

DRIVERS AND IMPACT OF CHINA'S BELT AND
ROAD INITIATIVE:
A Case Study on Chinese Financing of Infrastructure
Development Projects in Kenya

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By

Nicoletta Martelli

Student Number: 627311

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Pieter Tuytens

Second Reader: Dr. Geske Dijkstra

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ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative was announced by China in 2013, under the name of ‘One Belt, One Road’. In March 2015, the ‘Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century maritime Silk Road’ was published and in May 2017 the first ‘Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF)’ was held in Beijing. Over the years, the initiative has generated a lot of controversy and a rich debate has been going on since its launch. While Chinese officials claim that the objectives of the BRI are in line with liberal principles and the existing international order, many observers and foreign governments have criticised it. In particular, India and the U.S. have described it as a revisionist scheme to employ predatory economic in order to increase China’s influence on vulnerable countries and gain a position of leadership in the international order.

Kenya joined BRI in 2017, when an economic and cooperation trade agreement was signed with China at the BRF. However, the partnership between China and Kenya precedes this date, and by then Chinese firms had already started financing major infrastructural projects in Kenya that became part of BRI, such as the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), for which China extended a loan to Kenya as early as 2014. This thesis uses International Relations theories to establish how BRI projects in Kenya can best be explained, through a congruence analysis. The competing theories applied in this research are part of the realist and liberalist schools of thought. The evidence showed that defensive realism provides the best explanation of China’s motives behind and the impact of BRI projects in Kenya.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFRICOM	Africa Command
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEB	China Exim Bank
CRBC	China Road and Bridge Corporation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
IR	International Relations
LAPSSET	Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NLC	National Land Commission
NOFBI	National Optic Fiber Backbone Infrastructure
OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
PLA	People's Liberation Army
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGR	Standard Gauge Railway
SLOC	Sea Line of Communication
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WITS	World Integrated Trade Solutions

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Belt and Road Initiative

China's "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" was initially developed as two distinct projects, the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "Maritime Silk Road" (ZiroMwatela & Changfeng, 2016). These were then fused together in the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative, whose name was later changed to the current one. It is a strategic infrastructural plan to create new trade routes for China, first proposed publicly by president Xi Jinping in 2013 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium, 2013) and officially launched in 2015 (Gu & Qiu, 2019), when an action plan which presented an outline for the initiative, and the guiding principles behind it, was published (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015). The initiative is also a means to enlarge China's market and economic and political influence (Jie & Wallace, 2021).

BRI is composed of different bilateral arrangements with different conditions. Fifteen Chinese ministries are linked to BRI, and provinces and diplomats are also involved in projects to achieve their own goals and gain favourable positions within the party (Jie & Wallace, 2021). Currently, 145 countries are part of BRI, having signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with China (Green Finance & Development Center, 2021). Although funding is not transparent and the exact cost is not known, what is certain is that the initiative is funded by Chinese banks, which lend money to state owned businesses, and state-owned funds (Jie & Wallace, 2021). None of the few international institutions involved in BRI funding are western (BRI, 2022).

BRI has attracted a lot of criticism from a number of governments and international institutions. In 2014, it was decided to build maritime trade infrastructure along the old maritime silk road known as the Marco Polo route, which linked China with Southeast Asia and Africa, as well as Europe (Jie & Wallace, 2021). Because Pakistan is arguably the most important partner participating in BRI, India has vocally criticised the project. This is largely due to the animosity between India and Pakistan, specifically the contrasts over Kashmir, near which the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passes. Criticism against BRI also comes from the United States, where it is seen as a hazard for Western interests and a debt-trap. The United States' allies largely share this position (Jie & Wallace, 2021).

This thesis will focus on BRI in Africa, specifically Chinese-financed infrastructural projects in Kenya. China's engagement in Africa is not new, and in recent years it has been centred on economic relations and development. While the initial outline for BRI did not mention Africa, focusing more on Sino-European relations, by 2019 the majority of African countries, and the African Union, had gotten involved in the initiative (Gu & Qiu 2019). Kenya officially joined BRI

in 2017, by signing a MOU with China (Breuer, 2017; Sacks, 2021). At the moment, 46 African countries are reportedly part of BRI, in addition to the African Union (Xin, 2022). BRI is appealing to African countries because Chinese loans do not entail scrupulous conditionality terms, as opposed to Western ones, and China is more open to cooperation with non-democratic regimes (Venkateswaran, 2020). China's engagement in Africa has further fuelled the debate about China's alleged 'debt-trap diplomacy'. According to this argument's supporters, the initiative leads developing countries to take out loans that they often cannot repay, giving China power over their governments. This has been most debated in relation to the case of Sri Lanka (Jones & Hameiri, 2020; Wheeler, 2020; Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021), but divisive discussions also emerged with regard to African countries (ZiroMwatela & Changfeng, 2016; Chen, 2020; Mboya, 2021). Different authors and observers have emphasised distinct and sometimes contrasting reasons for China's extension of the initiative to Africa, and the debate has become increasingly politicised. As a result, there is still a lot of uncertainty around the initiative and China's dominant motives and intentions. This thesis aims to contribute to such debate.

1.2 Research Objective

The goal of this thesis is to analyse the reasons behind China's extension of BRI to Kenya. Because the discussion has mainly been between liberal and realist perspectives, those two International Relations (IR) theories will be taken into consideration, with the aim of establishing which sub-theory can better explain BRI activities in Kenya. Both liberalism and realism offer compelling explanations for China's BRI projects across regions and continents. Liberalist analyses focus on China's economic interests and the positive effects of international cooperation on China's growth (Schortgen, 2018). Realist interpretations focus on China's national interest (Schortgen, 2018) and national security concerns, including energy security, increasing stability near its borders and its influence in the Eurasian region (Wuthnow, 2017). Both seem to offer valid explanations; therefore the aim of this thesis is to establish which theory provides the most accurate and credible argument. The focus will be on Kenya, as the country is one of China's main African partners within BRI. Some authors underline China's commercial and economic interests in Kenya. This view leans towards a liberalist perspective, according to which international trade and its benefits improve welfare within a country, making economic cooperation an essential interest of states (Karlis & Polemis, 2019). Others underline China's interest in Kenya's resources and location in order to increase domestic energy security and national security, which is more in line with realist assertions (Karlis & Polemis, 2019).

1.3 Research Question and Sub-Questions

The following research question has been formulated:

“Can liberal theory explain China’s BRI engagement in Kenya better than realist theory?”

In order to provide an answer, the sub-questions have also been formulated:

- 1) *“What are the main drivers behind China’s BRI projects in Kenya?”*
- 2) *“Which liberal sub-theory is the most relevant to explain China’s BRI activities in Kenya?”*
- 3) *“Which realist sub-theory is the most relevant to explain China’s BRI activities in Kenya?”*

To answer them, a qualitative research method will be used. A congruence analysis will be undertaken to establish which theoretical framework can provide a better elucidation about China’s motivations for and implementation of infrastructural project in Kenya. The biggest advantage of employing a small-N research method lies in the intensity and detail of the study. In order to achieve this, “specific propositions and observable implications from abstract theories” will be identified and empirical observations will be compared with the implications from different theories (Blatter & Haverland, 2014, p. 144).

1.4 Academic Relevance

Much has been written about BRI and China’s reasoning for creating the initiative. However, most of the literature has focused on the debt-trap diplomacy narrative and many contrasting interpretations have been provided. Competing views have been presented regarding which IR theory is more appropriate to understand China’s involvement in African countries. Many case studies have focused on the effects of BRI, even in African countries, and many have also explored China’s motivations, but they have provided contrasting assessments about what the most appropriate theoretical framework to explain them is.

Through the employment of a congruence analysis, this research intends to add to the ongoing academic discussion between the competing liberalist and realist paradigms. The objective is not theoretical innovation, but rather to “contribute to the scholarly struggle between scientific paradigms” (Blatter & Haverland, 2014; p. 170). While most of the debate about China’s involvement in Africa contrasts the opposite interpretations of liberalist theories with offensive

realism, this thesis will look closely at defensive realism, which is usually not at the centre of such discussions.

1.5 Societal Relevance

BRI projects have consequences on Kenya's economy and its people, as they impact the society and environment in which they live and, potentially, their livelihoods.

The ambiguity and lack of transparency of some BRI projects make it hard to understand their effects. If it becomes possible to establish which theory can provide the most credible explanation for China's intentions, it becomes easier to analyse the aims of BRI projects and their consequences on the lives of citizens of the recipient country. If China is driven by an interest in economic cooperation that benefits both partners, BRI projects could significantly contribute to Kenya's development and locals are also likely to profit from them. If China intends to serve its interests in a manner that is disproportionately advantageous for its own economy and domestic needs, Kenyan citizens may be damaged by them. BRI has a huge potential for improving connectivity in African countries, as well as for increasing employment. However, negative repercussions have also come to light in relation to Chinese-financed infrastructural projects in Kenya. Therefore, a comprehensive case study which draws credible conclusions about China's genuine intentions can be useful to weigh the benefits of BRI projects to Kenyan citizens against their drawbacks.

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis will be divided in seven chapters. Chapter 2 will be dedicated to the literature review, which will focus on the drivers behind BRI. In Chapter 3, the theoretical framework will be developed. Realist and Liberalist theories will be presented, and sub-theories will be used to formulate propositions. Chapter 4 will illustrate the methods used to conduct the research. The selection of the case study will be explained and indicators will be formulated for each proposition. Chapter 5 will be dedicated to the analysis of data and information about China's BRI projects in Kenya. In Chapter 6, results will be discussed. In Chapter 7, the research question and sub-questions will be answered, and the limitations of the study will be discussed.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Drivers behind BRI

Several academics have provided explanations as to what led China to develop BRI, highlighting different drivers. This chapter will present the principal ones discussed in the literature.

Jie and Wallace (2021) indicate three motivations behind China's creation of BRI. The principal one lies in China's competition with the U.S.. One of the main issues is that China's international trade, which relies heavily on maritime transport, has to pass through the Malacca strait. The strait is located off the coast of a US ally country, Singapore, therefore China has been trying to find alternative routes. Another reason is linked to the 2008 global financial crisis, as China's response measures saturated the domestic market and highlighted the need to find new markets for Chinese companies. BRI is also a way to revive the economy of the central parts of the country, which are less developed than coastal regions (Jie & Wallace, 2021).

He (2019) also points to excess capacity as a driving force behind the development of BRI. While this problem was not new to China, it became more prominent with the global financial crisis. He names an article by Wang Jisi (2012) as the basis for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which were suggested the next year. Wang is president of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University and, when he published the article, was also in the Foreign Policy Advisory Committee of China's Foreign Ministry (Asia Society, 2022).

Wang maintained that China should look West in order to increase its influence on the international level and counterpoise the U.S.' power, going beyond the Asia-Pacific region. He put forward the idea that China should increase cooperation with other countries, to secure access to energy sources, and create a new Silk Road. He mentioned the importance of providing more aid to countries in South and Central Asia, the Middle East and the Caspian Sea region, as well as building a new route through the Indian Ocean (Wang, 2012). Wang's ideas have much in common with the aims and execution of BRI projects, although he did not mention the African continent, which is now a pillar of BRI.

2.1.1 Sino-American Relations

Clarke (2018) sees BRI as the result of a mix of domestic and foreign policy factors. Among the latter, he indicates China's desire to shelter itself from the risks linked to American supremacy and build an alternative to the world order led by the United States. China's initiative aims to strengthen

economic ties with European and Asian countries in particular, and BRI fits into President Xi's goal of bringing China to the forefront of the international scene. After President Obama decided to start limiting the U.S.' presence in the Middle East in favour of the Asia-Pacific region, the country reinforced its relations with its allies in the area, namely Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. The administration also began working closely with India, Vietnam and Indonesia. To China, this strategy appeared threatening, especially with the U.S. Secretary of State announcing that the country was planning on creating a "new Silk Road" through Asia (Clarke, 2018). Washington aimed to make sure that no single country or group of countries could assume a position of power in the Eurasian territory. Some, such as Professor Wang Jisi, saw this as an opportunity for China to move its focus from East Asia to Eurasia. Several academics agreed, resulting in greater attention to Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia. Thus, BRI is largely a Chinese response to the U.S.' strategic repositioning (Clarke, 2018).

Liow (2021) similarly cites China's urge to counter the American presence in the Asian continent and the Pacific area, which poses a challenge to China's dependence on maritime trade. He quotes General Qiao Liang, who described BRI as a defensive strategy against the U.S.' expansion towards the East. The most critical area in the U.S.-China trade wars is the South China Sea, and maritime vulnerabilities are presented as China's main concern in its competition with the US. Land-based routes in Eurasia are a way to limit vulnerabilities deriving from China's reliance on maritime trade.

Trang (2021) also cites China's interest in contrasting the American hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. He adds the fact that China, as the main beneficiary of economic liberalisation in recent years, has used the BRI to present itself as a supporter of globalisation, in light of President Trump's 'America first' policy.

2.1.2 The Global Financial Crisis

According to Clarke (2018), among the economic drivers behind BRI is China's industrial over-capacity and the need to get access to new markets for the country's products, but also new opportunities for Chinese capital. BRI has a two-fold economic potential, in that infrastructural projects abroad transfer some of China's production capacity out of the country and, at the same time, recipient countries develop their industry and economy. In particular, the Chinese steel industry benefits greatly from railway projects such as those in Kenya (Clarke, 2018).

Liow (2021) also mentions China's urge to avoid the "middle-income trap", referring to the situation in which a country's economy grows particularly fast, and the nation rapidly becomes a

middle-income country. The country then struggles to reach a high-income position, unable to keep up with richer economies and becoming stuck (Glawe and Wagner, 2020).

Olinga-Shannon et al. (2019) observe that the global financial crisis' effects on American and European markets had severe repercussions on China's exports. The government's stimulus package worsened the situation, due to the way it simplified the borrowing of money by provincial governments. These funds were mostly spent on large infrastructural initiatives. They increased China's consumption, but local governments became severely indebted, and the new infrastructure was often more than what would have been necessary, with excesses in housing, hydro- and wind-energy production. At the same time, China's cheap exports started to become less competitive due to wage increases. The Chinese government largely bases its legitimacy upon economic prosperity and the consequences of an economic downturn could cause dissent and turmoil. The same concerns are shared by the country's provincial authorities, whose career success is dependent on the economic performance of their territories. Thus, Chinese officials have a strong incentive to maintain a fast-growing economy (Olinga-Shannon et al., 2019).

2.1.3 Energy Security

Zhao et al. (2019) centre their research around the energy-related motivations behind BRI. They highlight the fact that China has noteworthy energy relations with its BRI partners. China's fast economic development made the country the biggest energy consumer in the world. Facing energy supply issues, China benefits from cooperation with the countries along BRI, which have enough resources to produce more energy than they need. The authors stress the connection between energy security and national security, which links energy to international relations (Zhao et al., 2019).

Madani (2021) observes that BRI can increase China's energy security when it comes to all of the so-called "four As": availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability. BRI allows China to expand its energy transportation channels for imports and gives it more power in global energy governance. It also addresses China's growing energy demand on account of the country's impressive economic growth. Security threats such as terrorism, geopolitical trends and piracy in the Indian Ocean have compromised China's import of oil and gas through its traditional routes. National disasters and competition over energy resources also threaten the country's energy security. While many of these issues have long existed, China's growth acceleration exacerbated them. China also needs to diversify its energy sources, as its reliance on domestically produced coal has significant environmental repercussions and the country pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Madani, 2021). Moreover, China does not produce sufficient oil nor gas to sustain its

domestic needs. China needs secure and reliable routes for its energy imports, as well as solid relations with producer countries. BRI is one way to achieve this, strengthening partnerships with strategic allies for energy procurement and transport. Infrastructural projects can simplify logistics and cut transport prices for China. In 2019, 84.37 % of China's foreign energy investments were energy investments within BRI, with an increase in African and Asian countries (Madani, 2021).

