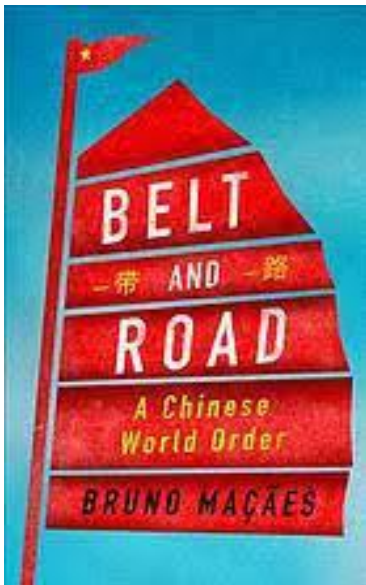


## BOOK REVIEW

**Bruno Macaes, Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order, London, UK: Hurst Publishers, 2018, 228 p, \$26.87, ISBN: 9781787380028**

Arnaz Shaik



Bruno Macaes's book is a map that tells a simple story of power and influence. This engaging read provides a multi-faceted insight into the most massive geopolitical feat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Belt and Road Initiative launched by President Xi Jinping in the year 2013. With its humongous infrastructure, a calculated plan of action and the

determined ambition to build a new world order replacing the US-led international system (which the author refers to as the West), its rather difficult to analyse all aspects of China's Belt and Road initiative under a designated premise. Throughout the book, Macaes has replaced the household abbreviation-BRI with the Belt and Road, because he believes, with rational proof as the readers will discover, that the Belt Road Initiative or One Belt, One Road, is not just an initiative. In a broader sense, it's a movement with an aim to instil a new universal value system.

Bruno Macaes is a Portuguese politician and is currently a senior fellow at Hudson Institute in Washington. Formerly Portugal's Europe minister (2013-15), he has been a regular commentator for CNN, the BBC and Al Jazeera, and has written for the Financial Times, The Guardian and Foreign Affairs. He has authored 3 books; the Dawn of Eurasia: On The Trail Of The New World Order (2018), The Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order

(2018) and History Has Begun: The Birth Of A New America (2020).

The book comprises five chapters. It begins an overview of the post-Cold War emergence of the Eurasian supercontinent, with its trade at \$2 trillion (2018), as part of the Introduction. The first chapter on "What is the Belt and Road?" begins with a brief explanation about the reforms by Deng Xiaoping, then progresses to Xi Jinping's proactive initiatives, indirectly making use of overcapacity in the Chinese industry (result of the 2008 Global recession) as a motivation for the Belt and Road. This chapter introduces the Chinese concept of Tianxia to the readers, which means All under Heaven, impressing upon the importance of world relations. The second chapter on "Nuts and Bolts", explains the logistics and foundational framework with respect to the time line of the initiative. The Belt and Road began in 2013 with almost 900 major projects envisaged that would require almost \$4 trillion to \$8 trillion till completion in 2049. While drawing a comparison to the US-sponsored

Marshall Plan, Macaes elaborates on China's vision for economic cooperation with concealed hegemony. The geographical, strategic and economic importance of the two components of the project: The Belt and Road are explained further in the chapter.

The third chapter on "The Belt and Road and the World Economy" brings out economic hurdles (in the first quarter of 2018, China's gross debt exploded from 171 to 299 per cent of GDP) of the initiative, highlighting the alarming issue of the 'middle income trap' arising and China's urge to secure a strong position in the global value chains. With approximately 1/3 of its imports directed towards export processing zones, China is moving towards implementing the first transnational industrial policy, with an aim to achieve a community goal of International industrial capacity cooperation. In the fourth chapter on "The Belt and Road and World Politics", Macaes discusses Pakistan as the 'crown jewel' of the Belt and Road, while both India and Japan are known for

unclear positions on the multi-trillion-dollar initiative, which finds a rival in the Indo-Pacific alternative. The final chapter on "The World after the Belt and Road", along with providing four different conclusions determining China's future place in the world system, elucidates that no matter which outcome materialises, China is likely to play a more active role in global politics than it ever has before.

In his book, Macaes approaches the BRI holistically discussing how it cradles 70 participating and other non-participating countries, spread across the Eurasia supercontinent with an aim to shift the centre of gravity of the global economy. Macaes provides a balanced understanding by providing both positive feedback as well as raising apprehensions on the project since its initiation in 2013.

The author puts across his stance in a riveting manner, through words and sentences that hold a deeper meaning than visible. "When imagining new worlds, we often start with a map", this part of the opening paragraph of the

book, in my opinion, helps begin on a perfect note, as the book encompasses a variety of ideas and philosophies backed by examples about the significance of the process of making a map to pursue an objective. In the final chapter, the author notes that "[h]istory looks kindly on those with resolve, with drive and ambition and courage, but it will not wait for those who are hesitant applauds China's courage in undertaking such a herculean project"-highlighting a normative perspective while assessing the future of the BRI for China as well as the World.

Bruno Macaes follows an interactive writing style throughout the text, different from the regular non-fiction genre. Not only has Macaes been able to present necessary information and statistics, but has also made many unique references, including topics from box office earnings to philosophical ideologies of a Greek statesmen, making the book both engaging and intriguing.

The book presents a well examined scenario of the Belt and Road initiative. For both, readers well-acquainted with the concept of BRI and those who have recently begun their exploration into this field, this book provides information and comparisons, all at one place and allows its readers to form individual perspectives regarding the Belt and Road Initiative.

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