaping its borders and arbitrarily taking

⁴⁹Freeman, Carla, Bates Gill, and Alison McFarland. “China and the Reshaping of Global Conflict Prevention Norms.” *United States Institute of Peace*, no. 190. (2023), p.1

⁵⁰Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “Remarks by Ambassador Zhang Jun at Security Council Open Debate “Peace and Security through Preventive Diplomacy: A Common Objective to All the Principal Organs of the United Nations.”” *MFA of the PRC*. (2021)

⁵¹Xinyu Yuan, “Chinese Pathways to Peacebuilding: From Historical Legacies to Contemporary Practices”, *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva*, 26-45, (2020), p.31

and using its land and economy for profit.⁵² Prior to the Opium Wars, which marked the beginning of the chaotic period, the region was in relative peace owing to the Confucian principles of anti-war, and more importantly an approach to peace whereby all nations and ethnicities of the region were involved in cooperation and a building of identity based on “harmony of interest” - later to have evolved into the principles of a “common vision of a future for mankind” and the win-win discourse adopted by the Chinese state.⁵³

These principles were more constructivist in nature, than they were realist, as special emphasis was given to building the idea of ‘we-ness’ among China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam regardless of their ethnic or religious belonging as opposed to the zero sum game approach embodied in the imperialistic and hegemonic tendencies of western powers of that time and which later developed into the universalistic liberal approach to state and society.⁵⁴ Additionally, the Confucian approach to peace was patriarchal in nature, and focused heavily on morality and ethics of political relationships in the region.⁵⁵ China, being the strongest nation at that time, was seen as the patriarch and ensured the peace lasted, while also allowing Japan, Korea and Vietnam significant freedom to conduct their own affairs separate from China, but in the interest of common regional harmony.⁵⁶ While the Confucian principles may have been Sinocentric due to China being the regional ‘hegemon’, the period between the 1300s and 1800s ended up being known as the “Long Peace”, precisely due to the persisting ideas of a common interest for a harmonious life between the peoples of the region. These common interests trumped all goals that were to be achieved by violent acts of war and in service of individual interests and at the expense of the collective - in other words, actions deemed to be immoral and non-virtuous which had regional consequences.⁵⁷

With the ideals and structures of liberalism being forcefully imposed by its proponents as the more superior alternative, the disparity between what was claimed to be the goal and purpose, and the actions and effects it had on society, became embedded in the Chinese

⁵²Kelly, Robert E. “A ‘Confucian Long Peace’ in pre-Western East Asia?” *European Journal of International Relations*, (2011), p.410

⁵³Xinyu Yuan, “Chinese Pathways to Peacebuilding: From Historical Legacies to Contemporary Practices”, *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva*, 26-45, (2020), p.31-32

⁵⁴Kelly, Robert E. “A ‘Confucian Long Peace’ in pre-Western East Asia?” *European Journal of International Relations*, (2011), p.410

⁵⁵Kelly, Robert E. “A ‘Confucian Long Peace’ in pre-Western East Asia?” p.412

⁵⁶Ibid, p.411-412

⁵⁷Ibid, p.413

socio-political discourse serving as a reminder of the plights of interventionism and colonialism.⁵⁸ To that extent, even during the Cold War when ideological blocs were forming and were stronger than ever, China did not allow the USSR to intervene in its domestic affairs and what it believed to be its sphere of influence, rather, they preferred a relationship based on mutual cooperation, respect on sovereignty, and the ability for China to resolve its own internal conflicts and set a path for development.⁵⁹ The “century of humiliation” along with the Cold War, therefore created a strong desire for a powerful, stable state and economically prosperous China, based on the “5 principles of peaceful coexistence” from the Non-Aligned Movement conference in 1954, and inspired by cultural and historical experiences of China, which are:⁶⁰

- I. Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty
- II. Mutual Non-Aggression
- III. Mutual Non-Interference in domestic/internal affairs
- IV. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit
- V. Peaceful co-existence

These five principles set the foundation for Chinese approach to foreign policy in general, and to that extent inform the approach to the concepts of peacekeeping and peacebuilding today. Comparing the current concepts of sovereignty held by China and the Western liberal states, the contrast is clear. The liberal approach clearly attaches an array of responsibilities to the sovereign state in terms of protecting human rights, securing freedoms among others already mentioned, which are enshrined in leading international institutions like the UN. Failure to uphold responsibilities implies that the international community as a whole must react and involve itself (in different capacities) and make sure that the issue does not get out of hand, and that people, where the situation necessitates, are protected. The Chinese understanding of sovereignty is different. Driven by its historical experiences of colonialism and its position as an economically underdeveloped state, one which may be taken advantage of again as other newly independent states and colonies were during the Cold War, China held to a

⁵⁸Mariani, Bernardo. “China’s Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: The Quest for Stability.” *PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform*.(2022) p.5

⁵⁹Mariani, Bernardo. “China’s Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: The Quest for Stability.” p.4

⁶⁰Ibid, p.16

much stricter and traditional concept of sovereignty. According to Schuman and Fulton, this concept is a lot closer to the original outlines of the Westphalian state order in terms of the absolute respect for sovereignty of states, committed to non-interference, than is the current “sovereignty as a responsibility” approach that the liberal democratic states advocate.⁶¹ China, therefore, strictly adheres to points (I) and (III) when it comes to questions of national sovereignty, and tends to represent them on the international level as well for several reasons, perhaps outstandingly due to the Chinese state viewing itself as the largest developing country in the world, and should therefore serve as the ally if not a role model for other developing states.⁶² Additionally, the concept of a sovereignty with responsibility implies that non-interference in the internal affairs of states (by other states or the international community) is not possible nor is it much of a concern should the situation warrant arbitrary intervention, as was the case with Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan among others.

This is a major selling point that China uses to boost its image on the international stage, and which reflects relatively well when it comes to questions of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.⁶³ In Pakistan for example, Chinese ‘participation’ in the economic aspect of the country through the China-Pakistan Corridor of the BRI, earns itself reverence from the host country due to China’s non-interference in domestic politics yet unwavering support in its development efforts, as well as support in its foreign policy approach despite Pakistan’s domestic issues which have been subject to scrutiny of liberal democratic members of the international community. According to Amnesty International, political volatility, along with violence against women particularly and other minorities have increased in recent years, and while resolving these issues is a primary goal of liberal peacebuilding, the Chinese approach allows the existing state structures to deal with them, while China is more actively involved with infrastructure projects, stability and so on.⁶⁴ This non-interfering aspect, one where all countries are equal on the global stage and have a voice in the international community, is a very important narrative in official Chinese foreign policies in promoting itself and its success as a viable alternative to western countries, which have been represented as hegemonic, intolerant different state structures and patronizing. For example, while western liberal states acknowledge their form of

⁶¹Schuman, Michael, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering. “How Beijing’s newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order.” *Atlantic Council*. (2023)

⁶²Xinhua News Agency. “China remains the world’s largest developing country: CPC resolution.” *Xinhua News Agency*, 2021.

⁶³Mariani, Bernardo. “China’s Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: The Quest for Stability.” p.17

⁶⁴Amnesty International. “Human rights in Pakistan Amnesty International.” *Amnesty International*.

democracy as the true and universal one, Chinese narrative on democracy tries to upheave this, adding its own ‘vision’ of democracy, as well as any other one which is unique to the situation of states, as viable options. In its recent publication of a white paper on democracy, China outlines that a democracy is determined by the people who live in the state, and not by rules and determinants that come from abroad, which is a thoroughly different understanding than that of western liberal states. Democracies are all states whose citizens have had an opportunity to determine the path which the country will take, and which will secure their happiness and prosperity.⁶⁵ In line with this rhetoric, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has outlined that its own state is a democratic one, centered around the idea of development and societal self determination, running in direct contrast to the liberal understanding of democracy.⁶⁶ The Chinese understanding of democracy and human rights is derived from the experience of striving to get rid of colonial hegemony and seeking stability in own unique way, guided by socialist principles and the notion of a community of common vision, where individualism, including individual rights and freedoms, take second place to the interests and good of the community as a whole. Again running in contrast to liberal democratic principles which are based on the rights of an individual, the Chinese approach as such isn’t aggressively exported to other states, however, it is offered through developmental projects, technical assistance, knowledge transfers among others, whereby developing and post-conflict states which often fall outside the umbrella of liberal democracy, understand that there is another option which may be adopted to the own set of unique circumstances.⁶⁷ During the 19th congress of the CCP, president Xi Jinping mentioned that the “system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the foundation for development and progress of China” and that China aims to be at the forefront of global change and progress in terms of peace and development.⁶⁸

In nurturing such an explanation and approach to what democracy is, and compounded with the ideas of the “5 principles of peaceful coexistence”, China set a path for all states which may or may not indeed be democratic according to the western liberal theoretical understanding,

⁶⁵The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. “China Issues White Paper on its Democracy” *The State Council of the People’s Republic of China*.

⁶⁶The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. “China Issues White Paper on its Democracy”

⁶⁷He Yin, “Peace through Development: Chinese Solutions in UN Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding,” *Studies of International Politics*, No. 4 (2017), pp. 1–14

⁶⁸Xi Jinping. “Xi Jinping: Securing a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving the great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era - Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of Ch.” *Xinhua News Agency | The State Council of the PRC*. (2017)

to claim themselves to be so, and under the principles of non-interference, justified their usage of the term and arguably vindicated their approaches to governance. So while western liberal democracies would not consider China, Russia, Pakistan, North Korea among other countries, to be truly democratic, the Chinese understanding means that China is a democracy, despite its one party state system, or human rights violations; Russia could be considered a democracy, despite its own political violence and state structure issues; Pakistan could be considered a true democracy despite political violence and military influence, and so on. While this may problematize the concept of what a democratic system actually consists of, both normatively and empirically, it creates a wide support base among the numerous developing states tired of the heavily structured and normative liberal approach, and in favor of China, which gives them significant political leverage and influence globally.⁶⁹ This support in turn contributes to China's goal of becoming more involved in the international order, and becoming a more responsible power, equal to its western counterparts and based on a truly multipolar world. Furthermore, to make the developmental approach more attractive to interested countries, China does not officially attach any requirements (strings) to its loans, assistance, or aid, unlike liberal peacebuilding projects other than interest rates. While this isn't completely true - China does in fact 'attach strings' on questions that are of a national significance like the One China policy - for the most part, the requirements are not normatively charged and aggressively intrusive in terms of institutional change, liberalization, societal reorganization within host countries.⁷⁰ The question of One China policy for example, might not play a significant enough role in most countries affairs in order to compete with the prospect of economic development, which does play a significant role in all aspects of life. The question of One China, while certainly being a political condition of significance to China, is a relatively insignificant condition for interested states to join the BRI for example.⁷¹ Similarly, votes and support in the international organizations like the UN follow a close pattern, in that partner countries in projects like the BRI

⁶⁹Freeman, Carla, Bates Gill, and Alison McFarland. "China and the Reshaping of Global Conflict Prevention Norms." *United States Institute of Peace*, no. 190. (2023), p. 26

⁷⁰He Yin. "A tale of two "peaces" Liberal peace, developmental peace, and peacebuilding". in *New Paths and Policies Towards Conflict Prevention: Chinese and Swiss Perspectives*. N.p.: Routledge. (2021). p.49

⁷¹As of May 2024, Taiwan is formally recognized by 12 countries: Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Holy See, Marshall Islands, Palau, Paraguay, St Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Eswatini and Tuvalu (these countries have no formal diplomatic relations with the PRC due to their recognition of Taiwan). On the other hand the BRI has over 150 signatories and participating states which shows the disparity and political weight that China carries with its status as a global power and economic partner.

- Australian Government. "Australia-Taiwan relationship." *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*

may vote along the interests of China, when the latter deems an issue to be of national interest. For example, such support might come in form of voting for a Chinese candidate for the position of executive director at an international organization, as is the case in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).⁷² According to AidData, global support for China within the UN has been on a steady rise, reflecting that government elites align with Chinese views, which is further encouraged by the fact that states and governments who choose to increase voting alignment rates within the UN by 10%, may expect an increase of 276% in aid and financial credit from China.⁷³ It is therefore much more beneficial for poorer states to align with China since it will bring a quick increase in finances, while it is also very significant for China as it increases its prominence on the global level and places it in a position where it may ‘voice’ and work in the ‘common interest of developing countries’, shaping the international order from within, and according to its own goals and interests.⁷⁴ On the other hand, supporting states are members of this community that focuses development over all other aspects and the exchange appears to be fairly equal. Obviously there are unique consequences to having close relations which verge on absolute dependence on China (as with any other country), including debt-trap, environmental and human rights issues among others, which will be addressed in the discussion and criticism section.