2.2 BRI in Kenya

Kenya plays a significant role in China's BRI. Rural roads are being ameliorated and new infrastructure, including airports and dams, as well as new roads, are supposed to be built as part of the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (Mutethya, 2022). The most important project is the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), the largest transport infrastructure built since the country's independence (Africa Policy Institute, 2021).

Kenya's high-speed railway was supposed to reach South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, for a total cost of \$5.2 billion, mostly financed by China (African Union, 2016). Chinese state officials claimed that the SGR has created an additional 1.5% growth in Kenya's economy. Despite this, Lesutis (2021) has pointed out how the railway project has brought to light old and new inequalities. For the urban middle class, the project can increase mobility. However, inhabitants of rural areas have been damaged by the railways, which passes through villages and family lands, in addition to interfering with other travel routes. The railway disproportionately benefits the urban population to the disadvantage of the lower rural class. Moreover, it has brought greater investment in the central areas of the country, especially around Nairobi, whereas investment and work opportunities are decreasing in other parts of Kenya, including Mombasa (Lesutis, 2021). The main funder of the new railway is the Chinese state-owned China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), which has interfered with the work of Kenya's National Land Commission (NLC) in its pursuit of the project. The latter is in charge of regulating land compensation, but the Chinese company has been paying inhabitants directly to make them leave their land in order to reach the targets set for the project, for a total of \$10 million. Due to the high number of court cases against it, the extension of the railway from Naivasha to Malaba has been halted in April 2019 (Lesutis, 2021).

In 2015, the Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor also started to be built. The Lamu Port has been defined as the "crown jewel of Kenya Vision 2030 and LAPSSET" (Africa Policy Institute, p.41), and is to be built by the China Communications Construction Company. It aims to turn Kenya into a transport and logistics focal point for East Africa and the

Horn of Africa, competing with the Durban and Djibouti ports. Kenyan authorities assert that traffic in Lamu port will reach up to 23.9 million tons by 2030 (Africa Policy Institute, 2021). The LAPSSET Corridor is supposed to include an industrial park, an airport, a resort town, as well as new services and housing opportunities for the population (Alden et al., 2021). A coal power plant was part of the project but was removed from it in 2020, after the Commercial Bank of China decided not to finance it. This was due to the cancellation of its environmental licence by Kenyan courts, after strong opposition from the Kenyan population (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2022).

2.3 IR Theories and BRI

The term ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ has often been linked to BRI. It refers to the practice of lending large sums of money to financially weak states, without evaluating their creditworthiness beforehand. Such countries are often unable to repay their debts, which gives the creditor more power over them (Chellaney, 2021). In terms of IR theories, observers closer to a realist perspective believe China to be using the initiative to merely increase its own power and influence. Those closer to the liberalist school of thought tend to focus on China’s economic cooperation with its BRI partners and contest the interpretation according to which China is acting in an opportunistic manner to profit off of the struggles their debtors.

Alam and Farhan Asef (2020) argue that China systematically uses the debt-trap technique to take advantage of vulnerable countries and further its own interests. They assert that, through generous interest rates, China induces developing countries to take loans that lead them to lose strategic assets to China. China requires concessions in exchange for debt relief, increasing its control over recipient countries. They cite the case of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, of which China has taken charge for 99 years starting from 2017, and predict a similar outcome for the Mombasa port.

The Hambantota case is also mentioned by Jones and Hameiri (2020) who, however, use it to present evidence against the accusations of debt-trap diplomacy moved to China. They argue that BRI is a commercial initiative and China would not be able to advance such elaborate strategic objectives because its development financing system is not cohesive enough. Furthermore, its development financing is recipient driven, meaning that China cannot decide on its own what is built within BRI projects. They maintain that the negative consequences associated with BRI projects are due to political contestations, patronage networks and corruption in recipient countries.

Such issues stem from the interplay between elites' interests and governance limitations both in China and in its BRI partner states (Jones & Hameiri, 2020).

Shaomin and Jiang (2020) point to the fact that the subject has been widely politicised by the U.S., which is the country that has promoted the idea of debt-trap diplomacy the most vehemently. Such accusations have had tangible repercussions for China, causing a decrease of about 50% in investment and construction contracts in 2018 in ASEAN countries, where many projects slowed down after recipient states increased their inspection of China's investments in infrastructure. It is also underlined how China's loans were requested by the recipients, in need of infrastructural improvements to modernise their economies. Like Jones and Hameiri, Shaomin and Jiang indicate that the motives behind BRI are largely economic, rather than political. China has also reduced recipients' debts on occasion, which goes against the idea of debt-trap diplomacy itself, while quantitative easing from the West has contributed to the growth of developing countries' debts (Shaomin & Jiang, 2020).

Risberg (2019) recognises that debt-trap diplomacy accusations are frequently exaggerated, often ignoring the positive implications of BRI. However, she also mentions that the lack of transparency in China's investments and loans contributes to increasing recipient countries' susceptibility to debt leveraging. She notes the use of 'coercive political and ideological tactics' (Risberg, 2019, p. 3) by China in Africa, as well as its military expansion and aggressive economic activities, but specifies that BRI offers valuable opportunities for African countries.

Thus, there are contrasting interpretations of BRI's purposes, based upon whether observers consider China's foreign policy to be aligned with liberalism or realism.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Realism

The realist school has been the dominant branch in IR for a long time. It has several sub-theories, which share a pessimistic view of IR and some fundamental assumptions. The first is that there is no actor that can guarantee a state's safety in the international context, as there is no authority above the sovereign state. Therefore, the international system is anarchic. The second is that, if change occurs, it tends to follow a repetitive trend. The third is that human nature is inherently selfish, with a desire for power in order to guarantee one's own safety. Similarly, for states, the accumulation of power is necessary to protect themselves in the anarchic international system (Elman, 2007).

The concept of "security dilemma", first developed by John H. Herz, is built upon such a worldview. It is at the basis of realism and refers to the fact that every individual or group, and thus states themselves, fears that it might be attacked and overpowered by other actors. To ensure their survival, states tend to accumulate power, which in turn appears threatening to other countries. Thus, they do the same, beginning a vicious cycle of power accumulation on both sides, increasing instability. Despite the possibility that countries may cooperate and form alliances to face common challenges, there will always be conflicts due to the security dilemma (Herz, 1950). Therefore, agreements to limit power on each side, such as the ones resulting from disarmament negotiations, are destined to fail. According to Herz, realism is characterised by an awareness of the effects of sovereign states' concern with security and the power competition at the international level, sometimes neglecting political ideals (Herz, 1950).

Another core conception of realism is that states do not focus on absolute gains, but rather on relative ones. This hinders cooperation efforts, as it means that a state is not only concerned with its own gains but also, and mainly, with the difference between them and those of others. States will refuse deals that benefit their counterparts more, so the issue is the distribution of gains, as states want to maximise their own power because of the implications of anarchy in the international system (Snidal, 1991; Waltz, 1979). Based on the concept of zero-sum game, a state's gain in power is seen by realists as a threat to others, as demonstrated by the security dilemma, where one's gain is another's loss (Rousseau, 2002). Thus, realists generally believe cooperation between states to be a rare occurrence.

3.1.1 Classical Realism

Classical realists and their precursors, such as Thucydides and Machiavelli, find that international politics puts statesmen in a position where they have to set aside ethical considerations. This is due partly to human nature and partly to structural reasons. To Thucydides, states inevitably feel the need to subjugate their weaker counterparts, and cannot be blamed when they do, because moral ideals cannot be applied to international politics (Forde, 1992).

Similarly, Machiavelli states that it is only natural to want to conquer more. It is prudent to attack proactively, as threats are always impending and will make an appearance sooner or later. It is better for a state to be the first to act rather than wait for rivals to strike when they are more powerful. To preserve the existence of the state, it is necessary to adopt a long-term perspective, in order to be prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. In such a world, there is no just or unjust war, as aggression and defence overlap (Forde 1992).

Hobbes argues that people are mostly concerned with their own survival. Because they initially found themselves in a state of nature, without any rules to protect them, they were exposed to attacks from others and worried about their safety. In order to achieve ensure security, people gave up part of their freedom to the state and, to be able to guarantee collective safety, the state must necessarily be powerful (Waltz, 1959).

To classical realists, politics is a fight for power, with the aim of imposing one's preference on others (Cozette, 2008). Morgenthau claims that this is due to human nature, and that moral principles cannot ever be fully achieved because the world is made of contrasting interests that inevitably clash. At best, it is possible to find a temporary equilibrium. He indicates six principles of political realism (Morgenthau, 1948), summarised as follows:

- 1) Politics is dictated by objective laws, which are based on human nature. Human nature does not change, therefore neither do the laws of politics.
- 2) Political actors move according to their interests, defined in terms of power. Politics is its own field, not to be mixed with others such as economic and religion, or ethics. Good motives do not necessarily result in good foreign policy. Statesman may have selfless intentions, but their policies may still result in failure and cause harm to people. Actors moved by narrow and selfish motives may achieve successful policies that bring more virtuous and satisfactory results. Good foreign policy is guided by rationality, which "minimises risks and maximises benefits" (Morgenthau, 1948; p.12).
- 3) The definition of interest as power is universal and objective and does not change based on the temporal and spatial context. However, the type of interest that drives political choices is

based upon political and cultural circumstances. The meaning of power and the way it is to be used also depend on such factors.

- 4) Political action has moral significance, but there is a tension between morality and political success: general moral concepts and ideal propositions cannot be used to define political action without being “filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place” (Morgenthau, 1946, p. 14).
- 5) It is not possible to identify the moral principles that guide a specific state’s actions as the ones that govern the world.
- 6) Realism is deeply distinct from other schools of thought, as it maintains the autonomy of politics from other disciplines, such as law and economics.

3.2 Offensive vs. Defensive Realism

Neorealist scholars concur that the anarchic structure of the international political system gives rise to competition between states. However, some have a more pessimistic view than others. Offensive realists find security to be particularly limited, and conflict to be a common consequence. Defensive realists have a more moderate position, claiming that war can sometimes be avoided, and security is not necessarily so scarce. Waltz is considered the main exponent of defensive realism, whereas Mearsheimer is the principal advocate for the offensive approach (Hamilton & Rathbun, 2013).

3.2.1 Offensive Realism

Offensive realists see no possibility of increasing cooperation, not even by reducing transaction costs. Due to the inevitability of the security dilemma, no amount of additional information that reduces the costs of coming to an agreement can change a state’s preferences to the extent of making conflict less likely. Even when it is possible to change states preferences, only one of the sides will profit from it (Jervis, 1999). Therefore, states need to accumulate relative power to achieve security in the anarchic international system. This is similar to Waltz’s structural realism, but to Waltz there is a limit to states’ want for power (Snyder, 2002).

The biggest difference between offensive and defensive realists lies here: to the former, states always want to increase their power, whereas to the latter they want to obtain only the amount of power necessary to keep the equilibrium in the international system and not more. Where defensive realists believe that states want to maintain their power, offensive ones believe that they want to expand it. According to this perspective, any state’s aim is to become the hegemon, rather than just guarantee its own security. However, as states face obstacles that make it impossible to achieve

global hegemony, they have to settle for trying to achieve regional hegemony and stopping others doing the same, defeating potential competitors. States decide to act when it is most convenient, which is when potential gains surpass costs. Because they always want to expand more, states are inevitably going to clash (Snyder, 2002).

Mearsheimer sees all powers as revisionist actors that expect others to have the same intentions. This does not mean that states are constantly acting in an offensive manner, as sometimes they are bound to find themselves in the position where they have to defend themselves from other states' attacks, since each power seeks expansion (Snyder, 2002).

3.2.2 Defensive Realism

According to defensive realism, states cannot always tell what kind of situation they find themselves into, due to "political and perceptual biases" (Jervis, 1999; p. 49). When the lack of trust is too great to be resolved, conflict will ensue. Defensive realists are in-between offensive realists and neoliberals, in that they argue that cooperation depends on the nature of the relationship between states. When a state is dealing with an expansionist rival, the situation is closer to that envisioned by offensive realism. When the state is negotiating with an actor akin to itself, the neoliberal view, according to which fair and solid agreements are possible, prevails. Cooperation depends on states' real purposes and the gravity of the security dilemma in a given context (Jervis, 1999). To achieve cooperation, states must be willing to limit their own power to damage or exploit their counterparts.

Defensive realists believe that conflict can be reduced by: (1) increasing transparency, (2) having several smaller negotiations rather than a single large one, (3) making cooperation a more appealing option compared to defection. Cooperation is more likely when states expect their interactions to continue for a considerable time in the future and choose to act according to the principle of reciprocity, as well as when "both the gains from cheating and the costs of being cheated on are relatively low" (Jervis, 1999; p. 52). Excessive accumulation of power and offensive measures can be counterproductive, as they are likely to cause reactions from other states trying to restore balance, giving rise to conflicts (Snyder, 2002). According to offensive realists, states need to maximise their relative power to ensure their survival or benefits. For defensive realists, instead, a state's maximisation of power ends up reducing the security of others, eventually leading to conflict. They argue that states often act out of fear rather than a desire to increase their gains, and conflict is only inevitable when differences cannot be settled in any other way, for example with aggressive rivals (Jervis, 1999). Offensive realists find a positive correlation between security and power, thus, the more power a state has, the more secure it is. Defensive realists do not share this

view and believe that too much power can be just as damaging as too little (Hamilton & Rathbun, 2013).

3.3 Realist Perspectives on BRI

Realist theories have been employed to provide explanations for China's BRI engagement across regions and suggest possible courses of action by other powers that feel threatened by it. This section will explore how defensive realist interpretations of BRI contrast with offensive realist ones.

According to some offensive realists, with initiatives such as BRI, China aims to control its region, which makes a clash with the U.S. inevitable, as it challenges the country's relative power and engagement in the same area. During the Trump administration, officials such as the director of the White House National Trade Council, Peter Navarro, used offensive realist arguments to justify penalising economic measures against China (Kim, 2021).

However, the areas where BRI projects are more numerous are not so significant that they could tilt the balance in the international system decisively in favour of China, which offensive realists suggest is China's aim. Economic initiatives such as BRI do not remarkably increase China's "innovative capacity" nor its "relative material power vis à vis the United States" (Kim, 2021; p. 1423). First, it is not certain that these projects will significantly increase China's economic growth. Second, for China to be able to reach the level of material power that the United States hold, its economy should be strong enough to withstand domestic and international shocks. China still has internal distributional problems and a developing country economic structure, and reliance on foreign trade makes the country exposed to the negative repercussions of international shocks. Initiatives such as BRI are not likely to solve these issues. Third, BRI projects are expensive for China, and it is not certain that the gains will be greater than the costs. Finally, while China's economy has been growing faster than that of the U.S., it is unlikely that the gains from BRI will be greater than the annual growth of the American economy, which is still more advanced and resilient to shocks.

Further, there is not sufficient evidence to affirm that China could obtain military support from most of its BRI partners, and, if the economies of these countries improve, they may need less help from China and become less pliant to its interests (Kim, 2021).

