

China marks ten years of Belt and Road Initiative

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China convened the third international forum of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Beijing over the past two days as the US escalates the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine and has thrown its full support behind Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinian population of Gaza. Some 130 countries sent representatives, along with various international bodies, including the United Nations.

The summit marks ten years since Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the BRI plan to expand Beijing's global economic and political influence. It involves a massive injection of Chinese funds into infrastructure projects, including rail, road, energy, ports and telecommunications, linking the Eurasian landmass by road—the Silk Road Economic Belt—and by sea—the Maritime Silk Road.

In particular, the BRI was aimed at countering the “pivot to Asia” launched by US President Barack Obama in 2011 aimed at undermining and encircling China. A decade on, the US confrontation with China has dramatically accelerated under Trump and now Biden into economic warfare and advanced preparations for military conflict.

Even as the summit was convening, the US announced a new round of bans on the sale of advanced computer chips to China aimed at crippling its hi-tech industries and the development of artificial intelligence applications.

In initiating the BRI, Beijing made an appeal to the European powers not only to develop closer economic relations with China and throughout Eurasia but, by implication, to distance themselves from Washington's increasingly aggressive methods.

None of the major European countries, however, had significant representation at this week's BRI forum—Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban being

the most prominent European figure. The European imperialist powers have all joined in the US-NATO war on Russia in a bid to share in the spoils of the conflict.

At the same time, US aggression is driving Russia, China and other countries targeted by Washington together economically and strategically. Russian President Vladimir Putin was prominent among the guests at the BRI forum on his first visit since just prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February last year.

The accelerating rise of geo-political tensions has fuelled moves by the US to “decouple” from China—the world's largest manufacturer. As it prepares for war, the Pentagon is making sure that US supply chains for critical raw materials and components are not dependent on China, as well as ensuring it retains its superiority in weaponry.

“Decoupling,” or “de-risking” as has now become the more fashionable term, threatens to fracture the world economy into blocs akin to those that developed prior to World War II. Moreover, given the far greater global integration than in the 1930s, such processes could have far-reaching and unpredictable consequences, compounding the crisis of world capitalism.

Speaking at the BRI forum yesterday, President Xi declared: “We stand against unilateral sanctions, economic coercion, decoupling and supply chain disruption.” He pledged to “deepen cooperation in green infrastructure, energy and transportation,” and “put forward global initiative for artificial intelligence (AI) governance.”

Following Xi's speech, the Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing would call for the UN to establish a body to regulate AI, adding, without naming the US, that it

opposed the “malicious obstructing” of AI development in other countries.

By the end of the forum yesterday, nearly \$100 billion worth of BRI projects had been announced. Their focus appears to have shifted from major construction projects towards hi-tech developments including digital finance and e-commerce. Much of the money was directed to countries in South East Asia and the Pacific as well as to the Middle East and Africa.

The BRI is just one component of China’s strategy to counter aggressive US efforts to undermine it on every front—diplomatically, economically and strategically.

At the August summit in South Africa of BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—China succeeded in pushing through an expansion of the group which will include Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as of the beginning of next year. Other countries such as Nigeria, Mexico, Venezuela and Vietnam could be added later.

The increase will strengthen both the economic and political weight of the grouping. Among the subjects discussed was decreasing reliance on the US dollar for trade and finance. The manner in which Washington has increasingly used the global dominance of the US dollar as a weapon against targeted countries has raised concerns among many countries, including close American allies such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Those fears were heightened when the Biden administration froze Russian central bank accounts following the invasion of Ukraine.

China has, in particular, sought to boost its relations in the Middle East, on which it is heavily dependent for energy imports. Significantly, Beijing brokered a deal between Saudi Arabia and its arch regional rival, Iran, in March to resume diplomatic relations which were broken off in 2016 following the Saudi execution of a prominent Shiite cleric.

Amid Israel’s savage onslaught on Palestinians in Gaza, backed to the hilt by Washington, China has toughened its stance in line with the outpouring of opposition and protests in the Middle East and around the world.

Initially, Beijing called for restraint and an immediate end to hostilities. Foreign ministry spokespeople on several occasions declared that China condemned acts that harm civilians—equating the criminal violence of

the Israeli military with that of the Palestinian uprising—and reiterated support for the bogus two-state solution.

As in the past, China sought to balance between Israel, with which it has economic and political ties, and the appearance of support for the Palestinian people, so as maintain relations with the various bourgeois Middle Eastern regimes.

Over last weekend, however, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi took a more critical approach to Israel. While stopping short of outright condemnation, he declared that Israel’s bombing campaign had gone “beyond the scope of self-defence” and that it “should stop collective punishment of the people of Gaza.”

No doubt his comments were pitched to the Middle Eastern delegates who were due to arrive in Beijing for the BRI forum.



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