To that extent, the more a country is intertwined with the interests of China, the likelier they are to support their interests, however, there are little, if any examples of a partner state voting in favor of Chinese proposals on an issue that is directly detrimental to its own national interests meaning that the questions like the support for One China policy, are far less significant compared to the perceived potential benefits of participation in BRI or other projects affiliated with China. Some of the Chinese ‘strings attached’ are vague enough (IO votes and infrastructure contract details for example), appear to have incredible short term benefits (like building port infrastructure to support mining efforts), or have relatively little political impact on domestic issues of partner states (like support for One China Policy), for them to reject the Chinese approach to development-led peacebuilding. In other words, China, as the largest

⁷²Feltman, Jeffrey. “China’s expanding influence at the United Nations — and how the United States should react | Brookings.” *Brookings Institution*. (2020). p.1-2

⁷³Parks, Bradley C., Amar Malik, et al. “Belt and Road Reboot.” *AidData*. (2023)

⁷⁴Feltman, Jeffrey. “China’s expanding influence at the United Nations — and how the United States should react | Brookings.” *Brookings Institution*. (2020). p.3-4

developing nation, has figured out that it can more often than not present its national interests as directly beneficial to all interested partner states, which draws attention away from western liberal approach deemed to be too demanding in their neoliberal economic and political democratic reforms, for the potential benefit they would bring.⁷⁵ Mao had outlined that as long as Western liberal democracies were at the helm of international organizations, the world would know no peace, and while the current Chinese leadership is not as dogmatic and normatively stringent in selling its developmental peace to the world, it is active in reminding of the plights and consequences that colonialism had in creating global conflicts and uses the support that is generated to promote itself as the viable alternative.⁷⁶

It is clear then, from the Chinese perspective and historical experience, the “road to peace” is best achieved through economic development, without interference from outside forces, and with strong state support guiding its citizens. According to Xinyu Yuan, China engages in content contestation in terms of challenging the order of precedence of international peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. Instead of favoring peace and institution building to the cause of good-governance, China places emphasis on economic development and state stability as the primary and often only areas that international aid and help ought to focus on.⁷⁷ This is driven, once again, from its own ‘success story’ of creating a global power out of an underdeveloped China, one in which peace is safeguarded by the constant and consistent development and focus on improving the immediate situation of its citizens, rather than focusing on the political rights, freedoms, and peace of individuals or minorities.⁷⁸ For example, Ambassador Dai Bing’s speech in the Committee on Peacekeeping Operations in the UN emphasized the need to optimize peace operations and that their goal ought to be the preservation and promotion of a political solution *including* the state structures that may or may not have partaken in the cause for unrest and intervention.⁷⁹ The political process to a peaceful solution should therefore take precedence over questions of human rights, freedoms and immediate democratic institutional reforms. While the focus on state building ought to remain dominant, it should not focus on replacing whichever state system was in place prior to the intervention, but

⁷⁵Fulton, Jonathan. n.d. “China’s Changing Role in the Middle East.” *Atlantic Council - Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East*. 28. (2019) p.12

⁷⁶The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. “China Issues White Paper on its Democracy”

⁷⁷Xinyu Yuan, “The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?”, *Third World Quarterly*, (2022), p1806-1808

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to the UN. “Remarks by Ambassador Dai Bing at the General Debate of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.” *PRC Mission to the UN*. (2023).

rather focus on helping it (the existing state structures) arrive at a political resolution, while also helping to build its immediate capacity to develop its economy and alleviate as many people from the poverty stricken people. To that end, ambassador Bing pointed out that since post-conflict states are not capable of achieving development goals by themselves, the UN and international community ought to assist and finance projects in the most pressing sectors like the agricultural, industrial, educational, or health sectors.⁸⁰ Emphasizing the wrong sectors, and prioritizing the wrong goals first, like democracy building and peace instead of stability and development, is extremely dangerous as it often leads to a failure of transition into a peaceful society as was the case in Afghanistan, where 20 years of involvement, billions of dollars in institution and capacity building, investment in the military and jurisdiction sectors proved fruitless.⁸¹ The Afghan state did not develop its own capacities to sustain itself without the international community being fully involved in helping it. Corruption, distrust, and wrong priorities resulted in the collapse of the Afghan national government as soon as the US and several international institutions announced they were going to leave the country, causing chaos and the return of the Taliban against which the coalition forces and international community fought so hard to remove.⁸² Over-reliance on the international community to effectively run the state instead of local government, while the latter reaps the benefits of financial assistance through various means including corruption, represent what Xinyu Yuan calls application contestation in China's approach to peacebuilding and challenging the current order. China contests the approach that liberal peacebuilding ought to rely on exterior involvement, including drafting peace and reconstruction proposals without dominant local input.⁸³ The international community ought to be no more than an arbiter at best and only offer support, while showing utmost respect to the sovereignty of the state in question, and regardless of its political establishment. To that end, continuing with the example of Afghanistan, China was the only global power to increase involvement in post-US Afghanistan, after the Taliban takeover,

⁸⁰Permanent Mission of People's Republic of China to the UN. "Remarks by Ambassador Dai Bing at the General Debate of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations."

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Sopko, John F. "Why The Afghan Government Collapsed." *SIGAR, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction*. (2022)

⁸³Xinyu Yuan, "The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?", *Third World Quarterly*, (2022), p.1808-1809

investing in infrastructure projects, building educational institutions, and reconstruction efforts.⁸⁴ While not formally recognizing the Taliban government, China has, and still is working with them on expanding projects and cooperation in order to stabilize the state and create a more lasting peace, reflecting the Chinese government policy on working closely with any government structure, regardless of where it may fall on the authoritarian spectrum.

On the national, more local level then, development is the key to achieving true peace and resolving the root causes of conflict which are driven by the inability to improve living conditions and create prosperity for people.⁸⁵ The Chinese approach, driven by its own experience, focuses on stability and development which ultimately resulted in the country alleviating 800 million of its citizens from poverty, and with China becoming a global economic and political powerhouse.⁸⁶ This is enshrined in the constitution of China, which proclaims the state's desire for peaceful coexistence and common development goals.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the constitution outlines that China had successfully defeated hegemonic tendencies towards itself and that the "exploitation of man by man" is resolved by the common approach and goal, which is mutual building of trust, poverty alleviation through a strong and stable state, and economic development.⁸⁸ While China has not ultimately achieved its goal of development, highlighting that it is a long term process worth pursuing, China's own interest in increasing its role dictates that the state offer its help and knowledge to the world based on mutual interest and consent, which is represented as a win-win approach. To achieve this, China insists on one of its 'pillars' of peacebuilding - the international community must employ 'true multilateralism' as opposed to 'selective or unilateralism' which, according to Chinese officials, the Western liberal states embody, in order to give a voice to underrepresented states which are more vulnerable to instability and conflict.⁸⁹ If Chinese discourse on post conflict states is founded upon the ultimate respect for sovereignty and non-interference; government capacity building in order to create a strong and stable state in the post-conflict period; and aid and investment in order to kickstart

⁸⁴Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "China will continue to support Afghanistan as it transitions from chaos to stability: Chargé d'Affaires of Chinese Embassy in Afghanistan." *The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*. 2022

⁸⁵The State Council of the People's Republic of China. "Constitution of the People's Republic of China." *The State Council of the People's Republic of China*. (2019)

⁸⁶Xinhua News Agency. "How China has lifted nearly 800 mln people out of poverty." *Xinhua News Agency*, (2021).

⁸⁷The State Council of the People's Republic of China. "Constitution of the People's Republic of China."

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions"

economic development to remedy the root cause of conflict and instability - underdevelopment, then multipolarity based on the “5 principles of peaceful coexistence” is key to achieving this.⁹⁰

As part of its foreign policy approach to international relations, including peacekeeping and peacebuilding, China has introduced the Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), as part of its contribution as a global power to revive and revitalize the UN 2030 Agenda, thereby also providing what seems to be a theoretical basis for its view on international relations.⁹¹ The three initiatives were introduced by Xi Jinping in 2021 and are representative of China’s goal to not only passively promote, but actively adjust, if not replace the existing theoretical approaches and structures within the global framework, with Chinese experiences and knowledge.⁹² They address the fields which China deems important to its own national interest and global stability and peace; the GSI addresses global governance; the GDI focuses on global development and its distribution; and the GCI on the common values of mankind and the way forward.⁹³ Within the policy paper “A Global Community of Shared Future: China’s Proposals and Actions”, the MFA of China outlines the purpose of each initiative and how they work together, along with the BRI, in order to promote stability and development, for the sake of a common vision for a ‘global community of shared future’.⁹⁴ The basis for this is the GSI which addresses questions of state as the key actor in international relations, reflecting the Chinese own system of values. The sovereignty of *all* states is most important and their territorial integrity and internal affairs ought to remain untainted by outside powers (point II, GSI); security concerns of each state should be considered in line with the principle of indivisible security (point IV, GSI); while the peaceful resolution of issues led by countries in question and without double standards ought to be the main goal of conflict resolution (V, GSI). Together, these goals achieve true multilateralism, representing all states in global politics, decentralizing international relations, while also improving cooperation against common threats like terrorism, climate change etc. (points I, III, VI, GSI).⁹⁵ As pointed

⁹⁰Mariani, Bernardo. “China’s Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: The Quest for Stability.” p.4

⁹¹Schuman, Michael, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering. “How Beijing's newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order.” *Atlantic Council*. (2023)

⁹²Schuman, Michael, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering. “How Beijing's newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order.”

⁹³Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions” *MFA of the PRC*. (2023)

⁹⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions”

⁹⁵Ibid.

out by Fulton and Schuman, the GSI directly challenges the ‘rules based order’ led by the US, EU, and other western partners, by emphasizing points II and IV against the notions of sovereignty as a responsibility, which appeals to states less developed and in danger of failing to uphold responsibility according to the liberal democratic international order.⁹⁶ The ‘outcast states’, therefore, find support in the GSI as it gives them back or reinforces the legitimacy that they were in danger of losing under heavy scrutiny for their failures. The push to implement the GSI on China’s part is out of its own interest as well, as it secures itself against critiques of other global powers, mainly the US, EU, Australia and Japan, on its human rights record, for example.⁹⁷ Yet, the GSI serves the interest and purpose of less developed countries which seek development levels and rates of China by advocating to give them equal space and opportunity to progress and participate in the international arena without having their sovereignty and territorial integrity stripped for not being able to fulfill liberal requirements. In theory, at least. In practice it seems to be far more complicated given the varying interests and level of commitment of governments to participate in development, the state’s production levels and economic capacity, corruption, interests of outside powers and so on, as will be explored within the cases of Myanmar and Pakistan.

In a similar approach, the GDI focuses on global development and its adjustment towards aligning with the Chinese global vision, placing it ahead of western priorities like good governance, liberal understanding of human rights, and the neoliberal understanding of economy which make up the template for liberal peacebuilding. Chinese development, shifts the focus from these principles towards its experience and emphasis on state stability and development as a key for peace, while also being in line and promoting the UN 2030 Agenda. The GDI puts forward within its first point that the priority of major global economies, and the international community as such, ought to be boosting policy coordination to improve global development partnerships, thereby creating a synergy which will benefit the wellbeing of all citizens around the world (point II, GDI).⁹⁸ Points III and VI reflect on the need of the international community to be more inclusive and address the needs of states and societies that have a more difficult time

⁹⁶Schuman, Michael, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering. “How Beijing’s newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order.”

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China’s Proposals and Actions”

developing i.e. are underdeveloped and more prone to falling to conflict, while respecting the principles of the GSI. Again, these points also represent Chinese discourse on the need for true multilateralism and de-hegemonization of international relations, specifically the domain of aid and peacebuilding, while also considering Chinese experiences and utilizing the knowledge that they offer to the global community.⁹⁹ In line with the 14th Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the PRC, the GSI also establishes the importance of innovative development and the harmony between humanity and nature (Points IV and V, GDI), pointing to the significance of up-to-date and technology transfer in order to create a better base for post-conflict and underdeveloped states catching up to the global standard.¹⁰⁰ Yet both the GDI and GSI are fundamentally based on state security as the main prerequisite for development, which itself is a prerequisite for long term peace, solidifying the notion of “peace through development”.¹⁰¹ In order to better frame the two initiatives against the dominant global rules based order, Chinese officials announced the GCI in 2023 which serves to promote a state-centered value system, reflecting the Chinese belief that the state (a representative of the collective will of society) is the primary and constant actor, while the freedom of the individual, despite its importance, the changeable factor.¹⁰² In essence, this initiative attempts to normalize norms and values other than those used in liberal peacebuilding, which caters well to countries that have unsatisfactory human rights records but also require aid and assistance in order to improve infrastructure and economic development, for example. The first point of the GCI emphasizes the ‘respect for the diversity of civilizations’, and abandons the idea of universality and supremacy of one.¹⁰³ It outlines some common values of humanity, like peace, development, justice and freedom (point II, GCI), but outlines that differences and deviations from this ought to be respected due to the different histories and experiences around the world.¹⁰⁴ Referring to

⁹⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions”

¹⁰⁰Asian Development Bank. “The 14th Five-Year Plan of the People's Republic of China—Fostering High-Quality Development (Observations and Suggestions N.” *Asian Development Bank*. (2021)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions”

¹⁰¹He Yin, “Peace through Development: Chinese Solutions in UN Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding,” *Studies of International Politics*, No. 4 (2017), pp. 1–14

¹⁰²Schuman, Michael, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering. “How Beijing's newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order.”