Defensive realists argue that the principal reason for the development of BRI is to increase China's security by contrasting the U.S.' growing presence in the East Asian region and adjacent areas (Jalil, 2019). They do not believe that a conflict between the U.S. and China would be inevitable and find it unlikely due to the interdependence between the two: although significant

security competition exists, and the international system is anarchic, it would not be convenient for China to overthrow the existing international order. They also find a contradiction in Mearsheimer's offensive realist argument. He is concerned by the rise of China and believes that it is an aggressive power intending to become a hegemon in East Asia, and states that this is a threat to the United States. However, he also claims that it is impossible to become a global hegemon. Thus, China and the U.S. could, in theory, coexist as hegemons in their respective regions without having to engage in a conflict (Jalil, 2019).

Defensive realism appears to provide a more appropriate framework for this research because, while China has acted in line with an offensive realist worldview in the past, in recent years it has been more aligned with a defensive realist one. It improved its relations with neighbouring states, stopped actively supporting uprisings in foreign countries and lightened its revolutionary discourse. Although relations with countries such as India are still far from friendly, they have improved, and China has been making greater use of soft rather than hard power, with the exception of the Taiwan issue. To defensive realists, great powers seek to maintain the status quo and contain any possible security dilemma. In their perspective, China's foreign policy, including BRI, is aimed towards avoiding changes in the regional distribution of power rather than becoming a global hegemon (Jalil, 2019).

3.4 Liberalism

The liberal approach to International Relations also contains multiple interpretations, with some common assumptions.

The first one is that the domestic social context limits the scope of state action, and therefore the preferences of individuals, who organise themselves in groups to advocate for their interests and influence governments' choices. This entails the existence of a clash between different groups, whose preferences diverge. Based on this assumption, liberals come to three conclusions. First, politics is largely shaped by society. Second, progress and stability can only be achieved through institutions, which steer individual interests towards social objectives that benefit everyone, such as security and prosperity. Third, it is possible for society to evolve and improve (Moravcsik, 1992). The second assumption is that any government only represents one part of society and acts in the interest of those groups through institutions. Because governments do not necessarily represent the preferences of all citizens, liberalists find that different forms of government represent different interests to varying degrees. Every government system is more in line with the preferences of some groups rather than others. Such biases are not always evident but can nonetheless influence policies

and create “concentrations of power” that allow actors, inside and outside of the state, to exploit national political institutions for their own benefit (Moravcsik, 1992; p.10).

The third assumption is that state action depends on state preferences, and therefore international relations do too. International relations are linked to the degree divergence or convergence of state preferences, which, in line with the first assumption, reflect domestic preferences. The contrast with realism is most evident in the fact that, to liberals, it is what states want, rather than their power, that determines international politics. Domestic politics ultimately determines international relations, and states are not *inherently* convergent nor discordant. To liberalists, a state’s foreign policy is closely connected to domestic civil society (Moravcsik, 1992).

3.4.1 Liberal Idealism

Liberal idealism claims that it is possible to create a cooperative international system, and was therefore largely criticised by realists, which referred to it as ‘utopianism’. Liberal idealists argue that, beneath diverging and contrasting preferences, all people have the same fundamental interests, such as security and welfare (Wilson, 2011). The main exponent of liberal idealism was President Wilson, whose beliefs were summed up in the ‘14 Points’. He believed that international organisations should be used to keep states’ power under control through measures such as: (1) collective security, (2) open diplomacy, (3) disarmament, (4) ensuring the right to self-determination for all states, (5) economic openness, (6) regulation of colonial claims, (7) non-violent settlement of disputes. Liberal idealists assume that law, public opinion and ethics can prevail over the use of force and be used to create a more harmonious international system (Wilson, 2011).

Modern-day liberal idealists believe that it is possible, and desirable, to eliminate power competition and turn the world into what Deutsch called a ‘security community’, where international law prevails and states do not violate each other’s rights. In such a world, every state values the well-being of other countries’ citizens too. While earlier liberal idealists claimed that reason could be used to transcend anarchy through increased pressure from better informed public opinion, after the Cold War idealism evolved into a different perspective (Mearsheimer, 2005). Contemporary liberal idealists have shifted the focus from reason to discourse: to achieve a peaceful international system, the liberal argument must be the only one, not just the prevalent one. They believe that this is the only way to get people’s conduct to change, because “behaviour follows from beliefs” (Mearsheimer, 2005; p. 145). They find the long-time prevalence of realist discourse to have influenced people’s beliefs, by over-stressing the relevance of military security. Therefore, they argue that is necessary to change the way international relations matters are discussed and

approached. In line with this, the notion of security has been expanded to include not just military concepts, but environmental, social and health-related threats as well (Mearsheimer, 2005). Both early and contemporary liberal idealists believe in the possibility of collaboration and mutual aid among states, but their ideas about how to achieve a system in which that is possible diverge.

3.4.2 Republican Liberalism

Republican liberalists believe that states that are more representative of citizens' preferences are less likely to start conflicts. If a state only represents the interests of a small group of people within its society, then such group may advocate for aggressive behaviour that only benefits them. The preferences of a smaller group also tend to be more variable than those of a larger one (Moravcsik, 1992). They conclude that republican states are less conflictual among themselves than those with other types of government: democratic states' preferences tend to converge more, therefore they find themselves involved in less disputes with other democracies. While there can be divergence in the interests of different states, it is unlikely that a conflict will be approved by the majority of citizens. If they are all somewhat represented in governmental institutions, using war to achieve the objectives of a minority becomes more difficult (Moravcsik, 1992). Democracies usually avoid costly conflicts with states of similar power, and republican liberals believe that having more democracies in the international system would reduce interstate wars. They identify two main cases in which republican states may choose to go to war: self-defence and imposing "public order and market mechanisms for structuring private interactions" in other countries (Moravcsik, 1992; p.19). If the elites in power have aggressive preferences and are not bound by representative institutions and law, they can use power without restrictions. Therefore, autocratic states tend to be more aggressive, although republican liberalists recognise that this does not apply to every case (Moravcsik, 1992).

Democratic institutions are believed to stave off rent seeking behaviour from single groups, and they can also promote ideals and principles of non-violence, which the state then applies in foreign policy (Rathbun, 2010). Republican liberalism ties democracy with peace. It is based on Kant's philosophy, according to which democratic states can create a federation where they establish peaceful relations. Republican principles allow the state to be ready to face external threats and keep the aspirations of aggressive individuals under control, through representation and the law. While this does not eliminate conflict entirely, it makes states more careful. According to republican liberalists, democracies only go to war for "liberal purposes", i.e., to advance freedom, help their allies, or promote democratic ideals (Doyle, 1986; p. 1160). Republican liberalists only

claim that liberal states are unlikely to fight each other; they will still get into conflicts with non-liberal regimes.

3.4.3 Commercial Liberalism

Commercial liberalism underlines the benefits of economic relations with other states, which make violent conflict less desirable because of the material and economic damage it causes (Rathbun, 2010). Commercial liberalists believe that economic interdependence increases cooperation among states and indicate a positive relation between free trade and peace. When a solid and well-developed system of transnational markets is in place, commercial liberalists expect more peaceful relations. When there are protectionist measures in place, transnational economic relations are associated with an increase in the incidence of war (Moravcsik, 2013). There are three main reasons why.

First, economic progress makes citizens more reluctant to support a war because, by increasing their wealth, it gives them more to lose and more power within domestic society. Second, economic relations between states are connected with increased interstate communication, not only social but also cultural and scientific, increasing citizens' knowledge of common issues and favouring the spread of reforms. Third, economic prosperity is positively associated with democracy, as it contributes to political development. Therefore, more economically developed states are expected to be more pacifist (Moravcsik, 1992).

Liberals believe that if citizens have an incentive to cooperate with foreign actors because it increases their wealth, they will advocate for an increase in interactions with other states. Moreover, economic interdependence and the mobility of means of productions, know-how and labour, bind governments. When production processes are spread across borders and involve other states, governments' scope of action is limited and states relies heavily on international cooperation to reach their goals (Moravcsik, 1992). Thus, greater economic interdependence makes conflict more costly for governments and citizens both. Not only does it cause material damage to production means and useful infrastructure, it also severs valuable and convenient links between states. Finally, relations are expected to be more cooperative when different states produce "complementary goods", and more conflictual when they produce "identical, generic or import-competing" ones (Moravcsik, 1992).

3.5 Liberalist Perspectives on BRI

According to neoliberal scholars, if China replaces the United States as the world's leading power, the liberal capitalist system will not be threatened by the change. In fact, it will benefit from it. Liberals believe that China does not have the capabilities, motives nor interest to overturn the international order in place. Liberal principles seem to fit with the official objectives of BRI indicated by President Xi's description of Chinese foreign policy goals: cooperation in order to achieve mutual gains, equality, mutual trust and reciprocity (Callahan, 2016).

China has been the main beneficiary of economic globalisation and has therefore been supportive of economic cooperation in recent years. China views economic interdependence as an opportunity (Callahan, 2016), and BRI contributes to its increase. However, liberal analyses do not fit with the fact that BRI-related financial operations have on occasion violated international financial regulations (Liu, 2021).

Not unlike idealist liberalism, President Xi's 'China Dream', at least formally, is about promoting "peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes" (Callahan, 2016; p.10). BRI is presented as a way to connect Asia, Europe and Africa and is part of broader efforts to bring China closer to its neighbouring countries and regions, economically and security-wise. Liberalists claim that rising powers exhibit a cooperative behaviour in the international system and, since the early 2000s, have been arguing that China does not have revisionist intentions (Liu, 2021). The liberalist theory of interdependence argues that close relations between states and a complex network to further different forms of exchange contribute to the development of a stable peace.

Through initiatives like BRI, China contributes to its partners economic growth, which according to a liberalist perspective, in the conditions of complex interdependence in the current international system, in turn contributes to China's pursuit of its own growth and foreign policy objectives. China's BRI activities have furthered economic interdependence and international cooperation, as China has used them to expand its partnerships with a number of countries. Moreover, liberalists point out that China has stated its commitment to not get involved in other states domestic affairs nor pursue a hegemonic position (Lairson, 2018).

3.6 Propositions

The fundamental disagreement between realist and liberalist interpretations of China's intentions is about whether China intends to use BRI to expand its power at the expense of its partners, or whether it merely intends to engage in mutually beneficial economic and strategic cooperation. A

realist and a liberalist proposition will be presented in the next two sub-sections, based on the theoretical framework presented above.

Table 1 sums up the central notions of realist and liberalist theories and how they are used to explain BRI.

Table 1: IR Theories and BRI Explanations

Key Concepts of Realist Theory	BRI Interpretation	Key Concepts of Liberalist Theory	BRI Interpretation
Competition	China is motivated by its rivalry with the US	Cooperation	BRI is a collaborative initiative
Distribution of power	China seeks to become a hegemon	Mutual gains	Host countries and China both obtain something valuable from BRI
Security	China seeks to increase domestic security (energy security, border stability, development of inland regions)	Economic interdependence	BRI creates closer economic ties and new commercial partnerships
Zero-sum gains	China wants to take advantage of its partners to improve its own position and serve its national interests	Reciprocity	There is mutual respect between China and its partners
Conflictual relations between states	China is an aggressive power that seeks expansion to the detriment of its partners	Mutual trust	China advocates for non-interference in internal affairs

3.6.1 Realist Propositions

According to realist analyses, China has established and expanded BRI in order to increase its influence, especially in strategic and neighbouring areas. Defensive realists believe that states aim to increase their power, but in order to increase their security rather than to become hegemons. As, based on existing literature, this appears to be more in line with China’s behaviour in foreign policy matters than offensive realist arguments, the following propositions have been formulated:

RP1: *“China feels threatened by the growing military American presence in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. China’s BRI engagement in Kenya is part of a broader effort to establish its control over neighbouring regions and strategic areas”*

RP2: *“China does not strive to gain a position of prominence in African countries in order to become a global hegemon. China’s BRI partnership with Kenya has defensive purposes and serves to increase China’s security by providing access to energy resources”*

3.6.2 Liberalist Propositions

From a liberalist perspective, China has developed BRI not as a means to take advantage of weaker states, but rather to tighten relations with existing partners and find new ones. Based on commercial liberalism, China has no interest in aggressive policies, because economic cooperation and closer institutional ties are expected to be more advantageous than a hostile foreign policy. At the 2017 Belt and Road Forum, China stated its interest in guaranteeing an open economy and free trade (Jalil, 2019). Consequently, the following propositions have been formulated:

LP1: *“China’s partnership with Kenya within BRI does not have military purposes. It is driven by an interest in economic cooperation and is advantageous for both countries”*

LP2: *“China’s BRI is not motivated by revisionist intentions. BRI projects in Kenya do not threaten the international liberal order but rather reinforce it”*

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Congruence Analysis

This research will employ the congruence method to analyse the case study, as it makes it possible to thoroughly inspect which, of two different theories, can better explain a phenomenon.

Three main steps are involved in a congruence analysis: (1) comparing empirical observations with a first theory, (2) comparing empirical observations with a second theory, (3) confronting the results obtained in the first two phases to establish each theory's "comparative merits". When results are used to determine which theory is more appropriate to provide an elucidation on the case study, as will be done in this thesis, the approach used is referred to as the "competing theories approach" (Blatter & Haverland, 2014, p. 204). Because the most relevant theories in the context of BRI are realism and liberalism, which are based upon opposing assumptions and have contrasting views, such an approach appears more fitting than the so-called "complementary theory approach" (Blatter & Haverland, 2014, p.145).

4.2 Case Selection

In a congruence analysis, it is important to choose a case that displays a clear connection to the selected theories (Blatter & Haverland, 2014). Therefore, it is worth explaining more in detail why Kenya has been chosen for this research.

The decision is based upon the country's significance within China's BRI activities, as well as the diversity of China's interests in the country. Kenya is also an interesting case because it has a strategic position and natural resources, which links the projects to the realist branch of IR. At the same time, these aspects have been mentioned in liberal analyses focused on China's plans for economic cooperation and international trade. Thus, it provides a suitable start for a thorough study on the appositeness of the contrasting theories.

The case appears promising for generalisation, at least in the African context, because of the similarities Kenya shares with many other developing countries involved in BRI, namely its strategic potential for China, for geographical and energy-related reasons, and its economic development level. Kenya also has a political situation not dissimilar to that of many other African countries, in that it is formally a democracy but, after the independence, it has been governed by the same leader for decades, then succeeded by his son (Collins, 2018). While not many other African governments have witnessed a direct father-son succession (Songwe, 2015), autocratic regimes are still in place in many African countries (Felter, 2021). This is not unlike Kenya's de facto state of

affairs, as the country’s political context is characterised by electoral fraud, militarisation of public services and security, corruption and political interference in media (Mutunga, 2020).

4.3 Selection of Theories

The focus of this thesis is on the two principal mainstream IR theories, because of their prominence in the BRI debate. After having provided an overview of some fundamental realist and liberalist sub-theories, one for each of the two schools has been selected based on its relevance for this research. Introducing different existing sub-theories and the fundamental assumptions of realism and liberalism is necessary in order to lay out the key concepts used to develop propositions, and to assume their plausibility (Blatter & Haverland, 2012).

The two sub-theories have been selected after taking into account both the official framing of BRI projects by the Chinese and Kenyan governments and existing literature on the topic. Defensive realism has been chosen after having excluded offensive realist assumptions. It maintains that China is seeking greater engagement in areas such as the Indian Ocean in response to foreign involvement, to increase its own security. Commercial liberalism has been chosen based on arguments which instead suggest that cooperation and economic growth are the main objectives of BRI.

