

UDC 32

DOI: 10.34670/AR.2026.81.19.009

Strategic Docking of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union in Central Asia

Wu Xuanzhen

Master Student,
Lomonosov Moscow State University,
119991, 1, Leninskiye gory, Moscow, Russian Federation;
e-mail: uxuanzhen@my.msu.ru

Abstract

This article examines the strategic docking of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the context of contemporary Sino-Russian relations and great power strategy. Special attention is paid to Central Asia as a key regional space where the economic and political interests of China and Russia intersect. The study analyzes the institutional, political, and economic dimensions of cooperation between the BRI and the EAEU, identifying both the driving factors and structural limitations of this process. It is argued that strategic docking does not imply deep institutional integration but represents a flexible coordination mechanism aimed at managing competition, ensuring regional stability, and promoting connectivity in Eurasia. The article also assesses the role of Central Asian countries as active participants rather than passive objects of great power strategies. The findings suggest that the future of BRI–EAEU cooperation will depend on pragmatic coordination, the management of asymmetrical capabilities, and the evolving regional and global geopolitical environment.

For citation

Wu Xuanzhen (2026) Strategic Docking of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union in Central Asia. *Teorii i problemy politicheskikh issledovaniy* [Theories and Problems of Political Studies], 15 (1A), pp. 61-66. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2026.81.19.009

Keywords

The Belt and Road Initiative, Eurasian Economic Union, Strategic Docking, Central Asian Countries, Regional Cooperation, Sino-Russian Relations, Eurasia.

Introduction

The growing complexity of the international system and the gradual transition toward multipolarity have significantly increased the importance of regional integration initiatives promoted by major powers. In this context, Eurasia has emerged as a key space of strategic interaction, where economic connectivity, political influence, and security considerations intersect. China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union represent two large-scale projects aimed at shaping regional development trajectories and consolidating geopolitical positions.

The simultaneous implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union has raised questions regarding potential competition between China and Russia, particularly in Central Asian countries. These states occupy a strategically important position due to their geographical location, resource potential, and role as transit corridors connecting East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. As a result, Central Asia has become a focal point for assessing the compatibility of Chinese and Russian regional strategies.

In response to concerns about rivalry and overlapping interests, the concept of strategic docking between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union was proposed as a framework for coordination rather than confrontation. This approach reflects a pragmatic attempt to manage asymmetrical economic capacities and political influence while maintaining regional stability and promoting cooperation. However, the practical content, depth, and long-term sustainability of this strategic docking remain subjects of scholarly debate.

Existing research often focuses either on the economic dimensions of the Belt and Road Initiative or on the institutional development of the Eurasian Economic Union, while the interaction between the two initiatives is frequently analyzed in a fragmented manner. Moreover, insufficient attention is paid to the role of Central Asian countries as independent actors capable of shaping the outcomes of regional cooperation.

This article aims to analyze the strategic docking of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union as an element of great power strategy and regional cooperation in Central Asia. The study seeks to identify the key drivers and limitations of this process, assess its implications for regional actors, and evaluate its prospects in the context of evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach based on political and comparative analysis. The article analyzes official policy documents, strategic statements, and analytical materials related to the Belt and Road Initiative, the Eurasian Economic Union, and Sino-Russian cooperation in Central Asia.

Comparative analysis is used to examine the differences and intersections between the institutional frameworks and strategic objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union. Elements of systemic analysis are applied to assess Central Asia as a regional space of interaction between China and Russia and to evaluate the role of Central Asian countries in regional cooperation processes.

Central Asian Countries as a Space of Strategic Docking

Central Asian countries occupy a central position in the process of strategic docking between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union. Geographically, the region serves as a key transit corridor linking China with Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. At the same time, Central Asia

represents a space where China's growing economic presence intersects with Russia's traditional political and security influence [Tingyang,2021].

For China, Central Asian countries play a crucial role in ensuring the overland connectivity of the Belt and Road Initiative. Infrastructure projects related to transport corridors, energy cooperation, and logistics hubs are aimed at reducing transportation costs and increasing the stability of supply chains [Xuetong,2019]. From the Russian perspective, Central Asia remains an important region for maintaining economic integration through the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as for preserving security cooperation mechanisms and labor migration ties [Callahan,2012].

The strategic docking of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union allows Central Asian states to avoid direct involvement in Sino-Russian rivalry. Instead, these countries actively pursue a multi-vector foreign policy, seeking to maximize economic benefits while preserving political autonomy [Jinping,2022]. As a result, Central Asian countries act not only as objects of great power strategies but also as independent actors influencing the practical implementation of regional cooperation initiatives.

At the same time, the region faces several challenges related to the docking process. Differences in economic development levels, institutional capacity, and national priorities complicate the coordination of large-scale projects. Moreover, the predominance of bilateral agreements within the Belt and Road Initiative limits the role of the Eurasian Economic Union as a unified regulatory framework in Central Asia [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China,2023].

Overall, Central Asia remains a key testing ground for the effectiveness of strategic docking between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union. The ability of regional actors to balance Chinese and Russian interests will significantly influence the future configuration of regional cooperation and stability.

Strategic Docking as a Great Power Strategy

The strategic docking of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union represents a pragmatic response by China and Russia to the risks of strategic competition in Eurasia. Rather than pursuing direct rivalry, both states have opted for a coordination model that allows them to preserve core interests while reducing political and economic tensions in Central Asia [Tsygankov,2019].

For China, strategic docking serves primarily as a political framework that facilitates the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in a region characterized by Russia's strong institutional and security presence. For Russia, docking provides an opportunity to adapt to China's growing economic influence while maintaining the relevance of the Eurasian Economic Union as a regional integration project [Laruelle,2018].

