



## CHAPTER 2

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# Belt and Road Initiative: A View from Russia

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### THE 19TH CPC NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE—CIVILIZATIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The 19th National Congress of the Chinese Party of China (CPC) held in Beijing examined issues connected with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The party leadership made the fundamentally important decision to incorporate President Xi Jinping's proposal for building the "Belt and Road" project into the CPC Constitution. In his speech before that Congress, the president emphasized the need for "creating a trade and infrastructure network linking Asia with Europe and Africa along, and beyond, the ancient Silk Road route."<sup>1</sup>

Introducing that text into the Constitution effectively enshrines Xi Jinping in modern Chinese history and CPC theory, alongside his renowned predecessors—Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. In addition to the "Belt and Road," his name stands linked to the idea of the "Chinese Dream" and the "New State" concept that includes a hard-hitting struggle against domestic corruption.

With regard to international politics, the proceedings of the 19th National Congress emphasize the need for further investment and

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infrastructure development in countries beyond China's borders. One of the leading projects toward that end is the "Belt and Road" initiative.<sup>2</sup>

With the proceedings of the National Congress emphasizing a stronger role for China in the world, two questions arise: does the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) pursue a hidden agenda of radically expanding the geographic scope of Chinese civilization? Isn't Chinese rhetoric about the exclusively economic nature of the Silk Road project really a cover for larger plans to achieve a "soft" cultural and civilizational expansion in the direction of Russia and other states lying along the route of the Silk Road?

The National Congress noted that the challenges facing the international community are growing so strong and dangerous that no state, however powerful, can cope with them alone. Therefore, as Xi Jinping noted in his report, only the combined efforts of all countries can mount an effective response. This is the basis of the Chinese political innovation of "creating a community of common destiny."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Chinese leadership sees the international community as a priori linked by common goals and objectives—namely, the need to respond to challenges and to develop in unison.

The 19th National Congress did not address the openly vexing nature of US policy under Donald Trump. On the contrary, the foreign policy sections of the report were measured and politically correct. They spoke of an open world shorn of protectionism or Chinese isolationism in any form. They proposed that the model of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is the new civilizational and ideological track of the world community—one that is moving invariably toward peace and mutual development.

The SREB project could not be better suited for achieving such a "soft" cultural and civilizational renaissance.

The National Congress also confirmed two of China's chronological and event-oriented benchmarks (development goals): (1) 2021, the 100th anniversary of the formation of the CPC and the date by which China plans to reach "average prosperity" nationwide; (2) 2049, the 100th anniversary of the Chinese People's Republic, by which date China should become a great and mighty power.

At the First and Second Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation held in Beijing on May 13–15, 2017, and April 26–27, 2019, respectively, senior political and economic leaders summed up the accomplishments and outlined future scenarios for implementing the Chinese initiative. We consider it of fundamental importance that the mega-project has evolved from a "one-dimensional" initiative focused