¹⁰³Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions”

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

earlier sections of this thesis, the GCI runs in direct contrast with liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding methods, which require an alignment of states with the universal nature of liberalism and democratic institutionalism, offering an alternative based on mutual respect of sovereignty and interest. In theory, the state-centered value system functions in a way which allows the individualist notions of liberalism to function as well although in developing and post-conflict societies, these notions lose importance while the state gains prominence on a larger scale. This is reflected in AidData's recent publications which show that overall public support for China in developing countries has fallen by 16%, from 56% to 40% in the period between 2019-2021, while that of the US has increased. However, support by national governments and local elites of developing states for Chinese led proposals in international organizations sits at 75% approval or support rate, while support for US led ones at 23%, which reflects impact and influence that Chinese development led peace has on in gathering support.¹⁰⁵ With the successes of China - but also Saudi Arabia and the UAE for example, which have signed partnerships with China to different degrees and are increasingly cooperating - in creating a relatively prosperous, stable, and state-centered approach around development as opposed to democracy and liberalism, the narrative around the Chinese Global Initiatives is becoming more prominent and important in international institutions like the UN, highlighting the need for a reform from the US, EU, and others.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, China has actively engaged in modifying the UN development system, and has pledged over \$200 million to the China-UN Peace and Development Fund, with a purpose to reinvigorate UN 2030 Agenda and invest in the peace and development operations of the organization, further implying China's interest in promoting its own understanding on peace onto the global stage.¹⁰⁷ This sudden prominence of China in the UN and other regional Asian multilateral organizations like ASEAN, has prompted the Paris Group, G7 countries to engage in a more pragmatic role with developing and post-conflict countries, alleviating debt and employing a more hybrid approach to peacebuilding which engages with local participants to a far greater degree, while also sticking to its normative system.¹⁰⁸ It has also led to more cooperation and coordination with governments that breach the normative approach of liberal peacebuilding, perhaps reflecting that a more pragmatic approach like that of China is better

¹⁰⁵Parks, Bradley C., Amar Malik, et al. "Belt and Road Reboot." *AidData*. (2023)

¹⁰⁶Freeman, Carla. "How Should the U.S. Respond to China's 'Global Security Initiative?'"

¹⁰⁷United Nations. n.d. "United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund | United Nations." the United Nations.

¹⁰⁸Mac Ginty, Roger. "Hybrid Peace: The Interaction Between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Peace." *Security Dialogue*

suited in dealing with certain governments. For example, the government of Al Sisi in Egypt has repeatedly been under scrutiny from western countries and international government and non government organizations for an alarmingly poor human rights record, yet its close relationship to China has given it the ‘protection’ (legitimacy) and backing its needs on the global stage to continue its socio-political and economic path despite breaching western normative values, with the relatively recent constitutional changes cementing Al Sisi’s power.¹⁰⁹ Egypt-China relations have been improving following the coup in 2013, with China investing in ports through the Industrial Park-Port Initiative of the BRI as well as the New Administrative Capital and business center project worth over \$20 billion.¹¹⁰ To that end, reflecting on the two options presented to Egypt, an official stated that: “There are powers who have the economic capabilities but will not help us; there are those who would help us but do not have the economic capabilities; China tops the list of those who have the ability and desire to help.”¹¹¹ The ‘turning’ of developing and post conflict states towards China for assistance in development and conflict resolution has led western countries to somewhat reluctantly ease up on their stance, opening up more trade and communication channels. In the case of countries like Egypt, Libya among others in MENA, this meant that western states opened up to trade, especially energy, and to some perhaps alarmingly, in the military sector which drew ire from human rights watchers.¹¹² If anything, this signifies that the ‘threat’ which China poses to offset liberal peacebuilding to be taken seriously by those who promote liberal peacebuilding. Seeing that China has become the largest trading partner and financial lender to developing and post-conflict societies, in much of the developing world (most of Africa, Central and South East Asia, and Latin America), and that the trend of debt ownership seems to be increasing in terms of states owning a large percentage of their national debt to China, while China keeps increasing their financing of projects.¹¹³

Finally, and particularly importantly, the Chinese approach to peace and peacebuilding, expanding influence and peace policy through the promotion of state stability and development would not be possible without the Belt and Road Initiative, the modern silk road. The extent of this economic and developmental initiative is formidable in scale with more than 150 states

¹⁰⁹BBC. “Egypt constitutional changes could mean Sisi rule until 2030.” *BBC*, April 16, 2019.

¹¹⁰Fulton, Jonathan. n.d. “China’s Changing Role in the Middle East.” *Atlantic Council - Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East*. 28. (2019) p.6

¹¹¹Fulton, Jonathan. n.d. “China’s Changing Role in the Middle East.” p.12

¹¹²Ghassan, Karim. “Egypt: West backs Sisi despite atrocities.” *International Bar Association*.(2022)

¹¹³Ghassan, Karim. “Egypt: West backs Sisi despite atrocities.”

having participated in the 3rd iteration of the Belt and Road Forum hosted by president Xi Jinping, focusing on the improvement of cooperation and better understanding of mutual interests in the fields of development and financial stability.¹¹⁴ To begin with, the BRI was introduced in 2013 by then president elect Xi Jinping as the flagship project for his grand domestic and foreign policy approach, *Fen Fa You Wei* ('strive for success'), highlighting the necessity for development as a means to achieve long term peace and stability in the world.¹¹⁵ Its creation was informed and inspired by the history and experience of China and the historical Silk Road which connected Eurasia with China, increasing multicultural and economic exchange while also safeguarding peace. The modern version is similar in that it promotes development and aims to improve underdeveloped states by connecting them with the rest of the world, while offsetting the negative impact of globalization in terms of them being over-dependent on developed states.¹¹⁶ Naturally, the BRI forms a key pillar in the Chinese vision for a 'Global Community of Shared Future' proposal, serving as the main venue in spreading development along its route which is comprised of six main sectors which cover different geographic areas (figure 1 in annex), like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Silk Road, Digital Silk Road among others, connected by land, sea, and air.¹¹⁷ Since its introduction, the total value of BRI projects has exceeded \$1 trillion and is growing, with most of the investments (\$634 billion) being directed into infrastructure projects in line with ambassador Dai Bing's remarks in the UN on the need to prioritize infrastructure and energy projects in the less developed and post-conflict states in order to improve their development and by that extent peace outlooks.¹¹⁸ However, what makes the BRI stand out from other lenders is that most of its projects tend to be realized in more conflict prone states, according to a cross comparison between State Fragility Index and China Global Investment Tracker, where traditional lenders like the IMF and World Bank thereby

¹¹⁴Xi Jinping. "Building an Open, Inclusive and Interconnected World for Common Development." "一带一路"国际合作高峰论坛 | *Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*.(2023)

¹¹⁵Herrero, Alicia G., and Mario Esteban. "The foreign policy of Xi Jinping after the 19th Congress: China strives for a central role on the world stage - Elcano Royal Institute." *Real Instituto Elcano*.(2017)

¹¹⁶The State Council of the People's Republic of China. "The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future" *Xinhua News Agency* | *The State Council of the PRC*. (2023).

¹¹⁷The State Council of the People's Republic of China. "The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future"

¹¹⁸Nedopil, Christoph, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative." *Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University*, (2023)

filling the developmental gap left between them and developed states.¹¹⁹ While financing through the BRI is treated like a business deal, i.e. through loans from the China Development Bank (CDB) and Export-Import Bank of China (CHEXIM) and not as aid or grants, Chinese officials claim that the benefits of the projects outweigh the potential harm from long term loans given to the state with more potential to increase economic development than hinder it and that long term development as such is a guarantor of world peace.¹²⁰ Additionally, over 50% of BRI engagement between China and partner states come in the form of investments indicating that Chinese business interests and foreign policy goals lie in developing states. While this is certainly indicative of Chinese market expansion and growing influence in the developing world via BRI investments and infrastructure projects, it also shows that there is mutual understanding where the recipient state accepts that it may benefit from said loans and projects in the long run.¹²¹ This is a major contention point in the West, however, and has been called debt trap diplomacy by US officials in light of the situation where many BRI partnership countries had to restructure their contracts due to their inability to pay off loans.¹²² China is being criticized by its peers on its peace and development approach through the BRI as its banks and loaning institutions offered lucrative deals which countries could not repay, or restructure due to: a) the debtee state being economically weak to begin with, with the BRI project not increasing national income as perceived exacerbating the weight of loans or; b) by taking concessions on natural resources, ports, airports, railways etc. as a part of the safety net for China, thereby also weakening the host state.¹²³ In extreme cases like Sri Lanka, the state could not resolve the immense pressure from its faltering economy compounded by the debt burden, which led to their default in 2022.¹²⁴ Yet, China has attempted to remedy the issue of increasingly problematic debt burden created by poor risk management, by improving the latter and tightening control over financial support and investments, including risk management involvement from international

¹¹⁹Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt / Leibniz-Institut Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung*. (2021) p.6

¹²⁰The State Council of the People's Republic of China. "The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future"

¹²¹Fulton, Jonathan. n.d. "China's Changing Role in the Middle East." *Atlantic Council - Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East*. 28. (2019) p.6

¹²²Parks, Bradley C., Amar Malik, et al. "Belt and Road Reboot." *AidData*. (2023)

¹²³Parks, Bradley C., Amar Malik, et al. "Belt and Road Reboot."

¹²⁴de Mel, Nishan, Nilanthi Samaranayake, and Ambika Satkunanathan. "A Year After Mass Protests, Sri Lanka's Governance Crisis Continues." *United States Institute of Peace*.(2023)

institutions like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC) among others thereby increasing transparency.¹²⁵ This is in line with China's point III of the GDI outlining the need for debt suspension in poverty stricken societies, which in the case of China includes debt restructure, but also empowering local governments to take on more responsibilities with such projects, while the international community including China serve as observers and advisers upon request.¹²⁶ For example, most recently, China has given over control of 2 major BRI projects to host countries (Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya), the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Mombasa-Nairobi railway including training for railway workers, thereby working towards the pledge to use Chinese capital and know-how to increase the number of infrastructure and energy projects which promote development, stability, and eventually long term peace.¹²⁷ While such gestures show solidarity with developing states, it is certainly in Chinese interests for its projects to be successful, and perhaps more importantly, affordable, in order to boost its image on the global stage as well as secure support and cooperation for future projects in order to promote the idea of peace and cooperation established by the BRI.¹²⁸

Ultimately, the four initiatives, the GSI, GDI, GCI, and the BRI form a multi pronged approach that China utilizes for the purpose of both domestic and global development and stability, as key components and prerequisites for sharing its vision and building a common future for mankind - the chinese vision of peace and peacebuilding. The 'win-win' situation created by the BRI, and supported by the other global initiatives should be enough to create long lasting peace where, in the spirit of the historical Confucian peace, all sides may win and progress through economic development, while common interest against war prevails and safeguards the process.¹²⁹ For China, it means that its capital, investment practices and expertise are enough to spark economic development, while in return, China safeguards its social and geostrategic stability.¹³⁰ In practice, China has been actively engaging with both liberal

¹²⁵Parks, Bradley C., Amar Malik, et al. "Belt and Road Reboot."

¹²⁶Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Full Text: A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions"

¹²⁷Nyabiage, Jevans. "China hands control of 2 African belt and road projects to local governments." *South China Morning Post*, (2024).

¹²⁸Xi Jinping. "Building an Open, Inclusive and Interconnected World for Common Development." "一带一路"国际合作高峰论坛 | *Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*.(2023)

¹²⁹Xi Jinping. "Building an Open, Inclusive and Interconnected World for Common Development." "一带一路"国际合作高峰论坛 | *Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*.(2023)

¹³⁰Ferchen, Matt. "How China Is Reshaping International Development." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (2020)

peacebuilding structures, ‘infiltrating’ them in global organizations like the UN, and promoting its own normative view and vision for humanity (including peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development),¹³¹ as well as states on a bilateral and multilateral basis, encouraging and convincing them of the value of their approach. As the largest financial donor in organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), China has significant influence and leverage over the stances and normative values they promote, resulting in concurrent views about sovereignty, non-interference and so on.¹³² In the case of Myanmar, China has insisted on a local resolution, with ASEAN representatives being used as mediators and advisors in the conflict resolution attempts.¹³³ While the process has been marked by arguable success, as is the case in Ethiopia, it has also had a host of issues plaguing it, from both a normative and practical standpoint where China’s pragmatism and willingness to work with any type of government regardless of its structure and problems like corruption has led it to offer loans and assistance to countries which could not repay; or by the projects being narrowly beneficial to a minority of the population while the majority has stayed in relative poverty (meaning that despite economic progress, its effects on the population are borderline non-existent). Furthermore, Chinese interest in promoting developmental peacebuilding seems to be proportional to the partner states involvement with the BRI, or their potential effect on Chinese interests should they not be involved. The further away the conflict is from the path of the BRI, or the smaller the effect of the conflict is on the viability of the project, the smaller China’s role and interest in the conflict will be.^{134 135} The success of China’s peacebuilding, then, depends on several factors, including its willingness to get more invested in ‘helping’ the host country, the host country being willing and ready to use the offered assistance, and the international community respecting the Chinese vision of peace and development and playing along the rules set up by China - a combination that is seldom easily achieved.

