ABSTRACT

China’s multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a common fixture on the radar of policymakers and researchers because of the massive financial investment it involves and the economic opportunities it provides disadvantaged Eurasian states. BRI promises fast-track infrastructural development, transnational connectivity, and unimpeded trade. It predicates economic growth in developing countries on the shared development model. However, BRI has also engendered sensitive economic and security challenges. The Islamic world embraces BRI even as China’s engagement there poses critical challenges to its foreign policy. This chapter highlights key markers on the landscape of BRI projects in the Islamic world and presents their implications for China’s foreign policy. It also provides useful policy guidelines for a more effective implementation of BRI-related projects, thereby protecting China from possible conflict with regional and global powers.
INTRODUCTION

China’s government is changing the trajectory of global and regional discourse on geopolitics, geoeconomics and finance—and on transnational collaboration. It is making a difference in people’s well-being, upping the ante on the true meaning of regional and international integration. Its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious, proactive, and globally driven strategic foreign policy venture announced by President Xi Jinping’s government in September 2013, is a cornucopia of a large number of international infrastructural development projects and opportunities for economic cooperation for mutual benefit and regional integration. It promises vibrant networks of roads and railways for landlocked economies of Asia, Africa and Europe. It seeks to link China with South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, East Africa, and Western Europe through the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” and the South China Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean (Figure 1). China is developing six economic corridors: (a) China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, (b) China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), (c) Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar

Figure 1. Infrastructural network of China’s Belt and Road Initiative
Source: Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2015
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