4.4 Operationalisation

For each proposition, the key concepts derived from the theoretical framework have been used to create indicators, in order to assess whether the evidence found is in line with the propositions.

4.4.1 Operationalisation of RP1

The first defensive realist proposition is: *“China feels threatened by the growing military American presence in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. China’s BRI engagement in Kenya is part of a broader effort to establish its control over neighbouring regions and strategic areas”*

Table 2: Operationalisation of the First Defensive Realist Proposition

	Concept	Indicator
1	U.S. military presence	The U.S. engage in military activities in East Africa and the Indian Ocean
2	China feels threatened	American activities in Kenya and neighbouring areas could damage China’s economy and security
3	Control over crucial areas	Kenya is in a strategic position for China’s national interests

For Indicator 1, the development of U.S. military operations and the extent of American military involvement in East Africa, as well as the Indian Ocean will be analysed. The years right before and since the launch of BRI will be considered. The economic size of U.S. military assistance to African countries and the nature of American military engagement in the continent over the years will be explored.

For Indicator 2, the analysis will be focused on whether any American military activities in the region in question pose a threat to Chinese commercial and security interests. The number and location of US military bases will be taken into account, as well as eventual increases in the deployment of US troops over the years and their purposes.

For Indicator 3, research will be centred around the strategic importance of the East African region and the Indian Ocean for China’s domestic security. It will be investigated whether its BRI partnership with Kenya has potential strategic benefits for China related to the country’s location.

4.4.2 Operationalisation of RP2

The second defensive realist proposition is: *“China does not strive to gain a position of prominence in African countries in order to become a global hegemon. China’s BRI partnership with Kenya has defensive purposes and serves to increase China’s security by providing access to energy resources”*

Table 3: Operationalisation of the Second Defensive Realist Proposition

	Concept	Indicator
4	Defensive purposes	BRI projects in Kenya contribute to China’s national defence
5	Energy security	BRI projects in Kenya contribute to China’s efforts to increase its energy security

China imports many mineral and energy resources from Africa which could potentially be used for domestic security. For Indicator 4, data and information about Kenya’s involvement in China’s procurement of materials that can be used in the military industry will be examined. For Indicator 5, the focus will instead be on China’s oil, gas and coal imports, the three main sources of energy for the country.

4.4.3 Operationalisation of LP1

The first liberal proposition is: “China’s partnership with Kenya within BRI does not have military purposes. It is driven by an interest in economic cooperation and is advantageous for both countries”

Table 4: Operationalisation of the First Liberalist Proposition

	Concept	Indicator
6	Non-military initiative	BRI projects in Kenya are not driven by military interests
7	Economic drivers	BRI projects in Kenya have predominantly commercial purposes
8	Mutual benefits	BRI projects do not bring economic and commercial gains only to China, but also to Kenya
9	Shared decisional power	Kenya has a say in the development and execution of the projects, China is more cooperative than assertive

For Indicator 6, information about the nature and objectives of BRI projects in Kenya will be gathered. In addition to this, it will be inquired whether projects that are not officially military-related could nevertheless be exploited by China for military purposes.

For Indicator 7, China’s economic motives in its BRI partnership with Kenya will be analysed, and the extent to which BRI projects in Kenya are used by China to achieve its commercial interests.

For Indicator 8, it will be researched whether BRI projects benefit both Kenya and China or only the latter.

For Indicator 9, the information analysed will be about how equal the collaboration between China and Kenya is, and how much decisional power Kenya has over the projects that China chooses to finance.

4.4.4 Operationalisation of LP2

The second liberalist proposition is: “China’s BRI is not motivated by revisionist intentions. BRI projects in Kenya do not threaten the international liberal order but rather reinforce it”

Table 5: Operationalisation of the Second Liberalist Proposition

	Concept	Indicator
10	Lack of revisionist intentions	BRI projects in Kenya do not damage the U.S. or threaten their supremacy
11	Reinforcement of the existing international order	China acts according to core liberal principles in the development and execution of BRI projects in Kenya

For Indicator 10, it will be researched whether any BRI projects in Kenya interfere with American economic and military operations in Africa. It will be investigated whether such initiatives are compromising the U.S.' security and commercial partnerships and predominance in strategic areas in the region.

For Indicator 11, it will be examined whether BRI projects are realised in the respect of values at the basis of the liberal international order, such as respect of the security of individuals, human rights and the rule of law.

4.5 Data Collection

To carry out this research, data will be collected from different sources. Government publications and statements from Chinese and Kenyan authorities will be employed. However, as these sources may be biased or not completely transparent, articles by scholars from different countries will also be analysed, as well as official documents from international institutions and organisations. News articles and reports written by experts with experience on the topic and regions in question will also be taken into account, as well as studies carried out by think-tanks. While Kenyan and Chinese sources tend to be overly positive, Western sources may be overly negative, due to the widespread hostility towards the initiative among some governments. Therefore, sources will be chosen as critically as possible, and efforts will be made to use Western and Kenyan and Chinese ones in equal measure, in order to conduct a balanced and objective study.

4.6 Validity

When considering the validity of an analysis, a distinction is made between internal and external validity.

Internal validity refers to the reliability and trustworthiness of results, that is, how confident one can be that the results are accurate. This should be easier to achieve in small-N studies, where the analysis is more intensive. However, there are potential issues due to the subjectivity of the indicators used in qualitative analyses, which means that the research cannot be conducted in the same way by other authors. In addition to this, measurement errors have a more significant impact in a case study, but are easier to identify due to the intensive nature of the research (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). External validity, on the other hand, refers to the applicability of the results to other cases. In other words, it is the extent to which they can be generalised. Small-N research usually entails a more restricted external validity compared to large-N research, due to the extremely limited number of cases. However, generalisation is still possible for similar cases

(Blatter and Haverland, 2012) and, as explained in section 4.2, Kenya has considerable potential for generalisation, because of its similarities with other African countries participating in BRI, especially the East African region.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS

5.1 First Defensive Realism Proposition

5.1.1 U.S. Military Presence in East Africa and the Indian Ocean

In 2011, President Obama launched the ‘Rebalance to Asia’ plan, in order to establish closer economic, socio-cultural, and security relations. The U.S. administration was largely motivated by the intent to contrast China’s fast rise and its dominant position in Asia. However, the initiative involved South Asian countries and the Asia-Pacific region (Galace, 2016) rather than Africa or the western Indian Ocean. Furthermore, during the Obama administration, the highest U.S. security assistance spending remained allocated to European and MENA countries (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). *Table 6* compares American assistance disbursements for peace and security to Europe, MENA countries and Sub-Saharan Africa, during the Obama presidency.

Table 6: U.S. Peace & Security Assistance Disbursed during the Obama Administrations, in US\$

U.S. Assistance	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Sub-Saharan Africa	354.5M	317.5M	448.6M	515.9M	668.2M	410.6M	694.4M	540.8M
MENA	8.995B	6.704B	6.37B	6.381B	5.153B	4.459B	6.503B	9.053B
Europe and Eurasia	1.177B	1.043B	1.105B	995.2M	864.5M	501.4M	418.7M	660.8M

Note. Figures in bold refer to the years immediately preceding the announcement of BRI (2013) and Kenya’s entry in the initiative (2017). Data was retrieved from the U.S. government’s Foreign Assistance website

In the two years right before Kenya formally joined BRI, U.S. military expenditure in Sub-Saharan Africa increased. Compared to the MENA region, security aid to Sub-Saharan Africa was still significantly lower, as in the years preceding the launch of BRI, but in 2015 it surpassed spending in Europe and Eurasia, mostly due to peacekeeping operations (Husted et al., 2020).

During the Trump administration, the ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy’ saw the U.S. announcing its intention to expand cooperation with Japan, India, Australia, South Korea, ASEAN and Mekong states, as well as Taiwan (U.S. Department of State 2019). One of the objectives was to contain China, which was said to “undermine the conditions that have promoted stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific for decades” (U.S. Department of State, 2019; p. 21). Compared to the ‘Rebalance to Asia’, the new strategy expanded the range of action to include the Indian Ocean as well (Chen, 2018). The U.S. started gradually increasing military engagement in the Indian Ocean in the 2000s. Before that, there was not a coherent strategy for the Indian Ocean, but rather the U.S. would formulate ad-hoc approaches when necessary. The reason is linked to the fact that it is a crucial area for trade and the transport of fossil energy resources (Erickson, 2010). Therefore, it has remarkable geo-political importance and controlling key routes provides a significant power. In particular, the U.S. has an interest in (1) ensuring the safety of the so-called ‘sea lines of communication (SLOCs)’, the key routes taken by cargo and military ships, (2) contrast terrorist groups’ activities and (3) ensuring that a ‘hostile power’ does not take control (Erickson, 2010; p. 218). It is worth noting that, although the United States do not rely heavily on fossil fuels from such area, many of their Asian allies and commercial partners do, which contributes to explain the U.S.’ involvement.

The Horn of Africa was included in the key areas indicated in the U.S. Maritime Strategy published in 2007 (Erickson, 2010) and the Africa Command (AFRICOM) was established in the same year, becoming active in 2008. According to the official website, AFRICOM “strengthens security forces and responds to crises in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity” and employs about 2000 people, with the programs being managed through Offices of Security Cooperation and Defense attaché offices in about 38 countries. Further, AFRICOM has officers in the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (United States Africa Command, 2022). Thus, the U.S. has a significant military footprint throughout Africa, including in East Africa. This verifies Indicator 1.

5.1.2 Potential Threat Represented by U.S. Military

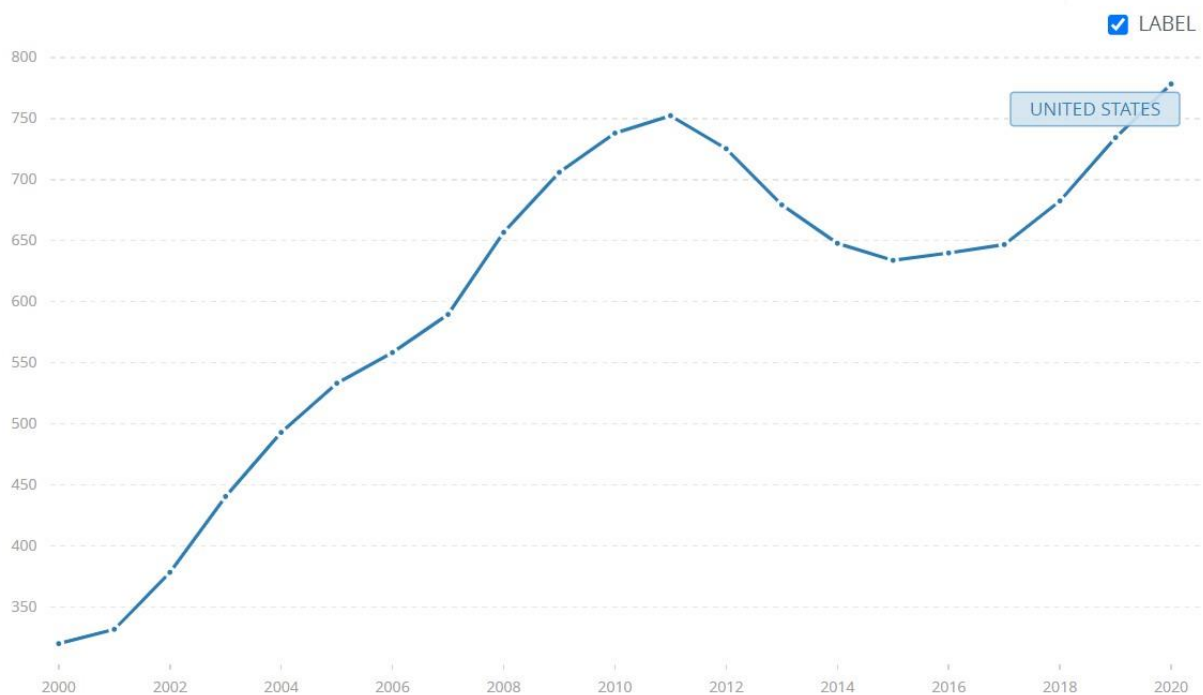
Operations to Chinese Interests

Compared to previous years, in the 21st century, American military supremacy has started to waver due to: (1) the U.S.’ involvement in conflict in the Middle East (2) military expenditure cuts with the aim of reducing federal deficit, (3) obstacles to investment in new technologies and procurement of more modern equipment and (4) a commitment to advancing the liberal order that has become too vast and expensive (Townshend et al., 2019). Thus, while the U.S. military remains the most

powerful in the world (Armstrong, 2022), it is objectively not as threatening to China as it was in the past, especially since China’s military capacity and equipment is already being expanded and modernised to protect China’s interests abroad (Nantulya, 2022; Ashraf, 2017).

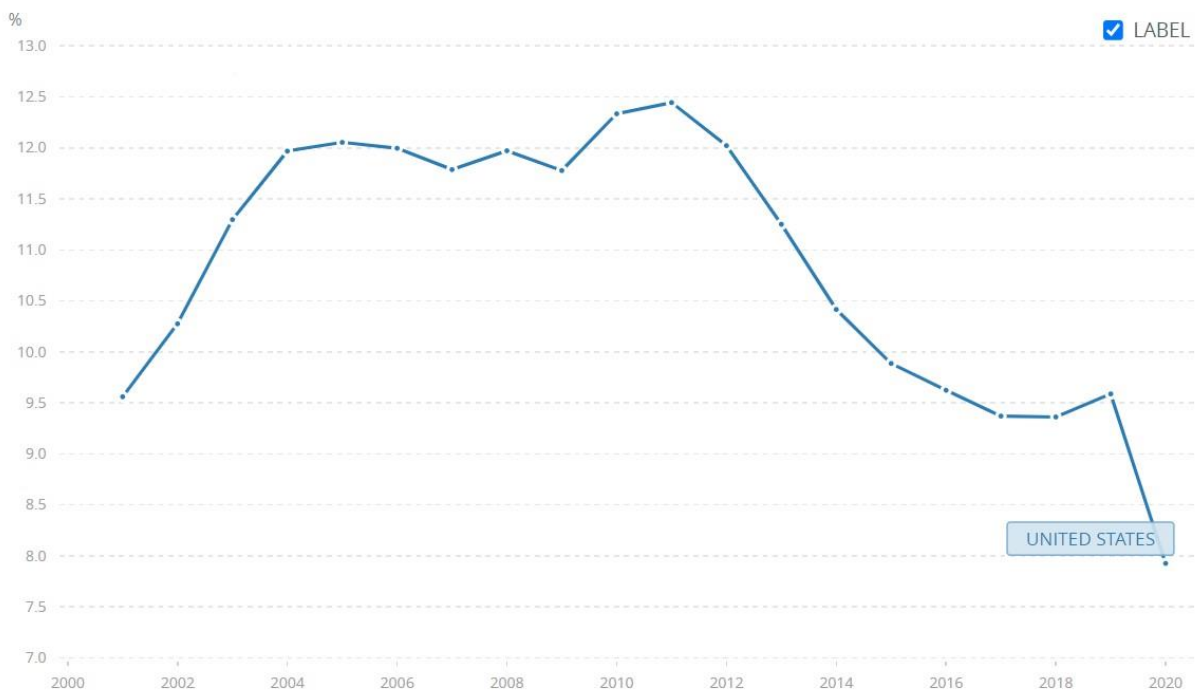
Figure 1 shows an increase in U.S. military expenditure after 2001, but this can largely be linked to the so-called “War on Terror” led by the United States after 9/11 (Kosiak, 2003; Crawford, 2021). Further, the African continent has not been considered a “strategic priority” by the U.S. in the years preceding China’s launch of BRI (Allen, 2018; p. 660). When, in the early 2000s, the continent became more relevant for the U.S., strategically and commercially, the latter started increasing military aid to the former, but still did not spend a remarkable percentage of its military assistance on African countries (Allen, 2018), as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 1: U.S. Absolute Military Spending in the 21st Century, in US\$ Billion