¹³¹Arrey, Lwanga E. “China’s Push for Normative Change in UN Peacekeeping.” *Institute for Security & Development Policy*. (2023)

¹³²Council on Foreign Relations. “China’s Approach to Global Governance.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. 2023

¹³³Al Jazeera. “ASEAN urges ‘Myanmar-owned and led solution’ to crisis triggered by coup.” *Al Jazeera*, (2024).

¹³⁴Li, Jason. “Conflict Mediation with Chinese Characteristics: How China Justifies Its Non-Interference Policy.” *Stimson Center*. (2019)

¹³⁵Legarda, Helena. “China as a conflict mediator | Merics.” *Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS)*. (2018)

5 - Case Studies

5.1 Myanmar

The case of Myanmar is a good example of how China is expanding its enormous economic and political power and influence into the field of conflict mediation and peacebuilding through development. Like China, Myanmar has had a history of being colonized and under foreign governance up until 1948 when it gained independence from Britain.¹³⁶ Since then, the country has been in a closed circle of unrest, military juntas and reforms highlighting the persistent complexity of relationships between national, ethnic, and religious groups in the region which has historically made it difficult to achieve long lasting peace. While military governments, strengthened by the Tatmadaw (army) and seldom fond of their large neighbor, have been in power for a majority of the state's history, China has been a prominent economic partner since the 1980s owing to a shared border, and culture between Myanmar's northern ethnic groups (most of which are considered Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO)) and China's southern ethnic groups in the Yunnan province.¹³⁷ Their economic and trade partnership has expanded to such levels that China has become the largest investor (primarily in infrastructure, arms and secondary goods), and trading partner to Myanmar accounting for more than 27% of its trade and the same amount of its total foreign direct investment, while Myanmar is one of the most significant suppliers of raw materials to China, as well as energy supplier.¹³⁸ China's strategic policy on energy supply is an important factor in Sino-Myanmar relations, whereby Chinese goal to reduce dependency is reflected in its interest to invest in its southern neighbor and improve ties. In 2007, a deal was struck on a massive oil and gas pipeline which would extend from Kyaukpyu in the turbulent and conflict prone Rakhine state, to southern Chinese Yunnan region, which was completed in 2015 through the BRI, worth several billion dollars.¹³⁹ While the oil and gas pipeline directly benefits China as the end consumer, the construction,

¹³⁶Thein, Aung Zin Phyo. "Myanmar: At a Crossroads: Myanmar's Evolving Security Challenges." Edited by Ron Huisken and Kathryn Brett. *CSCAP REGIONAL SECURITY OUTLOOK 2021*. p.55

¹³⁷Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.13

¹³⁸ISP-Myanmar. "Almost USD 17 Billion Gap in Myanmar-China Trade." *ISP-Myanmar*.(2023)

¹³⁹Tower, Jason. "The Limits of Beijing's Support for Myanmar's Military." *United States Institute of Peace*.(2023)

maintenance, and trade it brought to Myanmar have also benefited the local population to a certain extent.

The Chinese relationship with the pre 2010 junta came to an end when with the restoration of a multiparty system in which the main democratic party, the NLD, won the elections and made a pledge to democratize the country, opening it up to other partners and reducing the dependency on China, thereby straining the relationship between the two countries.¹⁴⁰ To that end, projects previously started under the military junta government came under review and civil scrutiny, like the Myitsone dam project, against which local communities and indigenous populations had been protesting claiming that the dam would flood historical and cultural sites of national importance, cause enormous environmental catastrophes and become a heavy financial burden to the people of Myanmar as the electricity that the dam was to produce would be extensively used by China, rather than Myanmar (over 80% of produced electricity).¹⁴¹ This was one of the major disputes between the two states, where the newly democratically elected government of Myanmar decided to go against its major trading partner and opt to cancel the project. This instance also illustrates that China had used the favorable position and relationship it had built with the previous authoritarian military junta to strike deals on large projects which would ‘promote’ development, yet heavily benefitted China as opposed to the host country. The relations between the democratic NLD and China had continued to stagnate, with the former looking for new trading partners in order to move away from China, looking towards powers like the US. However, in 2017 the Rakhine state conflict came to a boil and the Western countries decried the actions of the government and accused it of war crimes and human rights abuses as more than 10,000 people were killed and 700,000 displaced, forcing the NLD back into an uneasy relationship with China.¹⁴² This condemnation came as a warning that the new aspiring democracy was failing to uphold its responsibilities as a sovereign state, resulting in sanctions and international pressure for the government to resolve the Rakhine conflict. China on the other hand, saw the opportunity to get involved as its interests were at stake, with Myanmar being in its ‘backyard’ and considered under its sphere of influence, which prompted it to get involved in a role as a mediator in the country’s new inter conflict. The involvement also

¹⁴⁰Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. “Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States.” p.13

¹⁴¹Burma News International. “Junta – China Plan to Revive Myitsone Dam Project.” *Burma News International*. (2024)

¹⁴²International Crisis Group. “Scam Centres and Ceasefires: China-Myanmar Ties Since the Coup.” *Crisis Group*. (2024)

served to bring the two governments closer together on all levels of cooperation, where China among its ASEAN partners, in its non-intervention approach advocated for a Myanmar led, locally owned solution.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Myanmar had signed a memorandum of understanding for the BRI, joining the extensive list of participants in 2016, and inadvertently giving China a path to implement its development led peacebuilding approach. As was the case with other economically significant corridors of the BRI, China decided to open a new corridor through Myanmar, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC, figure 3), which would see the completion of a Kyaukpyu deep sea port, Muse-Mandalay railway connecting to southern Chinese provinces to central and coastal Myanmar and enhancing the connection and trade between the two countries.¹⁴⁴ The goal, under the ‘win-win’ idea, was to kickstart Myanmar’s development and peace path by creating jobs along the route of the new corridor and further economic and business opportunities, in line with its four global initiatives.

Following the most recent military coup in 2021, China wasn’t quick to condemn or support the new government, but rather waited to witness how the situation would unfold, much to the displeasure of western countries, but also ASEAN partners.¹⁴⁵ Chinese projects under the BRI were at stake which once again prompted the country to involve itself in the Myanmar conflict, calling for a Myanmar led solution to the issue. While it neither favored the government or the EAOs, it maintained the relationship with both. This posed both an issue as well as an opportunity. On the one hand, Chinese proximity to the EAO regions and their ties on a closer level meant that they had some leverage in bringing them to the negotiating table with the Tatmadaw.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, in line with its preference for state stability and respect for sovereignty, China had also maintained close ties with the Tatmadaw, offering assistance to both sides in resolving the conflict, and having them pledge their support to protect Chinese lives and projects in the country.¹⁴⁷ To that end, in the past ten years, China has used its political and economic weight to bring multiple sides of the conflict to the negotiating table as was the case in

¹⁴³Al Jazeera. “ASEAN urges ‘Myanmar-owned and led solution’ to crisis triggered by coup.” *Al Jazeera*,(2024).

¹⁴⁴BRI Monitor. n.d. “Muse-Mandalay Railway Project – BRI Monitor.” *BRI Monitor*

¹⁴⁵Tower, Jason. “The Limits of Beijing’s Support for Myanmar’s Military.” *United States Institute of Peace*.(2023)

¹⁴⁶Li, Jason. “China’s Conflict Mediation in Myanmar.” Stimson Center. (2020)

¹⁴⁷This was especially important after the Myanmar Tatmadaw government’s indiscrete shelling of border cities which produced Chinese casualties and economic losses.

the Kachin Peace Agreement, and more recent peace talks between the Tatmadaw government and the rebel Brotherhood Alliance.¹⁴⁸

China has resolved to play the role of a mediator between the conflicted sides, again playing the role it proclaimed in its suggestions to the UN, where the international community was to be no more involved than mediating role, respecting the sovereignty and producing a stable state. However, its impact and role go much beyond Chinese ambassador's, white papers, or Xi Jinping's pledges. While China has in fact remained in the role of a mediator, vying to listen to both sides and offer its assistance in creating peace, at least politically speaking, its economic interests have colored much of its approach to the overall conflict. Contrary to the 'non-interference' in domestic affairs ideal, China has been heavily involved in producing a resolution to the conflict, playing between both sides, in order to secure its interest in creating the CMEC and all the projects and trade that would go through it. While it has had some mixed results, the reality is that conflict between national and ethnic groups was an issue development itself could not resolve, at least not until there was sufficient state stability to guarantee it.¹⁴⁹ To that end, the Chinese government had reluctantly worked with the military government of Myanmar to secure Chinese citizens and projects, however that created an issue where Tatmadaw presence as protection for the BRI, brought instability to the regions that the projects were to be realized in, as opposed to the assumption that it would lead to peace.¹⁵⁰ In some cases along the Mandalay-Lashio highway, human rights watchers claimed that the Tatmadaw was using the BRI, which the EAOs were not going to target as part of China's deal with them, to indiscriminately shell, torture people, and destroy properties, inevitably creating more disdain between them and the local populations, but also affecting China's credibility as an effective partner and mediator.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, while BRI projects have indeed created job opportunities and contributed to stability of regions *away* from conflict as is the case near the Kyaukpyu port, the capital Naypyidaw and others, projects extending *into* conflict areas like the Shan state in the north have at best not contributed to peace, and at worst contributed to further conflict. The reasoning is that, as previously mentioned, BRI projects draw security forces from the official

¹⁴⁸Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.14

¹⁴⁹Sithu. "China's Engagement with the Myanmar Junta: A High Cost, Low Returns Deal" *Fulcrum* | ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. 2024

¹⁵⁰Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.14

¹⁵¹Tower, Jason. "The Limits of Beijing's Support for Myanmar's Military." *United States Institute of Peace*.(2023)

state, the Tatmadaw forces in this instance, further into conflict areas. Another reason, perhaps counterintuitive in nature, is that BRI projects with their developmental capacity create opportunities for anti-government forces to develop their capacity to wage war, rather than peace, as they use the finance generated from projects to procure arms and engage in more conflict, somewhat resembling a lose-lose as opposed to a win-win situation.¹⁵²

To make the matter more complicated, Chinese deals, and its interests, seem to only take care of Chinese workers and citizens, without provisions of guarantee for local populations, leaving them at the mercy of either conflicting side.¹⁵³ One of the primary reasons for more pronounced Chinese involvement in mediating between the conflicting sides following 2021 were the rampant scam centers in border cities in Myanmar, which were hubs for money laundering, human trafficking, and other illegal activities targeting Chinese citizens and causing thousands of victims, while utilizing the chaos of conflict to expand and finance further operations. Chinese officials attempted to persuade the military government to help resolve the issue, however since they profited from the illegal activities and supported the elites controlling northern areas, the junta did not resolve the issue despite its dependency on trade with China.¹⁵⁴ As a result China turned to its ties with EAOs who saw the opportunity to not only win favor, but actively take ground from the military government in Naypyidaw through Operation 1027, creating a relative disbalance between conflicting sides.¹⁵⁵ The direct threat on Chinese citizens created both domestic and bilateral pressure to resolve the issue, prompting China to get more involved, but it also showcased that the position of not favoring sides proved futile leading to indirect support of EAOs and thereby questioning the principle of non-interference, and more importantly its contribution to peace. This involvement was thereby one sided and meant that whichever side opted to help China, the other would risk worsening its ties with China, while Chinese goals would be fulfilled either way.

