

N.S. Ismailova,
*candidate of Economic sciences, associate professor,
the head of the department "The world economy" of Tashkent state
university of economics, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.*

A.R. Abdinabieva,
*Graduate student of Tashkent state university of economics,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF "ONE BELT, ONE ROAD" TO THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

Annotation. *In recent years, China has made significant economic inroads into Central Asia. The promotion of the new globalization under the Chinese umbrella in the form of lucrative initiative "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) has triggered new challenges to the established international economic and political orders. On the one hand, the implementation of lactiferous Belt Road Initiative (BRI) brings benefits to stakeholders, whilst, on the other hand, it poses a threat to their territorial integrity, which incites vigorous debates in Uzbekistan. This paper aims to identify the approach Uzbekistan has been employing to reap benefits, minimize the costs of OBOR.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, "One Belt, One Road" initiative, foreign policy, superpower rivalries, new globalization, international order.*

Н.С. Исмаилова,
*кандидат экономических наук, доцент,
заведующий кафедрой «Мировая экономика» Ташкентского
государственного экономического университета, Ташкент, Узбекистан.*

А. Абдинабиева,
*магистрант Ташкентского государственного экономического
университета, Ташкент, Узбекистан.*

ВАЖНОСТЬ «ОДИН ПОЯС, ОДИН ПУТЬ» ДЛЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ УЗБЕКИСТАН

Аннотация. В последние годы Китай добился значительных экономических успехов в Центральной Азии. Содействие новой глобализации под эгидой Китая в форме прибыльной инициативы «Один пояс, один путь» (OBOR) вызвало новые вызовы установленным международным экономическим и политическим порядкам. С одной стороны, реализация молочной инициативы «Поясный путь» (BRI) приносит пользу заинтересованным сторонам, а с другой - создает угрозу их территориальной целостности, что вызывает ожесточенные дебаты в Узбекистане. Этот документ направлен на определение подхода, который использует Узбекистан для получения выгод и минимизации затрат на ПОП.

Ключевые слова: Узбекистан, инициатива «Один пояс, один путь», внешняя политика, соперничество сверхдержав, новая глобализация, международный порядок.

Despite all the difficulties, contradictions and failures of the initial stage of the existence of the entire post-Soviet space, there was a constant search for ways to preserve and further develop close forms of interaction as a counterbalance to the protracted «collapse» of the former unitary system. This process was largely determined and still remains relevant by the realization that in the extremely complex and ambiguous conditions of globalization, as well as the clash of interests of the leading external.

What is “One Belt, One Road” or OBOR? One Belt, One Road (OBOR) is China’s much-touted new foreign and economic policy. It is a development strategy to connect China with Central Asia, Europe, and Indo-Pacific littoral countries. This policy has two components:

Belt– The “One Belt” refers to the land-based “Silk Road Economic Belt”. Here Beijing aims to connect the country’s underdeveloped hinterland to Europe through Central Asia.

Road – The “One Road” references the ocean-going “Maritime Silk Road”. It is to connect the fast-growing South East Asian region to China’s southern provinces through ports and railways¹.

Since peaceful transition of political leadership in late 2016, The President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has been at the centre of domestic and international attention. This attention is commanded by expectations of political liberalization and economic reforms. Uzbek society and the international community expect a continuation of politics of openness, economic development and political reforms initiated since early days of his power. Shavkat Mirziyoyev has been so far responding to these expectations by maintaining initial focus on change. Notably, Uzbekistan’s ongoing reform dynamics has crystallized around three grand directions: political and administrative reforms; economic development and industrial modernization; foreign policy opening². Uzbekistan is among 65 countries covered by the Belt and Road projects. Uzbekistan is an indispensable actor to realize China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, one of the six economic corridors which make up the Belt& Road Initiative. This Asian corridor spans across five Central Asian countries as well as two countries of West Asia which are Iran and Turkey. From the perspective of Uzbekistan, the BRI could help open the corridor to the Persian Gulf, enabling expansion of commercial and trade routes for the country. The latter point acquires particular importance taking into account recent focus of Uzbekistan to promote the export of Uzbek goods in foreign markets. Uzbekistan already stressed its readiness to participate in the Belt and Road projects through bilateral and regional platforms³.

¹ Rahul Sharma, UPSC Topper. One Belt One Road (OBOR) by China – Should India Join It? 2016. <https://www.clearias.com/one-belt-one-road-obor/>

² Action Strategy on Five Priority Areas of the Country’s Development for 2017-2021, adopted by Presidential Decree on Action Strategy for Further Development of Republic of Uzbekistan, 7 February 2017

³ Kenneth Rapoza, 'Eurasia's latest economic reboot can be found in Uzbekistan', Forbes, 14 September, 2017 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2017/09/14/eurasia-new-perestroika-uzbekistan-silk-road-china/#638cb51b6f25> (accessed 17 April 2018); Neil Buckley, 'Once-repressive Uzbekistan begins a post-Karimov opening', Financial Times, 13 February 2018 <https://www.ft.com/content/6c37419c-0cbf-11e8-8eb7->

The 3,666km Central Asia-China gas pipeline predated the new Silk Road but forms the backbone of infrastructure connections between Turkmenistan and China. Chinese-built, it runs from the Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan border to Jingbian in China and cost \$7.3bn⁴.

China signed agreements with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to build a fourth line of the central Asia-China gas pipeline in September 2013. Line D is expected to raise Turkmenistan's gas export capacity to China from 55bn cu m per year to 85bn cu m.

China is not the only investor in central Asian connectivity. Multilateral financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank have long been investing in the region's infrastructure⁵.

Then there is the Export-Import Bank of China, which lent more than \$80 billion in 2015. This dwarfs the Asia Development Bank, which lent \$27 billion over the same period. China has also redrawn Central Asia's energy economics. Chinese companies now own close to a quarter of Kazakhstan's oil production and account for well over half of Turkmenistan's gas exports. Recently they signed \$15 billion in gas and uranium deals with Uzbekistan.

Conclusion. Uzbekistan is a regular participant of annual China-Central Asia Cooperation Forum which is held regularly to promote cooperation between parties to build the Silk Road Economic Belt jointly. Theoretically, if Uzbekistan's political and strategic concerns are met, the initiative could be seen as viable, particularly given that many of the projects envisaged under "the Central Asia-China gas pipeline project" and the "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan

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⁴ Jack Farchy, James Kynge, Chris Campbell and David Blood. September. 14 2016. <https://ig.ft.com/sites/special-reports/one-belt-one-road/>

⁵ William T. Wilson, China's Huge 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative Is Sweeping Central Asia. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-huge-one-belt-one-road-initiative-sweeping-central-17150>

railway project” would dovetail into OBOR. Already all of Uzbekistan’s neighbors are a part of it, and Uzbekistan too is keen to increase connectivity with them.

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