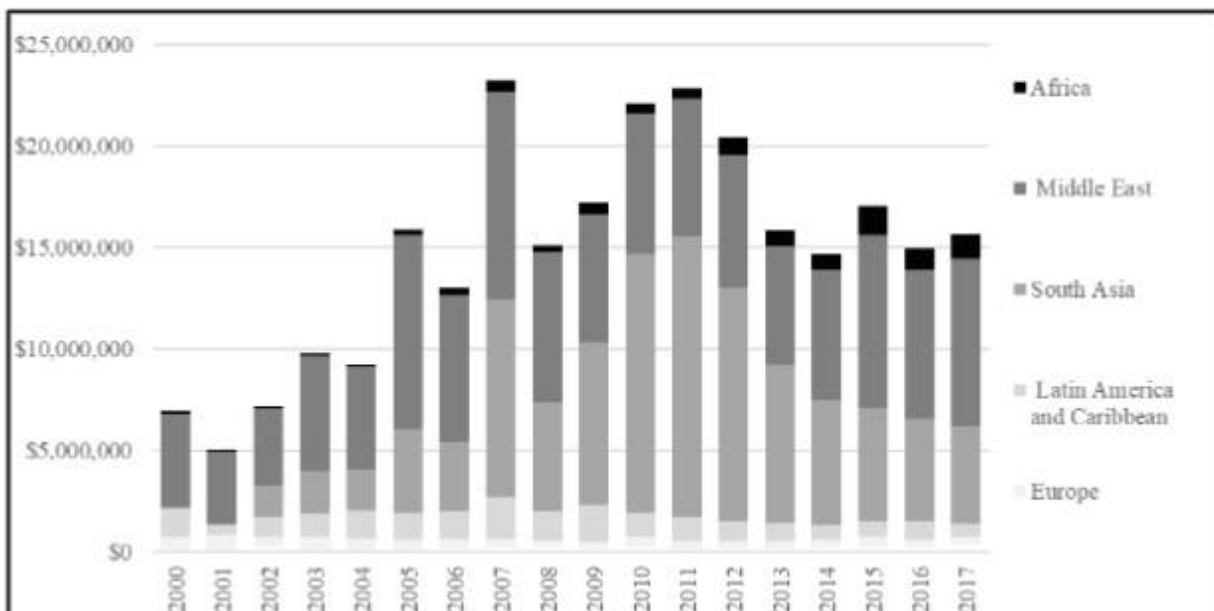
Note. Retrieved from World Bank (2022)

Figure 2: U.S. Military Expenditure as % of Total Government Spending in the 21st Century



Note. Retrieved from World Bank (2022)

Figure 3: U.S. Military Aid Distribution



Source: Center for International Policy, "Security Assistance Monitor" (Center for International Policy, Washington, DC, 2011).

Note. Retrieved from Allen (2018)

While the Pentagon has stated that the United States only have one military base in Africa, Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, there are 15 ‘enduring locations’ and 12 ‘contingency locations’ in the continent, the majority in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (Turse, 2020). Enduring locations provide strategic access to advance U.S. interests and allow the military to confront existing or future challenges. Contingency locations are instead intended for temporary operations (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2019). AFRICOM documents from 2019, made public in 2020, show 29 bases in the continent, in 15 different countries, including two in Kenya (Turse, 2020), and U.S. Special Operations Forces activity in several African countries, again including Kenya (Turse et al., 2020). An investigation conducted by the Mail & Guardian revealed that the U.S. intend to build four new military bases in Djibouti, Kenya and Niger (Turse, 2020). However, the documents are from 2018 and, because the information was previously classified, it is unclear whether these plans preceded China’s BRI involvement in Kenya and could have motivated it.

Moreover, the bases are mostly used to contrast terrorist activities and train African personnel (Turse et al., 2020), which does not harm China’s commercial and security interests, but rather makes the region safer.

During the Obama administration, Xi Jinping did not openly convey apprehension about American military activities in the Indian Ocean. Instead, in a joint statement from 2015, both presidents affirmed their interest in cooperation. Xi Jinping stated that it had been agreed that the American and Chinese military were to collaborate and work more closely together. He mentioned disagreements and discussions about the Asia-Pacific region, but not the Indian Ocean. As for Africa, President Xi stated that the U.S. and China were planning on collaborating on “food security, public health system establishment, emergency response, and disaster reduction” and to “help developing countries to achieve common development” (White House Press Secretary Office, 2015).

In recent years, the U.S. has been trying to limit China’s rise and its increasingly active engagement in the Pacific and Indian Ocean (Ashraf, 2017). During the Trump administration, China has often been described as a menacing adversary of the U.S. (Warren & Bartley, 2020). China has criticised the hostile rhetoric and actions against China by the U.S (Ashraf, 2017). However, by the time Trump took office, BRI had already been launched and China was already starting to finance infrastructural projects in Kenya, therefore it could not have motivated it.

President Obama, who was in office when Xi Jinping became president and when BRI was launched, had expressed concerns about China’s military modernization and growing power, and developed the ‘Rebalance to Asia’ strategy. However, said strategy was strongly focused on the Pacific Ocean, in particular the South China Sea, rather than the Indian Ocean. Throughout his

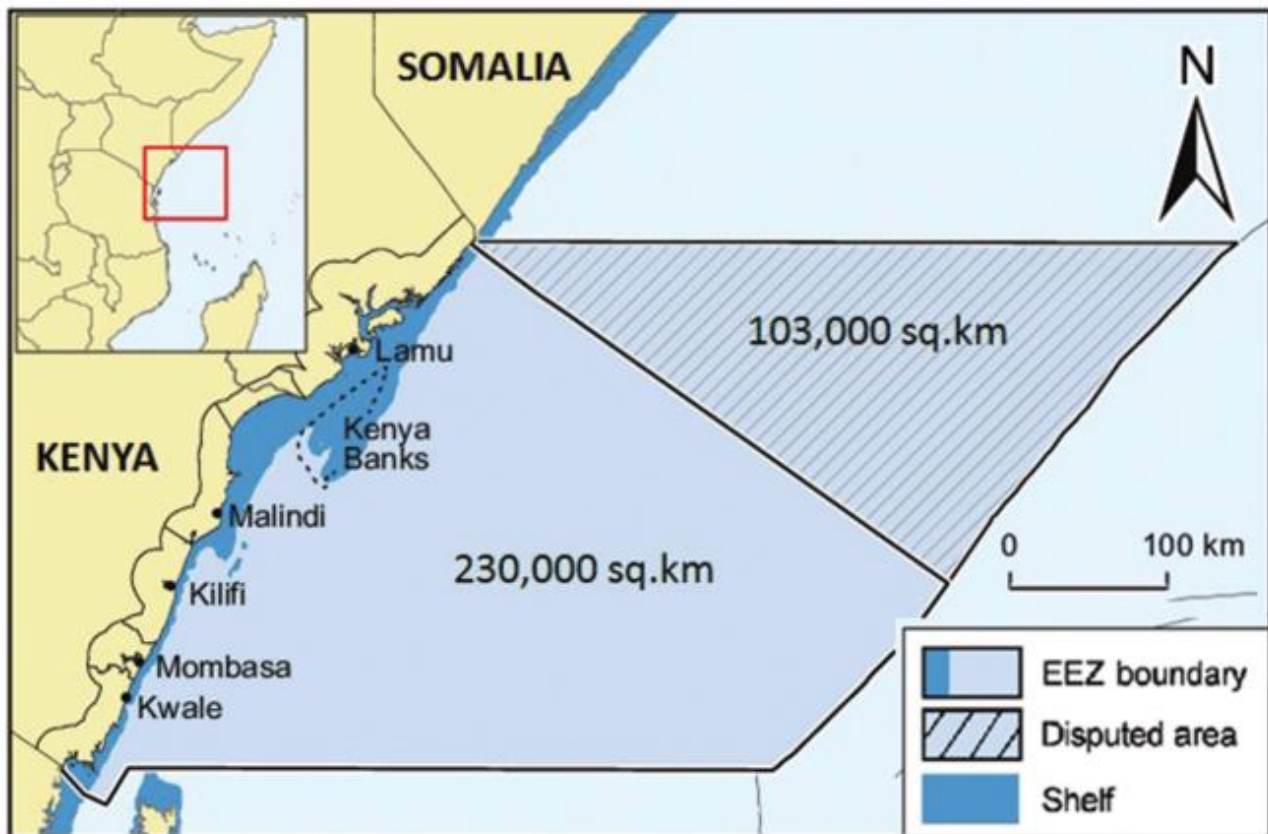
presidency, he also maintained a dialogue with Xi Jinping and often stressed the U.S.' interest in Sino-American cooperation (Warren & Bartley, 2020). Thus, the U.S. did not adopt a menacing rhetoric during the Obama administration. Finally, despite disputes in the South China Sea, there were no clashes about the Indian Ocean that could motivate China's growing involvement in Kenya. Therefore, Indicator 2 is not verified.

5.1.3 Chinese Strategic Interests in East Africa and the Indian Ocean Region

The Horn of Africa has historically been under Western control. A strong position in such area can grant a country control over security and the maritime trade routes that link Asia, Africa and Europe (ZiroMwatela & Changfeng, 2016). The expansion of ports on the Indian Ocean within BRI has been suggested by analysts of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Military Transport Academy as a way of creating alternative sea routes to the ones that go through the American-controlled Strait of Malacca (Nantulya, 2022). PLA analysts have expressed concern for the security of the Indian Ocean, and called for action to ensure the safety of strategic sea lanes, due to China's reliance on maritime transport for trade (Yue, 2013). These include the Indian Ocean, through which the world's most critical routes for trade and oil transport pass, connecting the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe (Ashraf, 2017).

In relation to this, BRI has been linked to China's 'String of Pearls' strategy. The term refers to how China has been increasingly building infrastructure in countries around the Indian Ocean, to expand its influence in the region (Ashraf, 2017). Kenya's importance to China lies largely in its position on the Indian Ocean and, when it joined BRI, the country had an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of about 230.000 km², shown in *Figure 4*. EEZ refers to the maritime area whose resources a coastal state has jurisdiction over (Grant & Barker, 2009). In Kenya, this territory offers potential for exploration of hydrocarbon reserves, possibly including oil and natural gas, as well as for deep-sea mining (Odhiambo, 2020).

Figure 4: Kenya's Exclusive Economic Zone



Note. Retrieved from Le Manach et al. (2015)

Note. The disputed area has been divided between Kenya and Somalia by an International Court of Justice ruling in 2021 (BBC News, 2021)

Moreover, Kenya's SGR is to be connected to the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway. This would link the Kenyan project to China's activities in Djibouti, where China Merchant Holdings Intl. contributed to the financing of the Doraleh port. The Doraleh port is crucial to China's involvement in Africa, because of its position on the Red Sea. China imports most of its oil from Gulf countries, and the U.S. safeguards the chokepoint in the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Therefore, China would benefit from increasing its involvement and being able to ensure greater security in the region. Further, the port was built with the intention to establish a link between Djibouti and Ethiopia (Breuer, 2017), an important trading partner and investment destination for China (Chakrabarty, 2016). Given the instability of this region, due to security threats such as terrorism and civil wars (Gambino, 2020), China has an interest in connecting the most critical hubs with other ports in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, transport-related BRI projects in Kenya are strategically important for China.

The Mombasa port is to be connected to South Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda (Breuer, 2017) and is already connected to Malaba, in Uganda (Saleshie, 2022). China imports oil from South Sudan, but its ability to do so has been hindered by the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. Kenya also has economic relations with Uganda, which is located in the hinterland, and could therefore benefit from better connectivity between Uganda and Kenyan ports (Farooq et al., 2018). Based on World Bank data from 2013 to 2017, China most important imports from Rwanda and Burundi are minerals, from Uganda vegetable products and hides and skins. However, none of those countries were among China's main sources for such products, and never appeared in the ten principal import partners (WITS, 2022).

It can be concluded that, while connections with Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi are not particularly important for China's energy security interests, Kenya could provide a more secure route for the transport of oil from South Sudan, allowing China to increase its imports from East Africa. Thus, Indicator 3 is verified.

5.2 Second Defensive Realism Proposition

5.2.1 Importance of BRI Projects in Kenya for China's

National Defence

Many BRI projects in Kenya are transport-related, and China has been using the new BRI infrastructure to connect industrial and energy activities in landlocked African countries to the coast. Industrial projects include mineral processing activities (Venkateswaran, 2020) and many of the minerals China procures from Africa can be used in the defence industry.

According to World Bank data from 2010-2019, Kenya is not among China's 10 main sources of mineral imports, nor is any of its neighbouring states. However, throughout the whole period (including in the years between the launch of BRI and the beginning of Kenya's involvement in the initiative), Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole remained among the 10 main sources of minerals, metals and metal ores. For minerals and metal ores, the main source among Sub-Saharan countries was always South Africa; whereas for metals Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (WITS, 2021).

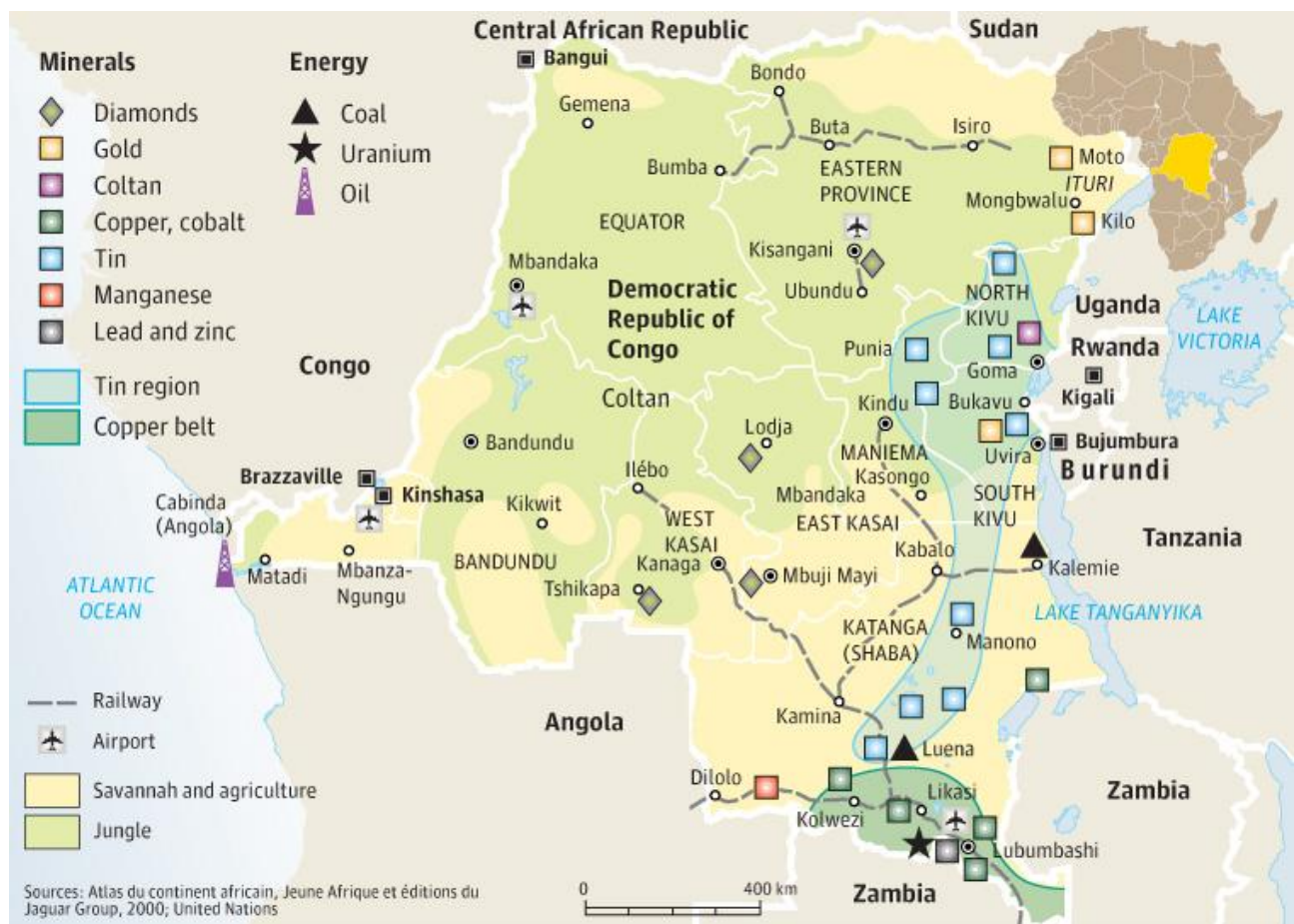
Because DRC is the closest to Kenya of the three, it is worth looking into China's involvement in its natural resources and whether it is linked with China's projects in Kenya.