When it comes to Chinese investments and infrastructure projects, their impact on society, and the question of whether they favor local or Chinese populations and workers remains open. On the one hand, Chinese projects do involve more Myanmar citizens by providing jobs, however, the projects largely seem to be structured in a way that ultimately helps Chinese

¹⁵²Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.14-15

¹⁵³Ibid, p.15

¹⁵⁴International Crisis Group. "Scam Centres and Ceasefires: China-Myanmar Ties Since the Coup." *Crisis Group*. (2024)

¹⁵⁵International Crisis Group. "Scam Centres and Ceasefires: China-Myanmar Ties Since the Coup."

business with local organizations and civil society groups claiming that Chinese projects often favor employing Chinese workers, rather than citizens of Myanmar, to all levels of job positions.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, local Myanmar based businesses and companies ultimately tend to seek mergers with Chinese companies due to them not being able to compete with larger, state-backed Chinese firms, and with the spreading conflict already straining their capacities to produce, further hindering their competitiveness with some companies working on less than 56% of their capacities, according to the World Bank report from 2023.¹⁵⁷ While this is not certain for all BRI cases in Myanmar due to the decentralized nature of a lot of Chinese deals especially following the 2021 military coup, in that it is not clear exactly which projects fall under the BRI and should go through more official channels, it is evident that local communities in war torn areas are left out of important developments and without a voice in said issues. This posed a major area of contention between Myanmar, its local communities, and China, but also represents criticism of Chinese BRI projects in general where their often secretive nature and backchannel deals make it difficult to gauge their overall impact, while the perception that it only helps the lender as well as a select few elites (in this case the Tatmadaw) rise.¹⁵⁸ To that end, the NLD government renegotiated many BRI deals with China between 2016 and 2021, and in 2018 created the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan which sought to streamline and regulate business conducted with China, albeit with limited success given its weakness to centralize and include various groups ranging from civil society, NGOs, and local ownership of projects.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps most notably under the new development plan, Myanmar renegotiated terms and size of loans for the Kyaukpyu deep water port, reducing from an initial \$7.3bn to a far more manageable \$1.3bn in light of Sri Lanka debt default connected with Chinese BRI loans.¹⁶⁰ However, this did not resolve the fact that the CMEC, the main economic corridor for Myanmar, was a Chinese vision for the country, with Chinese companies and officials creating projects they deemed were necessary, like the Myitsone dam, without local input into what was necessary for them to live a better life, which ultimately results in Chinese BRI projects serving little purpose to local communities and sometimes creating environmental, property, and livelihood loss and

¹⁵⁶ Hsu, Jennifer Y. J. "Burmese Civil Society Challenges China's Development Assistance in Myanmar." p.179-180

¹⁵⁷ World Bank. "Economic recovery falters as conflict and inflation weigh." *World Bank*. (2023)

¹⁵⁸ Hsu, Jennifer Y. J. "Burmese Civil Society Challenges China's Development Assistance in Myanmar." In *Gilded Age*, edited by Ivan Franceschini and Nicholas Loubere. p.179

¹⁵⁹ Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.15

¹⁶⁰ The Guardian. "Myanmar scales back Chinese-backed port project over debt fears." *The Guardian*. (2018)

expenses creating anxiety among people and distrust towards Naypyidaw and Beijing officials, between which these project tenders and agreements happen.¹⁶¹

Considering the path that Myanmar was on prior to the 2021 coup and civil war, an expanding economic relationship and trade with China, and bearing in mind Chinese developmental peacebuilding approach, it is reasonable to assume that the state would have been more stable and less conflict prone as Myanmar's economic development along with a relatively stable and democratic albeit decentralized government would have improved the livelihoods of its citizens and as a result institutionalized long term peace. This stands even with the military government which took over in 2021. While China was initially hesitant to support or condemn it, it eventually continued in its already begun economic projects, both within and outside of the BRI, bringing capital, job and development opportunities to local communities while also acknowledging the military government and actively working with it to resolve the ongoing conflict. However, the current situation doesn't favor the Chinese approach in terms of developmental peacebuilding, as well as Chinese soft power being *fully* capable of resolving conflict, instilling ideas of common interests and development as common values, and mediating a peaceful resolution between the conflicted parties. While China certainly created a positive economic impact resulting in relative peace in some regions, as well as being successful in bringing both sides to the negotiating table, it has yet to strike the chord of lasting peace. The ongoing situation in Myanmar is not promising a quick solution any time soon, with the government forces losing ground to opposition forces in the Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan regions. Economy under the military junta has stagnated and is set to grow a mere 1% in 2024, in comparison to a 10% annual growth in 2019 proving the importance of who the leaders of the country are and that the Myanmar conflict is not solvable by developmental peacebuilding alone.

5.2 Pakistan

Pakistan is another important case in Chinese attempts to promote a development-led approach to peacebuilding, as well as maintaining stability and peace. The relationship between the two countries is defined by both as “all-weather” and “ironclad” owing to their extensive history of supporting each other in political, economic, and military sectors, as well as common

¹⁶¹Hsu, Jennifer Y. J. “Burmese Civil Society Challenges China's Development Assistance in Myanmar.”p.179-180

development goals. Historically, Chinese and Pakistani bonds strengthened during the Cold War, with both countries identifying a common strategic threat in India, and forming an alliance around it.¹⁶² Pakistan played a crucial role in improving the relationship between the US and China in the period of 1970-1973 when Henry Kissinger, then US National Security Adviser, mediated the ‘opening up of China’. As a result of this, Pakistan benefitted in that China requested that the US relinquish its criticism of Pakistan, and support of India, providing the basis of Sino-Pakistan ‘ironclad’ which continues well into the 21st century.¹⁶³ China was, and is, Pakistan’s main trading partner and provider of aid, financial, and investment capital which has developed the latter over the years, making it a relatively stable democratic state¹⁶⁴.

Pakistan as a state, much like Myanmar, is defined by a complex dynamic of ethnic and tribal relationship, which, unlike in Myanmar, has never produced a conflict of great magnitude yet has infrequently produced fright of a looming civil war. The main source of potential large scale conflict in Pakistan is driven by the tense relationship between its ethnic groups within regions.¹⁶⁵ The western regions of Balochistan and Pashtunistan, bordering Afghanistan, are Pakistan’s underdeveloped regions where the majority of the populations live in relative poverty, compared to Pakistan's far more developed Punjab and Sindh regions.¹⁶⁶ The inequality of regions penetrates all levels of society, whereby the Eastern states, representing the majority of the population, receive most state funds for all types of projects, from agriculture and education, to infrastructure and roads. This has not only created, but extended the levels of inequality between the regions and people living in Pakistan’s East and West.¹⁶⁷ Adding to this issue, the most populous ethnic group in Pakistan, the Punjabis, dominate state institutions, but more importantly hold the helm of Pakistan’s military, seen as the historically most stable institution - one which the country could fall back on, should civil and democratically elected governments fail. This has placed the military in a position of power, where no civil government can win the

¹⁶²Khalid, Masood. “Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment – NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS).” *Institute of South Asian Studies*. (2021)

¹⁶³Khalid, Masood. “Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment – NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS).”

¹⁶⁴Although Pakistan today is viewed as a ‘hybrid democracy’ due to the role and involvement of the military in the state, its elections and institutions

¹⁶⁵Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. “Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States.” p.7

¹⁶⁶Ibid, p.8

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

elections, and stay in power, without winning the favor of the army.¹⁶⁸ In essence, such a position of power has helped Pakistan's military to spread its influence to all levels of government and has a stake in questions ranging from national security, to the economy and agriculture, often serving its own, and the interests of certain ethnic groups first over others. The power they hold over the civil sector is evident considering that no elected premier has served a full five-year term in office, most often due to eventually falling out of favor with the army and being removed from their office into 'self-exile', as was the case with PM Nawaz Sharif, or accused of corruption and imprisoned without the possibility of reelection as was the case most recently with PM Imran Khan.¹⁶⁹ This goes to show Pakistan's volatile political landscape, in which the military, along with a few ethnic groups, dominate, and determine national interests, often in line with their own, and at the expense of minorities.

Despite the complicated on-the-ground politics and inter-ethnic relationship, China has been a steadfast ally of Pakistan for several decades, and aided its development seen as beneficial for itself. This has only been amplified with Chinese interests in Pakistan's stability and development due to desire of energy independence, as a result of what Hu Jintao called the Malacca dilemma, where Pakistan's development would resolve China's issue of depending on India and the US for passage of critical energy supplies via sea routes.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Pakistan, being a committed ally against India, provided a suitable candidate for Chinese international finance and expansion. Pakistan received the first substantial sum of aid, around \$300,000 (around \$3 million),¹⁷¹ throughout the early 1960s, and subsequently received more throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, a significant amount of which was related to arms and military technology transfers, including nuclear weapons templates and material, which strengthened the bond between Pakistan's military and Beijing. In 2013, Pakistan seized the opportunity for a more profound level of cooperation with Xi Jinping's desire to expand economic trade and revitalize the ancient Silk Road through the new BRI, a role in which the military saw fit to further develop the country. That same year, China and Pakistan announced the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is the flagship corridor of the BRI and which has to date

¹⁶⁸Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.7, 12

¹⁶⁹Al Jazeera. "No Pakistani prime minister has completed a full term in office." *Al Jazeera*. (2022)

¹⁷⁰Anderson, Lars E., and Yang Jiaing. "China's Engagement in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Xinjiang | Will China's Root Cause model provide regional stability and security?" *Danish Institute for International Studies*. (2018), p.20

¹⁷¹Khalid, Masood. "Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment – NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)." *Institute of South Asian Studies*. (2021)

resulted in investments of more than \$25 billion, projected to rise upwards of \$62 billion.¹⁷² Most of the finance is directed towards infrastructure projects, most important of which is the deep water Gwadar port in the Baluchistan region, along with a grid of highways, rail networks and roads connecting Gwadar to China, however, bringing factories, refineries, and electrical facility projects to the country as well.¹⁷³ Among the most important of these projects are the ones related to generating power, including dams, coal electric plants etc. which are to increase Pakistan's electricity production capacity by 16,000 watts, bringing electricity to areas where there are none, and somewhat resolving the constant power shortages that the country has (an issue which has been identified as a significant contributor to underdevelopment in the country).¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, projects under the CPEC have created more than 70,000 job opportunities for locals, and are expected to produce up to 800,000 by 2030, as more projects like the Gwadar International Airport are planned, bringing even more Chinese investments.¹⁷⁵ From the inception of the CPEC in 2013, and with its budget expanding to an impressive \$62 billion dollars in 2020, Pakistan has seen a steady increase of its gross national income with its economy relatively improving in the period of 2013-2019 up until COVID-19, and then again in 2021 onwards, with the CPEC spearheading the majority of projects and industries, such as was the case with more than 5 electric power plants being built which contributed over 5,500MW to local communities and providing more job opportunities.¹⁷⁶ Considering the route and geographic location of the CPEC in Pakistan (figure 4), the regions and communities that are in close proximity to it, mostly regions of Punjab and Sindh, have experienced significant increases in development and compared to pre-CPEC data, and have contributed to more security and peace in those areas, showing that the CPEC and Chinese BRI have positive impact on the state of peace and development.

Yet, there is a side to the development-led peacebuilding approach in Pakistan, which has not only not contributed to building peace, but has arguably destabilized the regions in question, bringing the overall peace prospects of the state into question. This is closely and strongly related to the question of Pakistan's ethnic based tension and inequality. As previously outlined,

¹⁷²Weij, Xu. "Pakistan's PM says Belt and Road comes with benefits." *China Daily*.(2023)

¹⁷³Anderson, Lars E., and Yang Jiaing. "China's Engagement in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Xinjiang | Will China's Root Cause model provide regional stability and security?" p.19-21

¹⁷⁴Ibid, p.21

¹⁷⁵CPIC Global. "10 Reasons As To Why China Likes Pakistan." *CPIC Global*. (2019)

¹⁷⁶Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.8

Pakistan has a very volatile political landscape which it has to traverse carefully in order not to devolve into full-blown conflict. To that end, the military emerged as a strong guarantor for a stable and peaceful state, and actively influences the civil government and its institutions. While the civil aspect of government is changeable through regular elections, the military isn't, and due to the dominance of one ethnic group in the military, the Punjabis, it has created distrust and enmity between them and opposing groups, like the Balochistan Army or Taliban branches in Pakistan.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, minorities in Pakistan are fairly poorly represented in civil government as well, owing to the omnipresent military influence. Where minorities did have a channel to voice their desires, their opinions are seldom taken into consideration contributing to an overall state of distrust, tension, and occasional political violence.

This was a major point of contention in 2013, when the idea of the CPEC was being publicized and debated about in Pakistan. Namely, the PML-N, the dominant party at that time headed by Nawaz Sharif worked to gain favor with the military which had identified the potential benefits of Chinese development finance in the country, and sought to increase cooperation and through what was to become the main corridor of the BRI. Majority of the country had bought into the potential benefits of the CPEC, inasmuch as it promised to alleviate poverty, bring much needed electricity, create job opportunities and industrialize Pakistan, thereby bringing it into the 21st century as a competitive actor.¹⁷⁸ However, citizens in Pakistan's underdeveloped western regions voiced their concerns that plans and projects of the CPEC are mostly to be built and completed in Pakistan's already developed eastern provinces of Punjab and Sindh, which indeed ended up being the case (figure 4).¹⁷⁹ Such disparity and one sided interest stemming from the tensions of center-periphery created tensions, fierce political, and sometimes armed conflicts around which states were to receive CPEC finance and projects, and given the dominance of one ethnic group in Islamabad and its military, provinces like Balochistan were left unsatisfied and resorted to violent acts, exacerbated by the already persistent desire for independence. Pascal Abb et al of the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt (PRIF) conducted research and overlaid data showing that CPEC power plant projects as in figure 4, as well as HDI in the country, and found that there was a correlation between poverty

¹⁷⁷Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.8

¹⁷⁸Ibid, p.7

¹⁷⁹Ibid, p.9

and underdevelopment in the west of Pakistan, with the lack of CPEC funding, ie the concentration of the same in developed provinces of the east.¹⁸⁰ This was mostly the result of partisan politics and military involvement in finalizing deals with China and purposely not bringing any new projects to underdeveloped areas where they are realistically most needed, in a bid to keep holding the dominant power structures in the country.