At the strategic level, docking functions less as an economic integration mechanism and more as a tool of great power management. It enables both actors to signal alignment in Eurasia, limit the involvement of external powers, and contribute to regional stability without creating rigid institutional commitments [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,2023]. This flexible approach reflects the asymmetrical nature of Sino-Russian relations and the preference for political coordination over formal integration.

Discussion

The analysis of strategic docking between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union demonstrates that this process should not be interpreted as a step toward deep economic or

institutional integration. Instead, it represents a form of strategic accommodation shaped by the asymmetry of Sino-Russian relations and the need to manage overlapping interests in Central Asia [9]. The absence of unified governance mechanisms indicates that docking remains primarily political rather than structural in nature.

An important aspect revealed by the study is the role of Central Asian countries as active participants in regional cooperation. While China and Russia set the general framework of strategic interaction, regional states exercise a significant degree of agency by selectively engaging with both initiatives in accordance with their national priorities [Hall,2006]. This challenges interpretations that view Central Asia solely as an arena of great power competition.

At the same time, the discussion highlights the limits of strategic docking as a long-term solution. The growing economic gap between China and Russia, combined with the predominance of bilateral BRI projects, constrains the ability of the Eurasian Economic Union to act as a comprehensive coordinating platform. These factors raise questions about the sustainability of the current model of cooperation, particularly under conditions of global economic uncertainty and shifting geopolitical alignments.

Overall, strategic docking should be understood as a flexible and adaptive strategy rather than a stable institutional arrangement. Its effectiveness depends on continued political coordination, the management of asymmetrical interests, and the evolving strategies of Central Asian countries within the Eurasian space.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the strategic docking of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union represents a specific model of Sino-Russian cooperation shaped by the logic of great power strategy and regional pragmatism. Rather than leading to deep institutional integration, this process functions as a flexible coordination mechanism aimed at managing overlapping interests and reducing the risks of competition in Central Asia.

The findings show that Central Asian countries play an active role in shaping the outcomes of strategic docking. By pursuing multi-vector policies, regional states are able to engage with both initiatives in a selective manner, enhancing their economic opportunities while maintaining political autonomy. This significantly influences the practical implementation and limits of BRI–EAEU cooperation.

At the same time, the sustainability of strategic docking remains constrained by structural asymmetries between China and Russia, as well as by the predominance of bilateral formats within the Belt and Road Initiative. These factors suggest that the current model of cooperation is unlikely to evolve into a unified integration framework. Instead, strategic docking is expected to remain an adaptive and politically driven approach, the effectiveness of which will depend on continued coordination, regional stability, and the broader geopolitical environment.

References

1. Zhao Tingyang. *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021.
2. Yan Xuetong. *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
3. Callahan W.A. *China: The Pessimist Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
4. Xi Jinping. *The Governance of China*. Vol. IV. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2022.
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. *China's Global Civilization Initiative*. Beijing, 2023.

6. Tsygankov A.P. Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.
7. Laruelle M. Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields. London: Routledge, 2018.
8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Moscow, 2023.
9. Katzenstein P.J. (ed.). Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives. London: Routledge, 2010.
10. Hall I. The International Thought of Martin Wight. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

Стратегическое сопряжение инициативы «Пояс и путь» и Евразийского экономического союза в Центральной Азии

У Сюаньчжэнь

Магистрант,
Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова,
119991, Российская Федерация, Москва, Ленинские горы, 1;
e-mail: uxuanzhen@my.msu.ru

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается стратегическое сопряжение инициативы «Пояс и путь» (BRI) и Евразийского экономического союза (ЕАЭС) в контексте современных китайско-российских отношений и стратегии великих держав. Особое внимание уделяется Центральной Азии как ключевому региональному пространству, где пересекаются экономические и политические интересы Китая и России. В исследовании анализируются институциональные, политические и экономические аспекты сотрудничества между BRI и ЕАЭС, выявляются как движущие факторы, так и структурные ограничения этого процесса. Утверждается, что стратегическое сопряжение не подразумевает глубокой институциональной интеграции, а представляет собой гибкий механизм координации, направленный на управление конкуренцией, обеспечение региональной стабильности и содействие связуемости в Евразии. В статье также оценивается роль стран Центральной Азии как активных участников, а не пассивных объектов стратегий великих держав. Полученные результаты позволяют предположить, что будущее сотрудничества BRI и ЕАЭС будет зависеть от прагматичной координации, управления асимметричными возможностями и развивающейся региональной и глобальной геополитической среды.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

У Сюаньчжэнь. Стратегическое сопряжение инициативы «Пояс и путь» и Евразийского экономического союза в Центральной Азии // Теории и проблемы политических исследований. 2026. Том 15. № 1А. С. 61-66. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2026.81.19.009

Ключевые слова

Инициатива «Пояс и путь», Евразийский экономический союз, стратегическое сопряжение, страны Центральной Азии, региональное сотрудничество, китайско-российские отношения, Евразия.

References

1. Callahan W.A. China: The Pessoptimist Nation. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
2. Hall I. The International Thought of Martin Wight. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006
3. Katzenstein P.J. (ed.). Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives. London: Routledge, 2010.
4. Laruelle M. Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields. London: Routledge, 2018.
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. China's Global Civilization Initiative. Beijing, 2023.
6. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Moscow, 2023.
7. Tsygankov A.P. Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.
8. Xi Jinping. The Governance of China. Vol. IV. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2022.
9. Yan Xuetong. Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
10. Zhao Tingyang. The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021.