After announcing in 2015 its intentions to become a leading country in the clean energy sector, China has bought the majority of cobalt mines located in DRC (Searcey et al., 2021), where 70% of

the world's cobalt reserves are (Todd, 2019). Cobalt is necessary to stabilise lithium batteries, and demand is expected to continue growing. China's interest in cobalt appears to be mostly related to the production of electric car batteries (Todd, 2019; Searcey et al., 2021), rather than military vehicles for defence purposes. China also exploits Congolese copper mines (Searcey et al., 2021; Landry, 2018). Copper is an important electricity conductor used in the energy sector, especially in renewable energy systems, and is used in electric car batteries as well (Patel, 2022). However, copper and cobalt are also essential for national defence. Copper is employed in the construction of warships, weaponry and aircrafts (Minerals Make Life, 2015), and cobalt is used in jet engines (McGroarty, 2015).

Most of DRC's resources are in the eastern part of the country, as shown in *Figure 5*. However, Congolese copper and cobalt are shipped to China from Tanzania and the route does not pass through Kenya (Africa News, 2022).

Figure 5: Geographical Distribution of Cobalt and Copper in DRC



Note. Retrieved from Le Monde Diplomatique (2006)

Given dangers and delays associated with the current route (Africa News, 2022), China could be enhancing Kenya transport infrastructure with the objective of finding alternative ones and ship from Mombasa or Lamu. Be that as it may, there is still no conclusive evidence suggesting that the minerals are still not imported primarily to build military equipment or vehicles.

Between 2013 and 2017, China’s main imports from Kenya were scrap copper, titanium ore, niobium, tantalum, vanadium and zirconium ore, with titanium ore being the principal one, as shown in *Table 7*. China also imported iron ore and other metals and minerals, but they represented a significantly smaller percentage, therefore have not been included in the table.

Table 7: Minerals and Metals Imported by China from Kenya as % of Chinese Total Imports, 2010-2020

Metals and Minerals	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Titanium Ore					34.8	28	38.4	33.9	21.9	36.5	36.5
Scrap Copper	6.59	15.8	13.7	28.2	9.91	0.2	0.2	0.25	2.76	0.3	2.7
Nobium, Tantalum, Vanadium and Zirconium Ore	1.68				6.82	20.8	23.6	25.9	23.7	22.7	21
Iron Ore	3.08	20.7	13.4	5.6					3.62	3.35	3.18

Note. Data retrieved from OEC (2022)

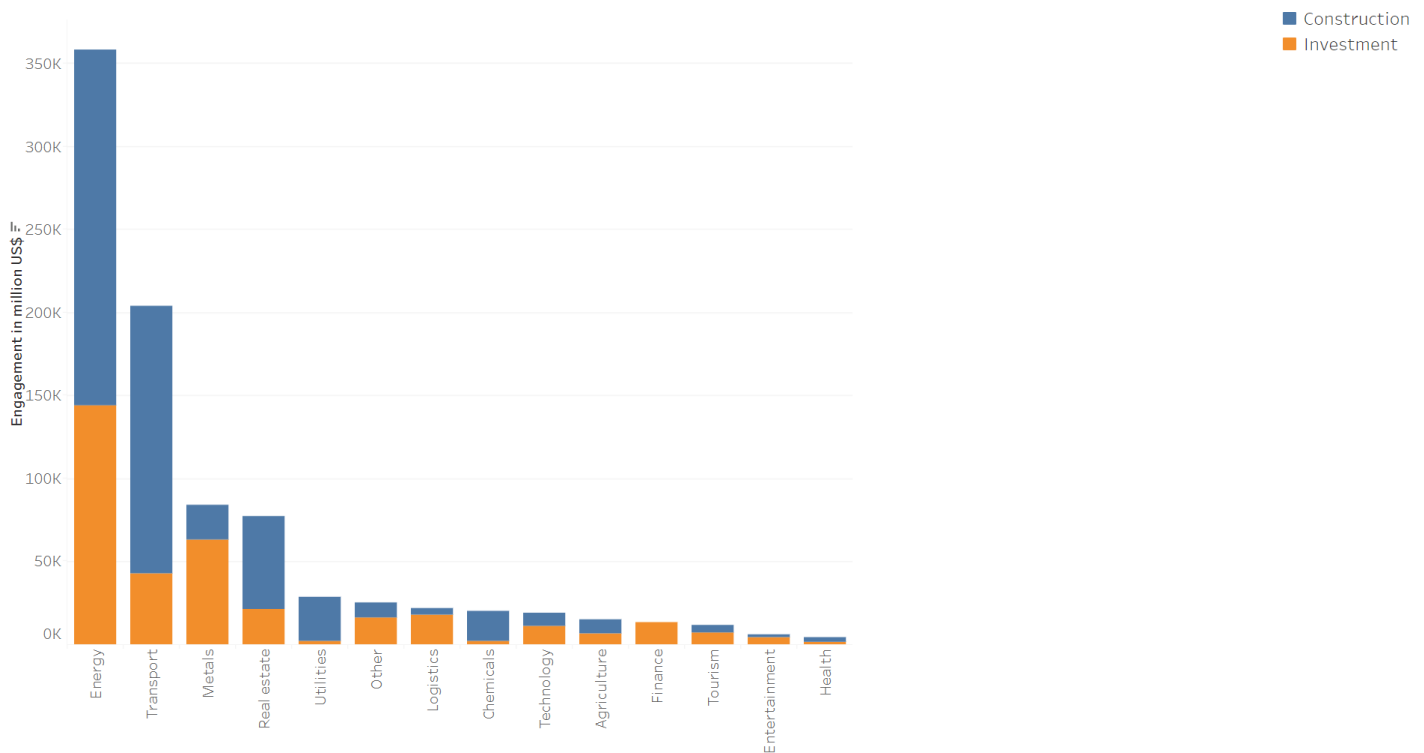
Note. The empty cells refer to years for which the value of imports of a specific mineral or metal was not indicated. This is due to them being grouped together with other mineral or metal products that represented a minor percentage of Chinese imports from Kenya. Figures in bold refer to the years immediately preceding the announcement of BRI (2013) and Kenya’s entry in the initiative (2017)

Titanium, which represents the biggest share of China’s imports from Kenya, has a number of uses in technological development. It is vastly used in the aerospace and military industry, as well as the automotive, naval, chemical and medical ones (Qiu & Guo, 2022). It is used to build nuclear submarines and minesweepers, but also for sport equipment, technological products for entertainment, architecture, to build cars and in aviation (Advanced Refractory Metal, 2022). Thus, it is necessary for the development of China’s defence industry, but also has a number of everyday uses. Therefore, Indicator 4 is not convincingly verified by the data.

5.2.2 Importance of BRI Projects in Kenya for China’s Domestic Energy Security

As *Figure 6* shows, energy is the most important sector in BRI. To sustain its economic growth, China has long imported oil and gas. In 2011, only two years before the announcement of BRI, China imported 59.8% of the petroleum used in the country, and 89% of natural gas. At the time, China was also the world’s biggest coal importer (Shi, 2015).

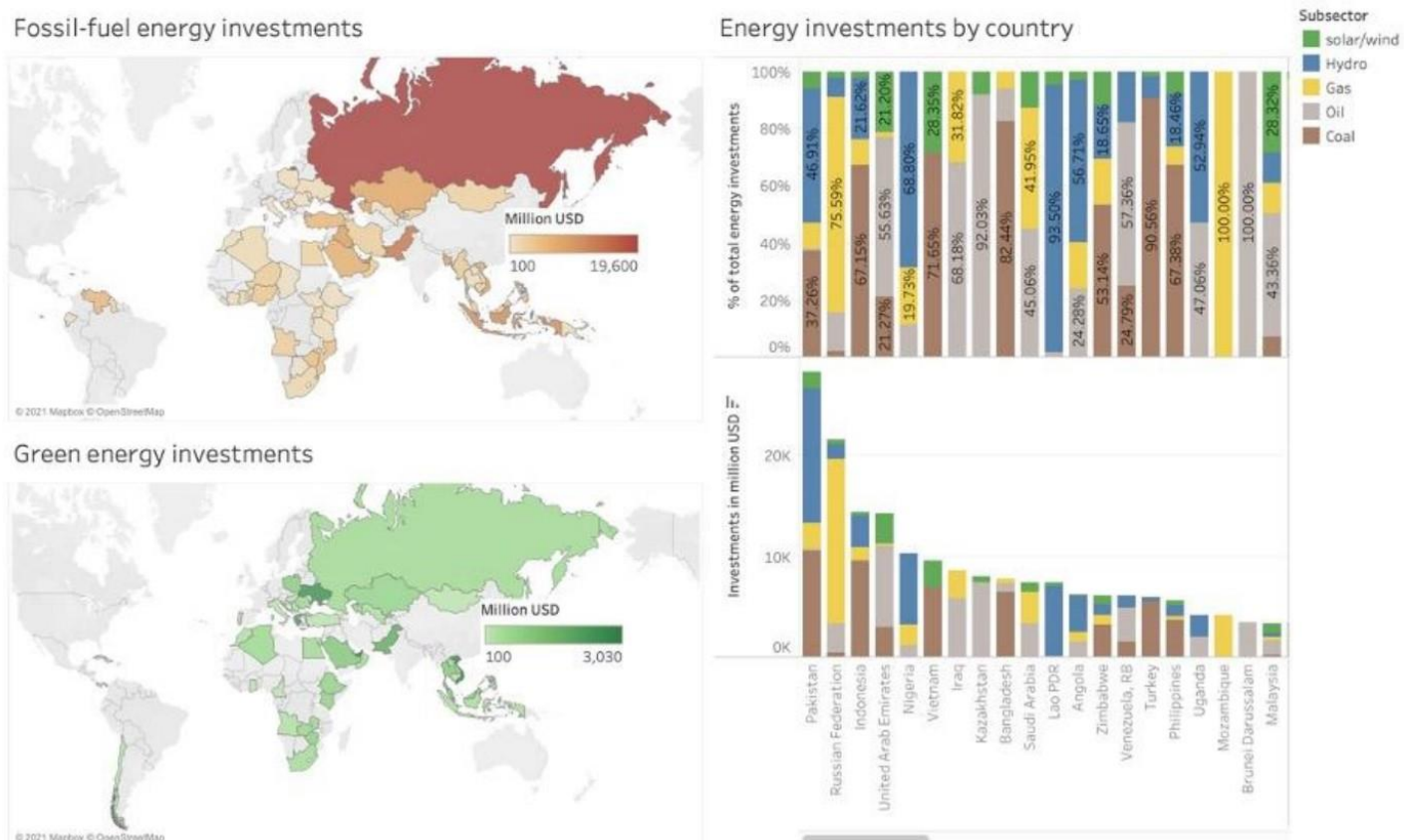
Figure 6: Sectors Covered by BRI Projects and Investment



Note. From Wang (2022).

A number of BRI projects in Kenya are related to the energy sector. As *Figure 7* shows, since BRI was first launched China has invested both in fossil fuel and green energy in Kenya, although the country is not one of the main beneficiaries of energy-related investment.

Figure 7: China's Energy Investment Distribution 2013-2020



Note. From Nedopil (2021)

China's oil imports have been progressively growing since the 2000s, and the country is now the world's biggest gross importer of crude oil, in addition to being the biggest net importer of petroleum and liquid fuels since 2013 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2018). While most of it comes from Middle Eastern countries, China also imports it from Africa. Kenya is not among its principal sources in the continent, the main one being Angola (Jaghory, 2022; U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2018), but started exporting oil to China in 2019 (Business Daily, 2019). Thus, both when BRI was first proposed and when Kenya joined it, Kenya was not a source of oil for China. It has since become one, although so far its contribution is not as significant as that of other oil exporters in the continent, nor is it geographically close to them.

In 2021, most of China's gas imports came from Australia, Turkmenistan, Russia, the U.S., Qatar and Malaysia (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2022). Similarly, in 2012, right before the announcement of BRI, its principal sources were Australia, the U.S., Qatar, Malaysia, Indonesia and Russia. Based on the data reported by the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), between 2012 and 2020, Africa remained a minor source of petroleum gas for China, compared to other continents, with the principal African providers being Nigeria, Angola,

Cameroon, Egypt, Algeria and Equatorial Guinea (OEC, 2021). Non-petroleum gas was mainly imported from the U.S., U.K., Angola, Australia and Singapore (OEC, 2021). The percentage of gas imported from Africa has not changed much since the launch of BRI, and African countries are still not China's principal gas sources, with the exception of Angola.

Further, Kenya was not included in the routes of oil tankers from Africa to Kenya before BRI (Brutlag, 2011), and China's concerns remain mostly related to avoiding the Malacca Strait (Sarker et al., 2018).

Of the African countries, Angola and Nigeria remain China's principal oil sources, with significant new investments in Uganda and Mozambique as well (Africa Oil Week, 2019). However, China is diversifying its oil and gas sources through BRI (Energy Capital & Power, 2017) and was involved in the construction of the new Kipevu oil terminal at the port of Mombasa. The project was handled by the China Communication Construction Company and is used both for oil (and gas) imports and exports from Kenya and East Africa more in general (Kitimo, 2022). The Chinese-financed pipeline connecting South Sudan and Uganda to Kenya is a means to secure oil exports from South Sudan (Alkhaloufi, 2021). Therefore, while Kenya and East Africa more in general are currently not China's main oil sources, the new infrastructure it is financing would suggest that China is trying to increase its oil imports from the region.

Despite having pledged to increase renewable energy use, China still relies heavily on coal and the LAPSSSET Corridor was initially supposed to include a coal power plant. While that is no longer being built, it would have been an additional source of coal for China. In September 2021, Xi Jinping pledged in the UN General Assembly to reduce China's coal use and construction of new coal plants abroad (Mukeredzi, 2021), but in previous years China had announced multiple times its intention to finance the construction of coal power plants abroad, especially through BRI, and invested a lot in coal, proposing several projects in Africa (Stanway & Brock, 2021; Hilton, 2019). Therefore, China did want to invest in coal in Kenya, and it is likely that it was planning to import part of it in order to cater to domestic needs. It can be concluded that Indicator 5 is verified.