The electric power plants built between 2013-2020, while bringing over 5500MW in the country, have directed almost all of it to Pakistan's already developed eastern regions, with the reason being twofold. On the one hand, China did not see the western region as favorable for its CPEC projects due to poor infrastructure support, meaning that they would have to invest from ground zero.¹⁸¹ Additionally, Islamist insurgency from the Taliban in Pakistan which poses a threat to Chinese interests both in Pakistan could inspire domestic issues in Xinjiang which hosts a large Uyghur population, one which China has been accused of exerting human rights abuses on.¹⁸² On the other hand, the Pakistan government also does not favor financial investment of western regions, and tries to push more towards the east in favor of dominant ethnic groups' interest. CPEC projects, under such premises, contributed to increased disparity of income, which increased tension and potential for conflict as underdeveloped regions not only see Islamabad as the cause of their poverty, but view China as the accomplice and silent observer to their plight, which they use to justify attacks on both government forces, and Chinese nationals.¹⁸³ The overall situation and tension between ethnic groups in Pakistan has contributed to its particularly low position on the Global Peace Index for 2024, ranking 140 in the world, and being only better than Afghanistan in the region of South Asia.¹⁸⁴ As a result of these issues, China has had concerns over the stability of the civil government in Pakistan and its ability to secure Chinese citizens, who were subjects of terrorist attacks, and has moved closer to the military, which it sees as a steadfast and reliable partner in the CPEC.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.9

¹⁸¹Ibid, p.8

¹⁸²Anderson, Lars E., and Yang Jiaing. "China's Engagement in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Xinjiang | Will China's Root Cause model provide regional stability and security?", p.30-31

¹⁸³Lee, Liz, and Robert Birsell. "China ready to boost Pakistan ties but urges security guarantee." *Reuters*.(2023)

¹⁸⁴Institute for Economic & Peace. "Measuring peace in a complex world | Global Peace Index 2024." Institute for Economics & Peace.(2024), p.9

¹⁸⁵Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.10

To add to Pakistan's complicated situation, there is fear of the country being too reliant and indebted to China, with over \$26.5 billion most of which are CPEC projects, a third of its overall foreign debt.¹⁸⁶ Pakistani officials have on multiple occasions requested restructuring of debt obligations due to budget deficits, most recently requesting \$15 billion in restructuring for power plant projects, and the Gwadar port.¹⁸⁷ These debt obligations have been straining Pakistan's population and have made them particularly vulnerable to unexpected disasters with devastating consequences, as was the case with the COVID 19 pandemic which was followed up by the severe floods in 2022, which alone caused over \$15 billion in economic damages with over 20 million people needing humanitarian aid, mostly in the underdeveloped and conflict prone Balochistan region.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, 15% of rice fields were destroyed, as well as 20% of cotton fields, which represent a significant amount of those industries in Pakistan.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, the government of Pakistan had to act and redirect already strained funds to alleviate some of the issues, as well as request additional international assistance to tackle the issue, highlighting how big of a cost the CPEC projects represent for the country, and how fragile the concept of developmental peacebuilding is in underdeveloped countries under huge loans.

This isn't to say that Chinese officials have not tried to work out ways in which they could improve the CPEC in ways in which it can build stability and peace, as opposed to taking away from it. China has created several committees to follow the implementation of CPEC projects, as well as engage with local communities, addressing their grievances and working with them to bring CPEC projects towards the western provinces. To that end, China and Pakistan, with local communities, have debated opening up veins and arteries, smaller corridors, running from the main line of the CPEC which connects Gwadar and Xinjiang, towards the underdeveloped provinces.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, under the new GCI, China has invested in the education and cultural exchange in Pakistan in a bid to make the two cultures closer and more acquainted. To that end, it provides Pakistani students with scholarships to study in China, has invested in Confucius cultural institutes across the country and in the reconstruction and expansion of educational facilities, resulting in more interest in learning Chinese, but also an

¹⁸⁶Radhakrishnan, Vignesh, and Rachita Rabboni. "Debt owed by Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to China rise to record levels: Data." *The Hindu*.(2024)

¹⁸⁷Aamir, Adnan. "Pakistan scrambles for relief on \$15bn energy debt owed to China." *Nikkei Asia*.(2024)

¹⁸⁸Center for Disaster Philanthropy. "2022 Pakistan Floods." *Center for Disaster Philanthropy*.(2023)

¹⁸⁹Center for Disaster Philanthropy. "2022 Pakistan Floods."

¹⁹⁰Abb, Pascal, Robert Swaine, and Ilya Jones. "Road to Peace or Bone of Contention? The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Conflict States." p.7-9

impressive approval rate of China by the local population with 75% of people supporting China and having a positive view of the BRI and CPEC as a force of peace and development.¹⁹¹ Ultimately, China adheres to its GSI principles, which were almost immediately supported by Pakistan upon their global announcement, in respecting its sovereignty, and allowing the state to conduct its own internal affairs, while also keeping close ties in order to influence and communicate interests to a far more proficient degree. The CPEC represents the flagship of the BRI and as such is predisposed towards being more successful than other corridors given Chinese overall investment, economically, politically, and culturally, in Pakistan, for the latter to outright fail. The influence of Chinese investments and projects has indeed helped Pakistan develop and stay relatively stable, thereby keeping peace within the country. Without the prospect of development, the country would potentially be experiencing civil war due to the disbalance between ethnic groups and their overall dissatisfaction with underdevelopment.

¹⁹¹CPIC Global. "10 Reasons As To Why China Likes Pakistan." *CPIC Global*. (2019)

6 Chinese Development-led Peace - a success or failure?

Xinyu Yuan of the Graduate Institute of Geneva identifies three main ways in which China can be a challenger to the global liberal peacebuilding efforts: *normative contestation*, *content contestation*, and *application contestation*.¹⁹² *Normative contestation* in this instance implies that China is a challenger to liberal normative values, i.e. that it aims and tends to upend and replace the current values of human rights, democracy, freedom of speech among others. However, from the examples given, and others which are readily available like Ethiopia among others, the Chinese approach does not necessarily go against such norms but rather remains a status quo actor.¹⁹³ China tends to work with whatever political establishment exists in the state and whichever offers the best chances of stability. While it does not subscribe to liberal norms as most important, it does not actively undermine them, occasionally accepting them and actively working with the western actors in peacebuilding efforts. According to Wang Yi, and echoed by Chinese scholars, Chinese developmental peace is complementary to liberal peacebuilding and can reinvigorate it. While Chinese loans have the capacity to build and develop the state, liberal norms can guide the state in the normative aspect of peacebuilding and statebuilding. However, as mentioned in previous sections, China emphasizes the respect for sovereign equality and non-interference, and true multilateralism in the international order. To that end, Chinese officials are weary of any human rights-led interventions and actions as they are seen to be intervening in the sovereignty of states, and often in the interest of western states, as were the cases in Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s which led to Chinese condemnation of the interventions as neo-imperialistic projects. As explored in the examples of Myanmar and Pakistan, Chinese officials tend not to intervene directly due to any normative issues, and act accordingly on the international level, preferring that each issue be studied on a case by case basis and in mind with its own unique set of circumstances.

This approach to the normative values is informed by China's own historical experiences in achieving stability, peace and development through communism with Chinese characteristics. However, throughout this approach, Chinese state officials were, and still are, aware that they had achieved success by repressing religious freedom, minority groups, political and

¹⁹²Xinyu Yuan, "The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?", Third World Quarterly, (2022)

¹⁹³Xinyu Yuan, "The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?" p.1799-1800

socio-economic repression and so on. While such acts may have been justified and deemed necessary by the CCP in order to achieve long term state stability and economic development, in the eyes of western states, these acts justify and warrant scrutiny according to the current international setting.¹⁹⁴ To that end, China does seek to increase its influence and credibility in the international order and institutions, so that it may shape and guide the narrative on its own, but without “ruffling the feathers” too much.¹⁹⁵

In terms of what Xinyu calls *content contestation*, China is far more active in challenging the order of precedence of peacebuilding efforts and projects as established through this paper. Its goal to reform the international order and base it on sovereign equality and true multilateralism, in practice means that western states accept the fact that multipolarity entails other forms of statehood, not just the universal liberal, and that there are multiple approaches to building peace, depending on the specific circumstances of every case. What China has to contribute to this, is its own experience in achieving peace and stability through development, both in China and abroad, a formidable achievement considering how far behind the country was merely 30-40 years ago.

This much is evident from the fact that China views that both “peace through strength” and “peace through democracy” have failed in the case of the former, and found limited success in the case of the latter.¹⁹⁶ According to Chinese policies and officials, state stability (regardless of the regime at its helm), and economic development must take precedence over democratic institutions and statebuilding, as well as emphasis on collective benefit over individual rights and freedoms - to produce “peace through development”.¹⁹⁷ This is rooted in the belief that neither democracy nor human rights are adequate in post-conflict societies and the rebuilding of peace. For one, democracies require an opportunity for change of power through regular elections, political deliberations and institutionalization and so on. These are processes which take a lot of time to implement correctly through trial and error introducing a lot of immediate change and without guarantees of success, making the current liberal order of precedence obsolete. In post-conflict societies, deliberation and democratic process cannot fully succeed due to it

¹⁹⁴Xinyu Yuan, “The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?” p.1806

¹⁹⁵Ibid. p.1806

¹⁹⁶Degang, Sun, and Zhang Jieying. “Peace Through Development | China's Peace Initiative for the Middle East Conflict Resolution.” *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*. (2021), p.388-389

¹⁹⁷Degang, Sun, and Zhang Jieying. “Peace Through Development | China's Peace Initiative for the Middle East Conflict Resolution.”, p.91

requiring stability and familiarity with the populace among other necessities outlined in the first two sections. Furthermore, according to Chinese officials, people in post-conflict societies are in need of security and immediate developmental assistance (which includes both aid, and investments into reconstructing the infrastructure and industrial capabilities of the state), a process which is far likelier to succeed and positively impact the overall society.¹⁹⁸ China, therefore, engages in content contestation in terms of order of precedence, claiming that the best remedy is in fact economic development and creating state stability, regardless of whether the system is democratic or not. In the case of Myanmar, China has mediated between both conflicted parties, however has up until recently at least, supported the formal government in establishing a ceasefire and peaceful resolution despite the accusations made against the military government.¹⁹⁹ While this is in line with the principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty that China holds dear to, in terms of not supporting the rebel armies openly, it also provides an issue in whereby any economic deals made with the militaristic and authoritarian Tatmadaw, for example, bring it away from ethnic groups opposing Naypyidaw and expand conflict wherever government forces are engaged in protecting BRI projects. Similarly in Pakistan, deals with the central government which relies on the support of the military thereby making it vulnerable, is viewed unfavorably by communities in western Pakistan which are in political conflict with Islamabad. Yet, in both cases, China deals with the state structures present in the country, despite their flaws, as they are the only capable forces of providing a foundation of stability for development and future peace. In these terms, China does contest and tend to upheave the current status quo in liberal peacebuilding. Its increasing engagement and financing of only certain sectors and UN missions (which adequately focus on infrastructure and development), as well as its open discourse in international organizations in favor of sovereignty and development, prove this to be true.

Finally, in terms of application contestation, which represents the contestation of external intrusion into internal affairs, or the involvement of external interest groups in resolving, drafting, creating external-led solutions as opposed to locally owned ones, China does pose a challenge to the liberal peacebuilding methods.²⁰⁰ This is evident from the cases of Myanmar and

¹⁹⁸Permanent Mission of People's Republic of China to the UN. "Remarks by Ambassador Dai Bing at the General Debate of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations." *PRC Mission to the UN*. (2023).

¹⁹⁹Tower, Jason. "The Limits of Beijing's Support for Myanmar's Military." *United States Institute of Peace*.(2023)

²⁰⁰Xinyu Yuan, "The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?" p.1808

Pakistan, where China insists on no foreign intervention, let alone western-led or sponsored involvements, and more local ownership of the conflict resolution process. The question of Balochistan in Pakistan, an inequality and distribution of wealth is an internal issue, which ought to be resolved by relevant parties in Pakistan, not in Europe or the US, however with China as a mediator and interested party. This is in line with Chinese strategic approaches to peacekeeping and involvement previously outlined, whereby the closer the conflict or destabilized area is to Chinese borders, and the higher the potential impact is on Chinese national interests including national security and economic development, the higher the likelihood of a no-foreign-involvement approach by China with a stronger emphasis on the traditional understanding of sovereignty and non interference.²⁰¹

This is very significant since it changes the outlook towards China from a challenging state that seeks to completely unroot and replace the international order and set it up according to its own perspectives, to an outlook where China does indeed pose a challenge but only in *certain* aspects of liberal peacebuilding in the international order, while it subscribes and actively contributes to others. For one, the term challenger is a point of view taken from the dominant position, the western perspective, and is prescribed to China, while China, at least officially, has not claimed to be a challenger, but rather a partner willing to work with proponents of liberal democracy on certain issues in its own unique way. Furthermore, critics of liberal peacebuilding themselves outline the shortcomings of western liberal democracies in upholding and implementing peacebuilding efforts ranging from normative issues and the zero sum approach of liberalism, to the issues in implementation of peacebuilding reforms ranging from local pushback, to haphazard planning, corruption, and other issues that arise in the all-to-often peacebuilding turned statebuilding projects. The arguable success of developmental peacebuilding, then, and its growing popularity, are more to be attributed to the disdain of the global developing south with the liberal peacebuilding methods and its sponsors, as well as the allure of any alternative that may help them out, than it is to China's approach to peacebuilding per se.

In analyzing the Chinese developmental approach to peacebuilding, a few comparisons and conclusions can be drawn against liberal peacebuilding. Development led peacebuilding cannot be forced, or rather has never been forced onto other states as a primary means to promote

²⁰¹Xinyu Yuan, "The Chinese approach to peacebuilding: contesting liberal peace?" p.1809

peace, the theoretic framework forbids it to do so. It is rather based on mutual consent and interest in development as a means to alleviate poverty and underdevelopment, and minimize conflict potential.²⁰² However, when a development led approach is faced with partial, or no support at all, meaning that development is not the primary focus or issue, then the peacebuilding aspect does not have what it needs to prevail either since there are theoretically no foreseen means by which the process of developmental peacebuilding can be forced. This was, and still is the case in Myanmar, where ethnic, national, and religious tensions create an atmosphere in which peace, let alone development as a means to achieve it, are not the first issue at hand. The EAOs, while geographically close to China, distrust the military government due to their actions and historical enmity towards each other. Compounded by the appropriation of all means of national and government control, and their use of the BRI to further achieve elite, as opposed to local interests, the EAOs have prioritized taking down the military government over a long term ceasefire and progress with China's development projects through the BRI. On the other hand, most citizens of Pakistan, including the ethnic minorities in underdeveloped regions like Balochistan and Pashtunistan, and which are weary of Islamabad, see the potential of the CPEC and generally refrain from expanding or intensifying conflict. It is understood that armed conflict over CPEC would only drive away finance and investment and profoundly affect the economy of the country, thereby proving that development plays a significant role in most parties involved, and making Pakistan a relatively suitable candidate for developmental projects which keep the country from resolving to war.

Another comparison can be made which speaks to potential issues that developmental peacebuilding is faced against, which is that it falls into a similar trap of assuming universality of its ideas and notions among the global society, as does liberal peacebuilding with its own set of norms and values.²⁰³ Chinese officials have on multiple occasions claimed that development is the common interest of all people and that it ought to be the common goal to which global society strives to achieve in cooperation with each other. In that regard, developmental peacebuilding points to the universality of striving for progress as a common value shared by all nations and people, and while it does not impose or assume an absolute position, in that if some

²⁰²Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Full Text: A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions"

²⁰³Referring to previously outlined comments within the thesis, made by Xi Jinping, Chinese officials, and documents which outline the 'common' desire of all mankind to seek development, hence the need for a 'common vision for future of mankind', based on development rather than democracy and human rights.

states or individuals do not favor development, China does not interfere and impose its values under the pretense of a responsibility of the state for social, political and economic development, it does run into a wall when countries like Myanmar clearly disprove that development is the end all be all of a country. Nor does it provide a clear and decisive peacebuilding formula in countries where the approach runs into a wall, so to say. On the contrary, although Myanmar conflict is an ongoing one (therefore not prudent to come to a conclusion before a comprehensive peace agreement is reached), the past few years of conflict show that development alone isn't a strong enough motive to make conflicted parties commit to achieving achieve peace, it is rather the proximity and influence of China, which has the power to prompt both sides to negotiate, i.e. traditional soft/hard power dynamic approach between states. Economic development, or the prospect thereof, is a secondary focus, while ethnic and politically motivated goals take precedence. Yet, in Pakistan, a substantial reason for state stability and relative peace between ethnic groups can be attributed to the CPEC, and the Global Initiatives, as well as the clear interest and investment of virtually all citizens of Pakistan in said projects, leading to development and proving the the Chinese assumption that the prospect of development trumps all differences in this instance. The cases prove that development, while not a universal aspect of all societies and nations, does in fact play a role in alleviating poverty and instituting peace, but is far from being the only factor which will define the success of peace.

Furthermore, significant criticism of Chinese development peacebuilding is directed against the claim of the need for absolute sovereignty, its respect, and non-interference. To that end, China has not only emphasized the principles and ideals in official national and international documents, but has formulated its own vision of an international order, and by extent approach to peacebuilding, through the Global Security Initiative.²⁰⁴ For China, the global order, as well as all peacebuilding efforts ought to be centered around the respect for state sovereignty, regardless of the system that dominates it, from authoritarian regimes, to democratic ones. According to China, its role as well as that of the international community should be reduced to consulting, and overseeing, with mediation as the furthest that intervention should happen. However, in reality, China has had a far more pragmatic approach to sovereignty and non-interference. On the one hand, it genuinely does restrain from direct interference and tend to allow affected parties to resolve their own disputes, only offering mediation as its only role in it, like in Myanmar

²⁰⁴Freeman, Carla. "How Should the U.S. Respond to China's 'Global Security Initiative?'" *United States Institute of Peace*. 2022

initially. On the other hand, it directly works with state structures on BRI, military technology and other lucrative businesses, with existing state structures which may push it towards more open involvement in state affairs, as was the case in both Pakistan and Myanmar, where frequent attacks on Chinese citizens and economic interests have forced China to more openly involve itself in resolving the disputes. For all intents and purposes, such involvement, and push to secure its own interest and citizens means that some form of political pressure is exerted, which could be understood as interference in internal state affairs. To that end, Operation 1027 conducted by the opposition forces in Myanmar against government positions, can be seen as direct involvement by China in Myanmar national affairs, as China had requested support to secure its citizens and interests, directly undermining the sovereignty of the military government in Naypyidaw, and thereby raising the question of its own role in the conflict. Interference is also very evident in the lobbying for huge economic projects which may not be in the interest of the partner state, either being too expensive and debt burdening, or serving relatively no purpose to the partner state and its citizens, as is the case with Myitsone dam in Myanmar for which China has reopened talks with Naypyidaw, with each side hedging their interests against each other.²⁰⁵

In some instances lobbying is not necessary when the interests of elites are synchronized with the interests of China, yet this too can arguably be seen as a form of interference as components of the state represent and push certain projects and agendas that serve themselves and not the people, and which may have been superimposed by the more powerful state, in this case China. In Pakistan, this has resulted in close cooperation between Chinese businesses and officials, with the Pakistani military, which has significant influence over civil components of state. To that end, the CPEC may be seen as an amalgamation of Chinese interests, as well as the interests of powerful groups in Pakistan, which result in the political goals of the military in concentrating wealth and development away from regions which pose a threat to its interests, as is the case between the dominant Punjabis and underdeveloped Balochistan, for example. This also raises a different concern regarding Chinese development led peacebuilding, which has been raised by western countries - human rights abuse and the support of authoritarian regimes.²⁰⁶ As established in this thesis, Chinese development peacebuilding does not need specific state

²⁰⁵Currie, Kelley E., and Jonathan Tepperman. "Myanmar Junta Tries to Leverage Myitsone Dam for Beijing Aid." *Foreign Policy*. (2021)

²⁰⁶Aboudouh, Ahmed, and Jonathan Fulton. "China and Russia are proposing a new authoritarian playbook. MENA leaders are watching closely." *Atlantic Council*. 2022.

systems to be present in order to facilitate development, as does liberal peacebuilding with the concepts of good governance and statebuilding of functioning democracies. Rather, China supports whichever regime is in power in line with its paradigm of ultimate respect for sovereignty along the lines of the GSI and GDI, whether they be authoritarian, militaristic, hybrid, or democratic. In some instances this created a problem where Chinese insistence on the respect for sovereignty and government in power would have it end up defending and advocating for governments which clearly engage in oppressive behavior, thereby affecting the global image of China. In the case of Myanmar, the international community including ASEAN, condemned the actions of the military junta in human rights abuses and the escalation of war, to which China remained relatively quiet, as its own policies would require it to aid in defense of the junta, while condemnation would come at the cost of integrity of its non-interference claims.²⁰⁷ The result was that China took a more muted approach where it asked for restraint and a peaceful resolution to the conflict, without committing to any hard stance.

While this general approach to sovereignty and non-interference has gathered vast support for China by developing countries, and allowed China to approach any regime and government without normative values holding it back, it has raised questions about Chinese impact on said issues. Namely, China itself is accused of violating human rights of muslim Uyghur populations in its Xinjiang province, which China claims is prone to terrorism, and which forces China to lay low on questions of human rights abuses as any involvement may point fingers back at itself.²⁰⁸ To that end, China has a fairly lax approach to questions of human rights in other countries, leaving the question to its western partners where it has no interests, and to local governments where it does. This has raised a question of how the impact of Chinese developmental projects in conflict prone states has shaped the narrative around human rights, with western countries claiming that the impact is profoundly negative.

This issue can also be analyzed by considering Chinese prerogatives in its development led peacebuilding approach, as well as the results in countries where China has had concerted efforts to influence positive state stability through development. For one, China views the state as the core unit in international and national affairs, rather than the individual, which is evident from the various speeches and congresses throughout history which have highlighted that the

²⁰⁷Tower, Jason. "The Limits of Beijing's Support for Myanmar's Military." *United States Institute of Peace*.(2023)

²⁰⁸Part of the reason for China's insistence on absolute respect for sovereignty, and non-interference in international affairs is so that it can insulate itself against any criticism and attacks by the international community, while also allowing it to play a significant leadership role despite its actions.

community as a whole is more important in achieving development and that individuals must be prepared to give up their individual rights should the community as a whole necessitate so. This kind of narrative speaks well to authoritarian regimes and conflict societies, which may justify the oppression of certain groups under the pretense that it is necessary in order to achieve development and long term peace.²⁰⁹ In Myanmar for example, government operations against the Rohingya, or other ethnic groups have passed under the pretext that said groups posed a threat to the overall interests of the country, thereby justifying any operations against them. Chinese projects have both alleviated and contributed to this issue, as in some cases, their expansion brought both sides to the negotiating table, whereas on the other it expanded conflict within the state. Furthermore, indigenous groups have been removed from their homes, and the environment around them destroyed, in order to expand BRI projects, which in a lot of cases mostly secure Chinese interests, as well as the interests of the elites in power and the Tatmadaw. In the case of Pakistan, its close cooperation with the Pakistani government, and more importantly military, have exacerbated inequality and conflict between government forces and Balochistan and Pashtunistan independence movements. With the ideas and principles of the GSI, such regimes may feel emboldened to reproduce hierarchies and patterns of power which favor only them, while they oppress minorities, without the fear of severe repercussions.²¹⁰ Furthermore, it complicates China's involvement in mediating and reduces its impact as its actions and projects are seen as counterproductive to creating long lasting peace. The emphasis of state to state, government to government, and elite to elite cooperation instituted in Chinese international policies for peacebuilding and development have reduced its overall effectiveness as they do not include civil societies, NGOs and others, which are often subject to claims of foreign interference, and which are subject to intense government scrutiny.

²⁰⁹ Aboudouh, Ahmed, and Jonathan Fulton. "China and Russia are proposing a new authoritarian playbook. MENA leaders are watching closely." *Atlantic Council*. 2022.

²¹⁰ Aboudouh, Ahmed, and Jonathan Fulton. "China and Russia are proposing a new authoritarian playbook. MENA leaders are watching closely."

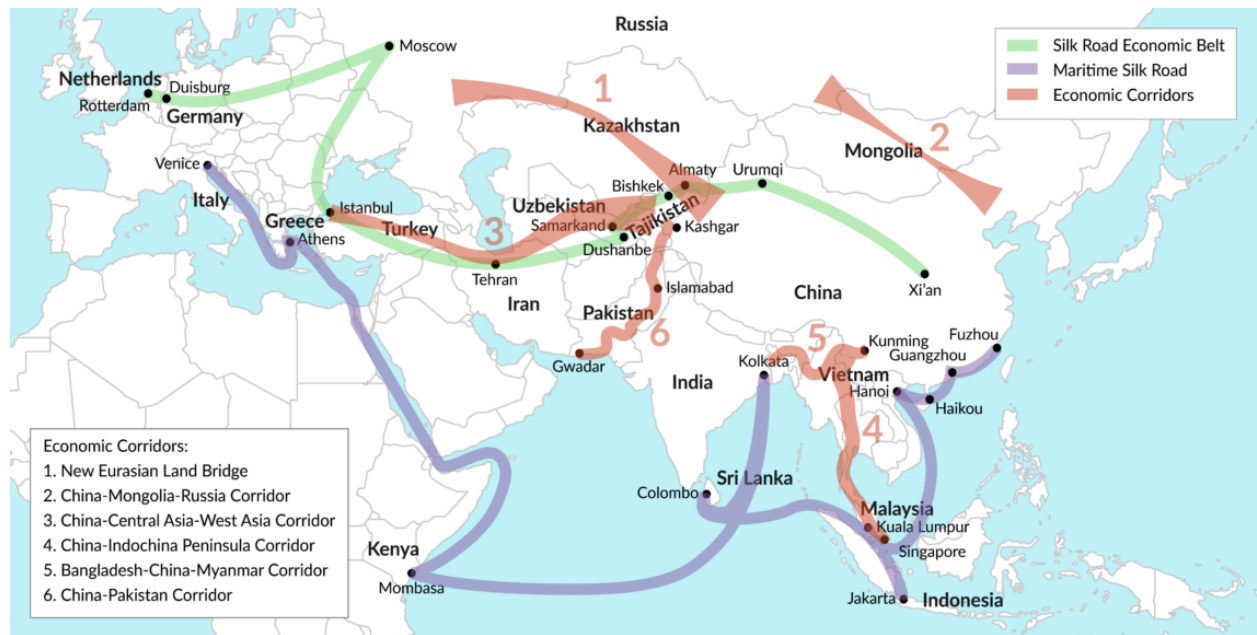
7 - Conclusion

Chinese development led peacebuilding is still in an experimental phase, compared to liberal peacebuilding which has a 10-20 year advantage and established benefits and shortcomings of its approach. Development led peacebuilding is neither theoretically or practically developed fully in order to proclaim itself a successful challenger to the current status quo. While it does pose a credible threat in some aspects of peacebuilding, it mostly relies on China's willingness to spend and invest in conflict states in order to *potentially* resolve the issues of underdevelopment and institute peace. Since development is seldom achievable in the short term, the period between the beginning of the development-led peacebuilding process and its end seems to be crucial in determining its success while the inclusion of local communities and smart resource allocation on the part of local governments represent the minimum for a successful implementation. Furthermore, China has often employed the help of already established liberal peacebuilding actors in order to fortify its approach, thereby showing its intention of equally using both approaches, rather than simply challenging and ousting the liberal approach. Alone, development led peacebuilding has seen some successes, but has also seen some severe failures, the result of which was states turning towards traditional liberal institutions like the IMF and World Bank to provide aid and loans to resolve the problems created by unserviceable debts - the cost of Chinese peacebuilding approach. While China has unequivocally brought economic opportunities through the spread of BRI projects, and with a goal of inducing peace through development, in cases like Myanmar, the economic opportunities seem to have only expanded instability and uncertainty with China having to look towards more traditional forms of influence and pressure. In Pakistan, on the other hand, while CPEC brought enormous economic benefits, and influenced positive GNP increases by creating jobs, it has instituted patterns of hierarchy that, while currently not presenting a threat towards open conflict, may well enough become one should economic development slow down or even halt to a standstill, given the subsurface ethnic and economic based tensions between regions and people. Looking forward, Chinese development peacebuilding seems to be best implemented when it is alongside liberal peacebuilding methods, in that Chinese expertise on developmental finance, and western expertise in statebuilding, with local involvement, may provide the 'perfect storm' for a