5.3 First Commercial Liberalism Proposition

5.3.1 Potential Military Uses of BRI Projects in Kenya

Below, all BRI projects currently in progress or planned in Kenya have been inserted in a table, which defines the official purpose of each one. The information has been retrieved from a report by the Africa Policy Institute, an independent and not-for-profit pan-African think tank.

Table 8: BRI Projects in Kenya

Project	Type (as described by the Africa Policy Institute)
Nairobi Outer Ring Road improvement	Transport
Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR)	Transport
Lamu Port expansion	Logistics, Trade
Mombasa Port expansion	Logistics, Trade
Garissa Solar Power Plant	Energy
Naivasha Inland Container Depot	Logistics, Trade
LAPSSET Corridor	Trade, Tourism, Transport, Energy
Naivasha-Kisumu SGR Rail Line	Transport
Global Trade Center	Tourism, Housing, Trade
Africa Economic Zone (AEZ) Pearl River Center	Trade, Housing, Research
KEIDA Ceramics Factory	Construction, Trade, Education
Kibwezi-Usueni Highway	Transport
Senda FMCG project	Trade, Healthcare
Nairobi Expressway	Transport
China Wu Yi: Precast Building Materials Factory	Construction
Precast Supermarket	Construction
Karimenu II Dam	Domestic Water Security, Agriculture
Thwake Multi-Purpose Dam	Energy, Water Security, Agriculture
Kipevu Oil Terminal	Energy
Sino-Africa Joint Research Center	Research
Confucius Institutes at the University of Nairobi	Education, Research
Airborne Silk Road	Transport, Tourism
MCEDO Beijing Primary School	Education
Kenya-China Joint Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology	Research
National Optic Fiber Backbone Infrastructure (NOFBI)	Digital Infrastructure, Connectivity
Konza Data Center	Digital Infrastructure, Connectivity
International Languages Centre at Kenyatta University	Education
Kenyatta University Teaching, Referral & Research Hospital	Healthcare, Education, Research

Note. Information retrieved from Africa Policy Institute (2021)

The report did not mention any non-civil purposes for any of the projects, and those related to education, construction and renewable energy production are unlikely to have military uses for China. However, the improvement and expansion of certain transport infrastructure could be at least partially driven by militaristic motives, as ports and airports safeguarded by the host country in partner countries can be exploited in times of crisis to ensure supplies (Wuthnow, 2017).

China has denied claims that Kenya, along with other African countries, might be used to host Chinese naval bases. However, similar claims had previously been made about the Chinese naval base now present in Djibouti. In the Djibouti case, China created a “dual-use” base, which has both commercial and military applications (Nantulya, 2022).

Kenya was mentioned by the Army Military Transportation Academy, a Chinese higher education institution, among potential locations for a Chinese military base. The existence of debt to China and BRI infrastructure are among the factors “that may increase the likelihood of a location becoming a military logistics node” (Peltier, 2020; p.25), as is government support for Chinese presence. As Kenya satisfies those conditions, the Mombasa Port has been indicated, in a report prepared by defence analysts for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, as a likely location for a new Chinese base. Further, in 2019, China was able to employ a civilian cargo vessel for underway replenishment (UNREP) of naval ships. The container ship had previously stopped at the Mombasa port. UNREP is used to transfer fuel, food, ammunition and other supplies from one ship to another allowing the receiving vessel to remain at sea longer. Thus, even if China were not to create a formal naval base in Mombasa, it could still gain military benefits from the expansion of the port to host more container ships, as they can be used for refuelling and restocking naval ships at sea (Peltier, 2020). Therefore, Indicator 6 is not convincingly verified by the evidence.

5.3.2 Commercial Purposes of BRI Projects in Kenya

China has been Kenya’s principal trading partner since 2014. However, while most of Kenya’s imports come from China, Kenya only represents a minimal share of China’s total imports. The SGR is officially intended to improve transport of goods and boost the Kenyan economy, although so far that has not happened (Gu & Qiu, 2019). Before the Court of Appeal of Kenya ruled against it in 2020, the Kenya Ports Authority had established that all importers had to use the SGR for shipping (Bennon & Fukuyama, 2022), which would have made the new railway indispensable for Kenya’s trade.

Kenya’s position on the East coast of Africa also means that greater development of the country’s infrastructure provides better access to neighbouring landlocked countries, facilitating trade between them and non-African countries such as China (Johnston, 2018). Therefore, infrastructural projects were at least partially driven by China’s commercial interests. China is also using BRI to expand its e-commerce sector and BRI digital infrastructure projects allow China to expand its digital trade with African countries (Arcesati, 2021). E-commerce in Africa is growing steadily and Kenya is currently among the top three African e-commerce markets. This was already the case in

2017, when Kenya formally joined BRI, and China has become increasingly involved in Kenya's e-commerce since then (The Asian Banker, 2020).

Nevertheless, despite the existence of commercial interests and motivations behind China's extension of BRI to Kenya, economic cooperation is not the sole driver. As previously collected evidence demonstrates, China has energy-related and strategic interests in East Africa and its investment in the transport sector in Kenya is likely to be led by intentions to create dual-use infrastructure. Further, as of 2021, Kenya was not among China's 15 top trading partners (Workman, 2022), despite their BRI collaboration. According to data from the World Bank, since BRI's launch in 2015, Kenya has continued to represent a minimal percentage of China's imports and exports, including the years after Kenya joined BRI (WITS, 2022). The most recent data from the World Bank is of 2019, two years after the Mombasa-Nairobi SGR line was completed. The percentage of exports from China to Kenya was 0.20% of total Chinese exports, whereas imports from Kenya represented only 0.01% of total Chinese imports. Such numbers are very close to the import and export shares from 2015 and the following years (WITS, 2022), therefore BRI does not seem to have had a remarkable impact on non-digital trade between Kenya and China.

China has greatly increased its presence in Kenya's e-commerce sector, but only two of the main BRI projects in China are aimed at improving digital infrastructure and connectivity, the NOFBI and the Konza Data Center, as indicated in *Table 8*. At the same time, import and export trade between the two countries does not appear to have increased significantly since the launch of BRI. Thus, while there is certainly a commercial aspect to BRI projects in Kenya, evidence does not convincingly point to it being the predominant reason behind them, as commercial liberalist interpretations would suggest. For this reason, Indicator 7 is not verified.

5.3.3 Distribution of Benefits from Kenya and China's

Partnerships

According to Chinese governmental sources, BRI is the necessary response to low-quality or insufficient infrastructure in certain countries and a "mutually beneficial global value chain". BRI is said to contribute to development across regions and increase cooperation "to the benefit of all" (Belt and Road Portal, 2017; p.24).

In 2019, in order to repay loans to China Exim Bank (CEB), which financed the SGR, Kenya raised the Railways Development Levy, introduced in 2013, from 1.5% to 2%. This refers to a tax on imports to be paid by Kenyan citizens, initially only meant to contribute to the funding of the SGR but now also used to repay loans to CEB. The new tax and its recent increase contributed to an

increase in the cost of imported goods for Kenyan people (Brautigam et al., 2022). At the same time, the SGR has reduced travel time from Mombasa to Nairobi from 12 to 4.5 hours. Similarly, the Nairobi Expressway drastically reduces travel time from the capital's periphery to the Jomo Kenyatta International airport, as well as to the SGR (Ndegwa, 2021).

In addition to its contribution to trade and the reduction of CO₂ emissions, the SGR makes it easier to reach gas and oil deposits on East African coasts. However, this is more beneficial to Chinese businesses than Kenyan ones, given China's struggle with domestic oversupply and growing energy needs. More than 46,000 jobs have been created to realise the SGR, according to Chinese authorities, and it has often been argued that Kenya has benefited from the new employment opportunities which BRI provided for locals. Nevertheless, despite Kenyan workers having received training, Chinese workers were also hired and sometimes received a higher compensation for the same job than their Kenyan counterparts (Muthoni Githaiga & Bing, 2019), as well as better living and working conditions. In 2018, Kenyan news reported that since the launch of the SGR in 2017, 4,954 Chinese workers had been hired to work at the railway (Plummer, 2019).

Bidding for SGR was not competitive and the project was given to China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) in an untransparent manner, with no other businesses allowed to conduct feasibility studies. This lack of transparency constitutes an obstacle in establishing whether the government actually gained from the project. Kenya's debt to China rose by almost 750% between 2014 and 2019 and the SGR registered a loss of about \$5 million between 2017 and 2018. Little more than 5 million tons of cargo were transported in 2018, compared to the 22 million it was projected to carry every year. In 2019 the amount was even lower and losses reached \$200 millions in 2020 (Otele, 2021). Compared to a similar railway project being realised in Tanzania by a Turkish firm, the SGR cost twice as much to build. The \$3.8 billions spent on the first phase of the SGR alone made it Kenya's most expensive infrastructure project since independence. At the same time, transporting cargo through the SGR is about twice as expensive as doing the same by truck (Dezenski, 2020).

Furthermore, Kenya's NLC had to refund citizens displaced due to SGR's construction (Otele, 2021) and this was also quite controversial. Several landowners have claimed that the compensation they were granted was much lower than the actual value of their land. NLC had to double the budget for compensation, blaming politicians for pushing citizens to dispute its decisions (Wissenbach & Wang, 2016).

However, despite the fact that China seems to be getting the greatest benefits from the SGR, Kenya had long wanted to develop new railway infrastructure (Chen, 2022), and BRI made it possible to do so. BRI projects have improved connectivity and transport options for Kenya's citizens. CEB has

also contributed to the funding of the Karimenu II Dam, which is to be used for irrigation and drinking water provision (Thuita, 2022; Wanyoike, 2022). The Thwake Multipurpose Dam is also expected to supply energy (Cavince, 2022), and CEB has financed the construction of the Garissa Solar Photovoltaic Power Plant (Pombo-van Zyl, 2020), completed by China Jiangxi Corporation for International Economic and Technical Co-operation in 2020 (Pombo-van Zyl, 2020). Because, while unbalanced, the benefits of the BRI partnership have been mutual, Indicator 8 is verified.

5.3.4 Decisional Power in the Development of BRI Projects in Kenya

African countries, including Kenya, have been using BRI to become more involved in global trade and markets in Europe and Asia. Chinese loans are easier to obtain than those from Western financial institutions. This is convenient for many African governments, which use BRI financing to improve their countries infrastructure in order to achieve greater development, as is the case with Kenya (Van Staden et al., 2018). China is in a position of power compared to the underdeveloped African states, but the latter are not powerless when it comes to the choice of BRI projects in their territory. China worries about the negative effects that its African partners' excessive indebtedment would have on its reputation. This gives African governments more power in the definition of the terms of the partnership within BRI. The African Union also plays a noteworthy role, as it allows states to "collectively bargain with China" (Van Staden et al., 2018; p.30), increasing their agency in the development of BRI projects. This degree of decisional power is especially evident in the renewable energy sector: while Chinese businesses sought new markets, African states took advantage of their eagerness to find projects abroad to receive financing and find contractors to build dams, solar and wind power plants that would benefit their countries (Downs, 2018).

In official documents and statements about BRI, China is said to value the preferences and input of host countries and integrate them in the development of projects (Belt and Road Portal, 2017). BRI is meant to advance China's interests first and foremost (Nantulya, 2019), but it is also true that African states' authorities have pushed for some projects in order to realise their own national interests and preferences. In Kenya, this was the case with the SGR, which was conceived as part of the greater East African Railway Master Plan (Chen, 2022), proposed in the early 2000s due to the poor conditions of East African railways (East African Community, 2022). This was long before BRI was even announced, and the SGR was developed as the principal project in the 'Kenya Vision 2030', the country's national development programme, years before China became involved (Railway Technology, 2020). Moreover, the new Mombasa-Nairobi railway was inaugurated just

before the 2017 elections in Kenya (Chen, 2022) and the SGR project, along with the controversies linked to it, was often politicised for electoral gains by Kenyan politicians (Wissenbach & Wang, 2016). Thus, when it comes to the biggest BRI project in Kenya, the country's authorities had an interest in having that specific infrastructure built, which makes it unlikely that China was the sole decision-maker in the choice to finance such project. In addition to this, Kenyan politicians often used it to try to achieve their own political goals, therefore it is clear that the country's authorities were not passive in the development process of the SGR. Therefore, Indicator 9 is verified.

5.4 Second Commercial Liberalism Proposition

5.4.1 Potential Threat Represented by BRI Projects in Kenya to U.S. Interests

Kenya collaborates closely with the U.S., most importantly in the fight against jihadist terrorism (Taylor, 2020), and the U.S. has provided considerable development aid to Kenya. The U.S. has had a military base in Mombasa since 1980, from which it can use its military power to guarantee free international commerce in the Indian Ocean. China has expressed interest in contrasting the influence of the U.S. in Africa and has been increasing its strategic engagement in the Horn of Africa. While Kenya's government still owns and operates the country's ports, a leaked document from Kenya's auditor general suggested that China would be entitled to take control over the Mombasa port in case Kenya were not able to repay Chinese loans (Kardon, 2022).

Since 2000, Kenya participates in the U.S. African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), which aims to increase trade between African countries and the U.S.. Because of this, imports from Kenya and other Sub-Saharan countries in the AGOA programme receive preferential access (Omolo et al., 2016). However, data from the World Bank shows that, between 2010 and 2020, Kenya was not among the 10 principal import partners for the U.S., representing only 0.02% of the U.S.'s imports every year except for in 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019, when it reached 0.03%. Neither was the Sub-Saharan region as a whole, which reached a maximum of 3.39% of the U.S. import share in 2010 and after 2012 always remained below 2%. (WITS, 2022). In the same time period, exports from the U.S. to Sub-Saharan Africa and Kenya were also a small percentage of total American exports, as *Table 9* demonstrates.

Table 9: U.S. Exports to Kenya as Share of U.S. Total Exports, 2010-2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.33	1.42	1.45	1.50	1.56	1.19	0.92	0.90	0.94	0.94
Kenya	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02

Note. Data retrieved from WITS (2022)

The year after BRI was announced, exports to Kenya more than doubled but in 2015, the year in which BRI was launched, U.S. exports to Sub-Saharan Africa and Kenya started declining again, remaining below 1% afterwards. Since Kenya joined BRI, exports have also declined, although only by 0.01% of the total share. Overall, the data shows that exports to Kenya (and Sub-Saharan Africa) continue to represent a small percentage of total U.S. exports. The U.S. have been trying to increase trade with the region through AGOA since 2000, but have not been able to compete with China. Strengthening relations with Sub-Saharan Africa has been hindered by Chinese involvement in the region (Williams, 2015), which increased even more with BRI. As Figure 8 shows, since Kenya joined BRI in 2017, Kenya's imports from the U.S. have always remained lower than its exports to the U.S..