successful peacebuilding approach. Whether or not that is feasible remains to be seen, for now it seems that China is steaming ahead with building its own peacebuilding infrastructure based on development, and garnering global support for its “common vision of a future for mankind.

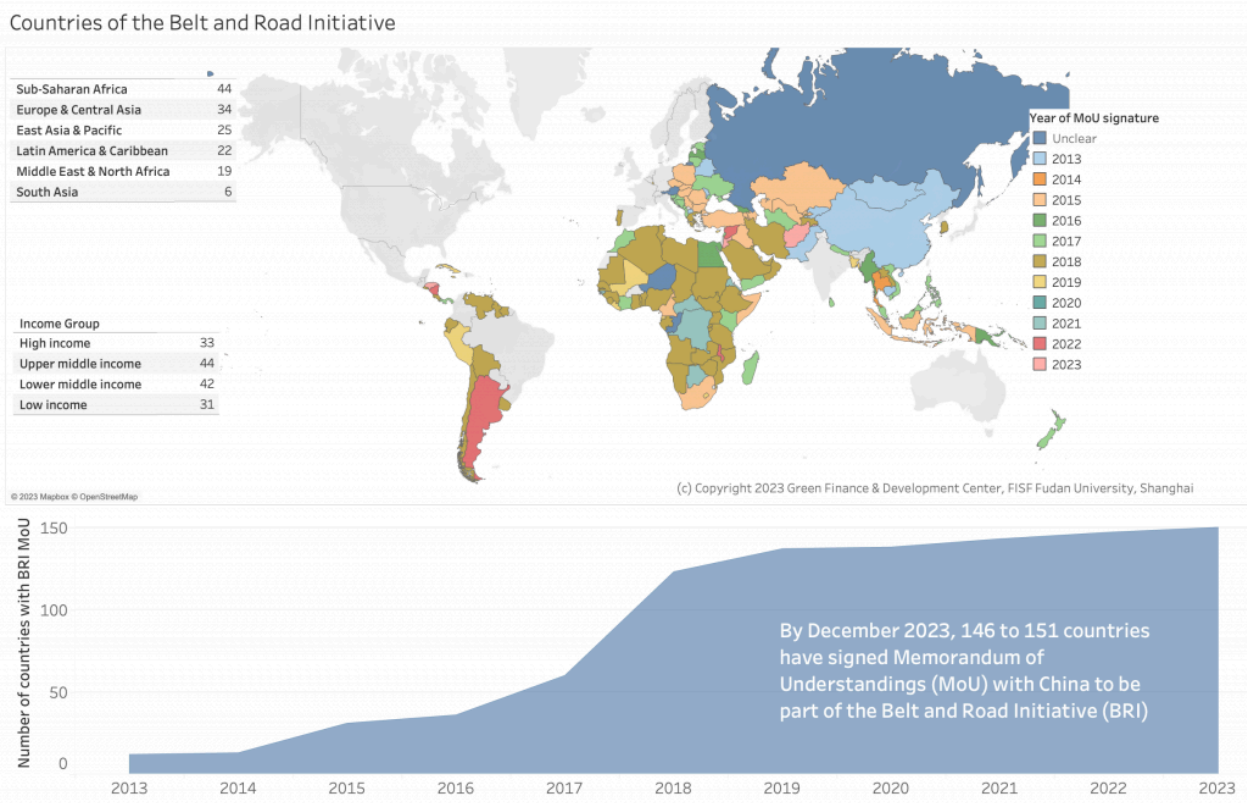
Annex

Figure 1. Belt and Road Initiative with its corridors²¹¹



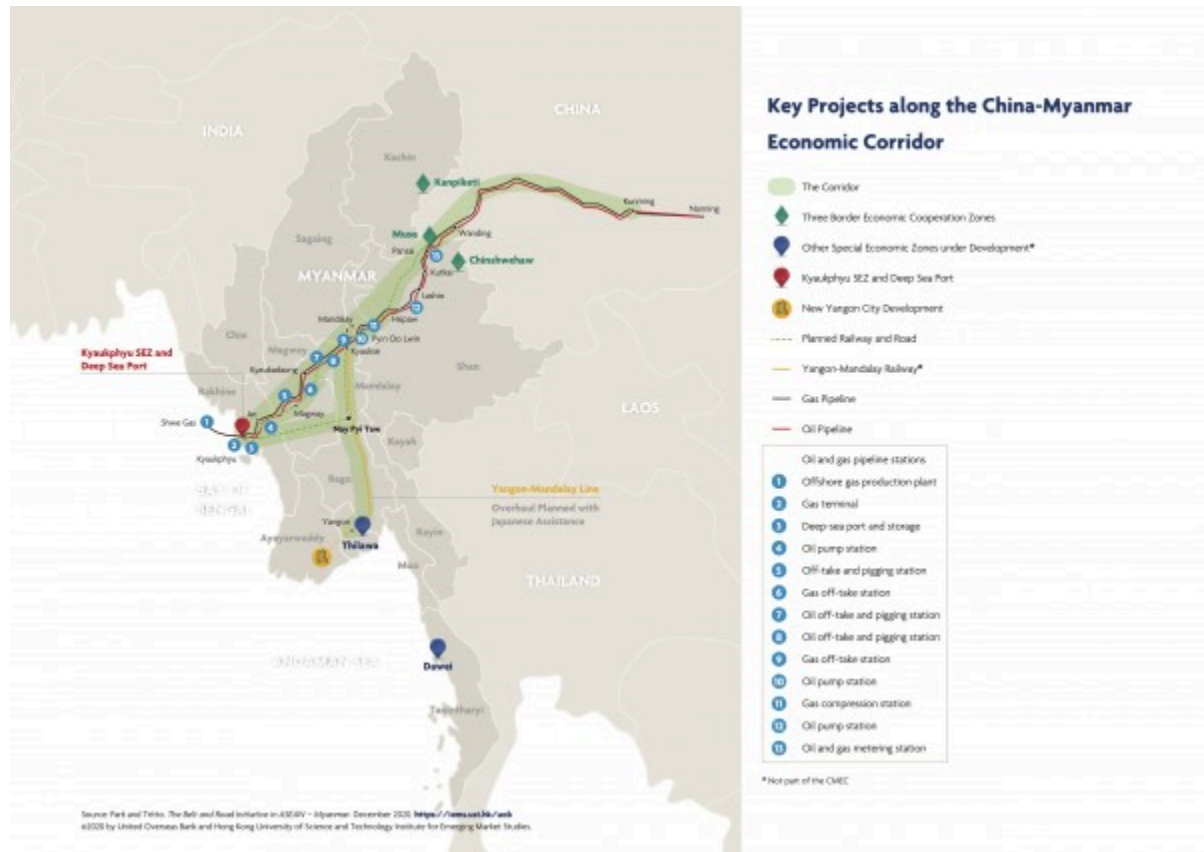
²¹¹ Chaudhuri, Pramit. "The dangers of the Belt and Road Initiative – GIS Reports." *GIS Reports*. (2019)

Figure 2. BRI partner states²¹²



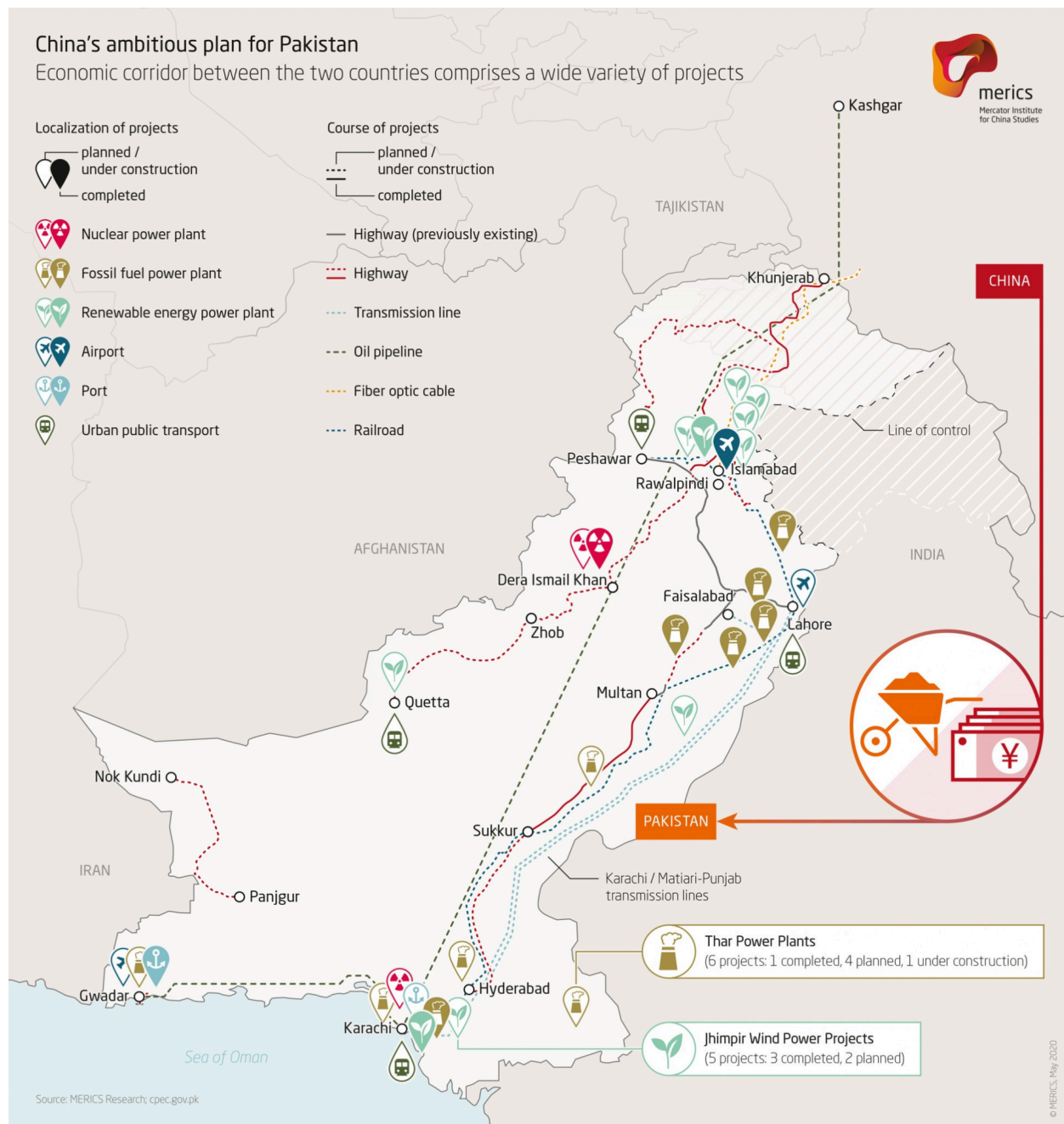
²¹²Nedopil, Christoph, “Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative.” *Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University*, (2023)

Figure 3. China-Myanmar Economic Corridor of the BRI²¹³



²¹³The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. “Myanmar Report | Reports | Publications | HKUST Institute for Emerging Market Studies.” HKUST Institute for Emerging Market Studies.(2021)

Figure 4. China Pakistan Economic Corridor ²¹⁴



²¹⁴Mardell, Jacob. "The BRI in Pakistan: China's flagship economic corridor." *Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS)*. (2020)

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