Figure 8: U.S.-Kenya Trade 2000-2021, in US\$ Million



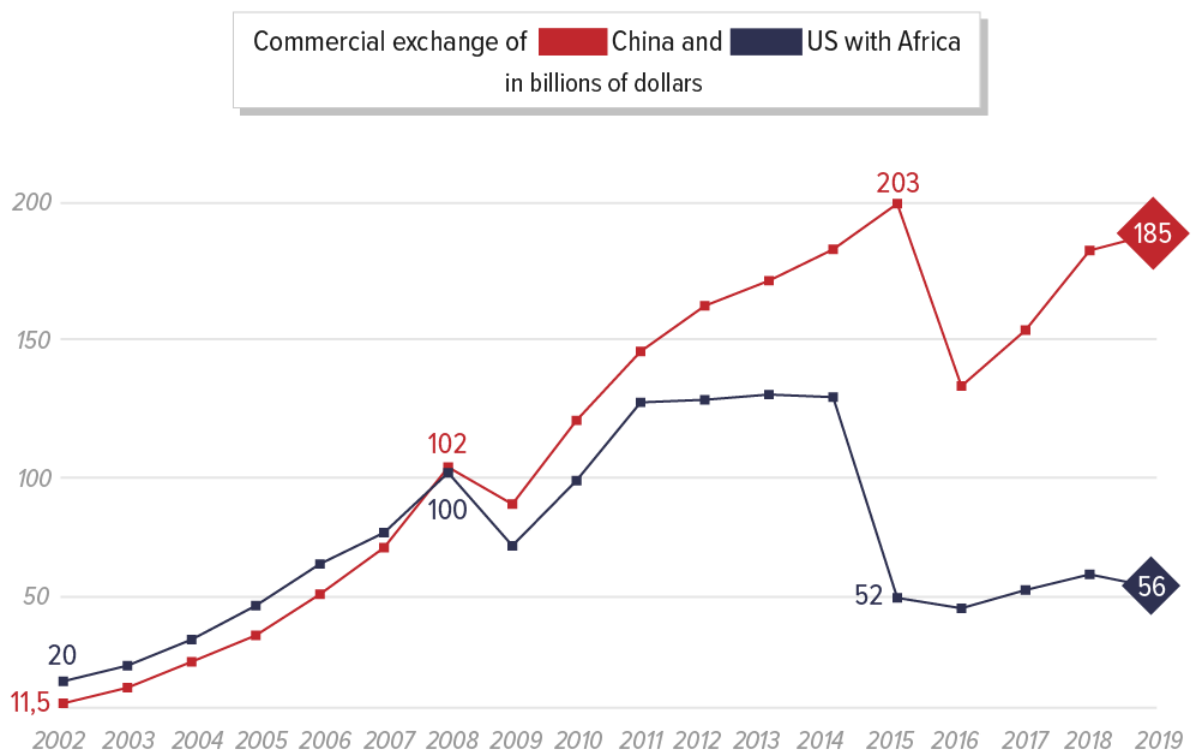
agoa.info

Note. Retrieved from AGOA (2022)

African authorities and academics have said that they are interested in maintaining good relations with both the U.S. and China. They have stated that they would want a greater involvement of American businesses in infrastructure projects in the continent (Wilson-Andoh, 2022). However, African countries tend to prefer Chinese companies due to lower costs (Farooq et al., 2018) and lower conditionalities, and China has been progressively increasing investment in Kenya, especially in infrastructural development, to the detriment of the U.S. (Omolo et al., 2016). Since China has consolidated its presence in the continent, the U.S. has been struggling to increase its trade with and investment in African countries (Njiraini, 2014). China and the U.S. have also both shown interest in Kenya's resource exploration (Omolo et al., 2016), which increases areas of competition.

Figure 9 compares Chinese and American commercial exchanges with Africa, and shows that since BRI was launched the U.S. have not been able to compete with China. A closer partnership between China and Kenya interferes with American interests, as American companies find it hard to enter the African continent due to China's predominance (Sany & Sheehy, 2021). Therefore, Indicator 10 is not verified.

Figure 9: Chinese and American Commercial Relations with Africa, 2002-2019



Note. Retrieved from Toulemonde (2022)

5.4.2 Respect of Liberal Values in the Realisation of BRI

Projects in Kenya

The core values of liberalism include tolerance, respect of individual rights and the rule of law, as well as equality and fairness. Because the state of the environment can have an impact on the “security of human life, liberty and property”, it can also be linked to the liberal concept of justice (Vincent, 1998; p. 449).

In 2018, seven CRBC officials were arrested in Kenya for bribing agents investigating corruption in relation to the SGR (Solomon, 2018). The investigation was about a ticketing fraud, in which Kenyan and Chinese CRBC workers appropriated several millions shillings (Okoth, 2020). In addition to this, the government-to-government procurement method chosen for the construction of the SGR meant that the loans were not subject to procurement law. The method was deemed legitimate by the Kenyan High Court, and has been used by other countries (Olotch, 2017). However, it meant that competitive bidding and transparency standards did not apply to the SGR, based on the terms of China’s loans (Dezenski, 2020).

Further, there have also been reports of discriminatory treatment of African workers in favour of their Chinese counterparts, with the former being given low-skilled tasks and being subject to low pay and poor working conditions (Muthoni Githaiga, 2019).

In Kenya, Chinese state-owned enterprises followed the local environmental regulations (Carrai, 2020), but the construction of the new infrastructure is causing environmental damage nonetheless (Cheng, 2021). The Lamu Coal Plant project, which China intended to finance as part of the LAPSSET Corridor, had been widely condemned, including by the Kenyan Environmental Ministry and EU officials (Anthony, 2019; Rowell, 2018), given that Kenya is a signatory of the Paris Agreement. The expansion of the Lamu Port has destructed a significant portion of coral reef and mangrove forests, with negative effects on the aquatic environment. It compromised locals’ use of forests for their livelihoods, due to the increased population and the conversion of forests to agricultural land. Moreover, the Port is located on the Mkanda Channel, which is the only passage connecting the islands of the Lamu Archipelago to Lamu town, where they can access government and social services, as well as schools. There are concerns that the channel will be closed once the new port becomes operational (Anthony, 2019), and the construction of the new berths has already blocked access to some areas (Kazungu, 2019).

Institutions at the basis of the liberal international order, such as the U.N. and the World Bank, are increasingly trying to contrast ecological degradation and climate change. In such a context, China’s involvement in projects that further deteriorate the environment and its disregard for

Kenya's biodiversity during the construction process go against some the current international regime. The disregard for local populations' necessities during the development and construction of new infrastructure also goes against the ideas of individual rights and security of individuals, which are central in a liberal international order. Therefore, Indicator 11 is not verified.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 10 compares the indicators for each proposition with the results provided by the analysis.

Table 10: Comparison of Indicators and Results

Propositions	Indicators	Results
Defensive Realism Proposition 1: <i>“China feels threatened by the growing military American presence in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. China’s BRI engagement in Kenya is part of a broader effort to establish its control over neighbouring regions and strategic areas”</i>	<i>U.S. military presence:</i> The U.S. engage in military activities in East Africa and the Indian Ocean	Y
	<i>China feels threatened:</i> American activities in Kenya and neighbouring areas could damage China’s economy and security	N
	<i>Control over crucial areas:</i> Kenya is in a strategic position for China’s national interests	Y
Defensive Realism Proposition 2: <i>“China does not strive to gain a position of prominence in African countries in order to become a global hegemon. China’s BRI partnership with Kenya has defensive purposes and serves to increase China’s security by providing access to energy resources”</i>	<i>Defensive purposes:</i> BRI projects in Kenya contribute to China’s national defence	N
	<i>Energy security:</i> BRI projects in Kenya contribute to China’s efforts to increase its energy security	Y
Commercial Liberalism Proposition 1: <i>“China’s partnership with Kenya within BRI does not have military purposes. It is driven by an interest in economic cooperation and is advantageous for both countries”</i>	<i>Non-military initiative:</i> BRI projects in Kenya are not driven by military-related interests	N
	<i>Economic drivers:</i> BRI projects in Kenya have predominantly commercial purposes	N
	<i>Mutual benefits:</i> BRI projects do not bring economic and commercial gains only to China, but also to Kenya	Y
	<i>Shared decisional power:</i> Kenya has a say in the development and execution of the projects, China is more cooperative than assertive	Y

Commercial Liberalism Proposition 2: <i>“China’s BRI is not motivated by revisionist intentions. BRI projects in Kenya do not threaten the international liberal order but rather reinforce it”</i>	<i>Lack of revisionist intentions:</i> BRI projects in Kenya do not damage the U.S. or threaten their supremacy	N
	<i>Reinforcement of the existing international order:</i> China acts according to core liberal principles in the development and execution of BRI projects in Kenya	N

Note. Y indicates that the results confirm the indicator, N indicates that they contradict it

Based on the information available about China’s BRI engagement in Kenya, liberalist proposition have been mostly contradicted by data.

While China stresses the commercial purposes of the initiative, there are also significant geo-strategic interests behind China’s involvement in East Africa. This is not to say that economic cooperation is not at all a factor behind it. China relies heavily on international trade and, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis, has needed to find new markets for its products. However, one of the principal projects that China financed in Kenya, the expansion of the Mombasa Port, could be aimed at realising dual-use infrastructure, as China has previously done in Djibouti. The Djibouti case is an interesting precedent because it was also framed by China as a purely commercial initiative, until the construction of the naval base had been completed. Thus, China’s official statements do not appear reliable, especially given Kenya’s strategic position.

So far, BRI projects in Kenya have benefited China more than Kenya. The SGR was an overly-expensive project, currently generating more losses than revenues. Controversy related to the biggest BRI projects in the country has created tensions within the government and discontent among citizens. Nevertheless, Kenya has gained new infrastructure that has the potential to improve connectivity, therefore it has benefited from the partnership to an extent.

Despite the power imbalance between Kenya and China, the former was also able to obtain financing for projects that were planned long before BRI, and that Kenya likely would not have been able to realise without China’s contribution. China did not impose its presence in an assertive manner, but rather the partnership was based on mutual agreement and decisional power was shared.

Regarding Sino-American rivalry, China’s growing involvement in Kenya’s infrastructure development and its closer commercial relations with the country appear to be damaging to U.S. interests and trade in Kenya. Currently, Chinese competition is the main obstacle to American economic and energy-related engagement in Kenya and Africa more in general.

Finally, the realisation of BRI projects in Kenya, which has harmed some local populations and the environment, has been shown to be carried out with disregard to key liberal values such as individual freedom and security, by threatening the livelihoods of several Kenyan communities.

Defensive realist propositions have been mostly supported by the available information. Nevertheless, not all indicators were confirmed by the evidence.

The U.S. do have a significant military presence in the African continent, with a number of unofficial bases. It is also true that China has maintained a competitive relationship with the U.S. over the years, in particular during the Trump presidency. However, data shows that U.S. military operations in Africa do not pose a tangible threat to Chinese national interests in East Africa. Such operations are mostly aimed at eradicating Islamic terrorism, and Chinese trade and security are not negatively impacted by them.

Kenya is in a strategic location and it is therefore likely that China is attempting to use its partnership with the country to advance its own security and energy-related interests. While Kenya is not a major energy source for China, it started exporting oil to China after joining BRI, and there are big energy-related projects being realised in the country, most importantly the new Kipevu Oil Terminal.

Finally, the analysis of data concerning the contribution of BRI projects in Kenya to China's national defence provided mixed results. China's main import from Kenya is titanium ore, which has a number of uses. While it is essential for national defence and is used extensively in the military industry, it is also employed to make everyday products.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this thesis was to examine China's engagement in Kenya within BRI and determine which IR theory could provide the most convincing explanation. Taking into account the existing debate on the subject, it became clear that realism and liberalism presented the strongest arguments.

To make the study more thorough, three sub-questions were formulated. The first one concerned the drivers behind Chinese-financed projects in Kenya. The literature review revealed that there is a vast on-going debate about whether BRI represents a case of 'debt-trap diplomacy'. However, this theory has largely been debunked (Risberg, 2019; Shaomin & Jiang, 2020; Jones & Hameiri, 2020). The review also showed that BRI is motivated by several different reasons, including financial, commercial and strategic ones. Financial drivers are related to the consequences of the 2008 global crisis, whereas commercial ones derive from China's economic growth and search of new trading partners. Strategic reasons are linked to Kenya's geographical position in the Horn of Africa and on the Indian Ocean, with potential for creating new routes for energy sources' transport (Jie & Wallace, 2021; He, 2019; Clarke, 2018; Liow, 2022).

The second and third sub-questions were aimed at understanding which liberalist and realist sub-theories could provide the best explanation of BRI projects in Kenya. Liberalism and realism include several sub-theories, therefore it was not possible to analyse all of them. The theoretical framework was focused on the sub-theories most relevant to the subject. In the end, defensive realism and commercial liberalism were chosen as the basis to carry out the research, based on China's foreign policy in recent years. In particular, offensive realism was excluded because its claims have largely been contradicted by China's attitude in foreign relations. Commercial liberalism was instead chosen based on China's prominent role in economic globalisation and its reliance on international trade.

The analysis included academic articles, news articles, books, think tank reports and briefs from governmental institutions. The evidence provides greater support to the defensive realist propositions than to the commercial liberalist ones. While not all the indicators for the defensive realist propositions were verified by the data, there was more in support of them than of the commercial liberalist propositions. Thus, defensive realism offers the most convincing explanation about the drivers behind China's BRI partnership with Kenya. Evidence suggests that China intends to use BRI projects in Kenya to address some of its domestic concerns, such as energy security, and foreign policy interests, mostly related to its competition with the U.S.. China's description of BRI as a 'win-win' initiative is not supported by the negative impact of BRI projects on Kenya's

economy and on some local communities. That is not to say that there are no benefits at all for Kenya: the country was in need of better infrastructure, whose realisation was made possible by Chinese financing. China also contributed to the development of digital infrastructure and renewable energy power plants. However, it appears that China stands to profit more than Kenya from the partnership.

The results of this research contribute to the existing debate on BRI. The literature review found that many criticisms of BRI based upon offensive realist perspectives are largely exaggerated. China does not offer loans with the objective of increasing vulnerable countries' dependency to itself: given the damage that the deb-trap diplomacy claims cause to China's reputation, it would be counter-productive and threaten potential partnerships (Van Staden et al., 2018). The case study shows that China's main goal is achieving its strategic interests, in particular in relation to domestic energy concerns.

The Kenyan case provides some valuable insights into China's intentions in neighbouring states as well. There is potential for generalisation to other cases in East Africa, due Kenya's similarities with them. In particular, African countries on the Indian Ocean have similar strategic value to Kenya, from China's perspective.

In terms of internal validity, in order to obtain reliable results, a varied set of sources have been analysed. Given China's lack of transparency about the objectives of BRI projects and the well-documented corruption of the Kenyan government (Mwenzwa, 2015; Transparency International, 2022), Western sources have been used to delve deeper into China's intentions and the effects of the projects on Kenya's economy and society. However, while countries such as the U.S. offer more transparent data, they also often present a negative bias when it comes to Chinese foreign policy. For this reason, sources from both sides were included.

Other limitations of the study are related to the fact that BRI is a recent initiative, and Kenya only joined in 2017. Thus, it is still soon to assert with certainty that the defensive realist perspective is entirely correct, especially since not all BRI projects in Kenya have been completed yet, and further research may provide more definitive answers. It is also worth looking more into the issue of dual-use infrastructure, especially with regard to other African countries in strategic areas, to assess whether China will show a consistent pattern of building officially civilian infrastructure which also has military uses. This research also showed ambiguous results about the motives behind China's growing interest in Africa's natural resources, therefore it might be interesting to investigate whether China's use of minerals and metals for defence purposes increases in the coming years.

This thesis established that defensive realism is the most appropriate IR sub-theory to provide answers on the motives behind and effects of BRI projects in Kenya so far. However, one of the

shortcomings of congruence analysis is the fact that external validity is more limited compared to large-N analysis (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). Therefore, it is important to note that this does not mean that defensive realism might necessarily be as appropriate to explain BRI projects elsewhere.

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