



Research Article

A Comparative Analysis of the G7's Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative as an Alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

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Abstract

The Build Back Better World initiative, launched by G7 leaders, aims to provide a fair and more sustainable alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative for infrastructure development in developing countries. The B3W initiative, supported by the U.S. under President Biden, seeks to revitalize multilateral cooperation and contribute to the \$40 trillion needed for infrastructure in lower-income countries by 2035. Although the details of B3W are limited, they are compared with China's BRI strategy, which focuses on trade, investment, and development across multiple countries. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing secondary data sources that include journal articles, data from international organizations, newspapers, and magazines. Data from many sources are gathered and organized into tables to offer coherent evidence supporting the claims. However, Biden's plan has raised serious concerns. Can this anti-China coalition focus on collective norms to counter China's influence? Will the launch of the B3W initiative offer an alternative to China's BRI?

Keywords: Group Seven (G7), Build Back Better World (B3W), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Global Affairs, Cornwall Summit 2021.

Introduction

The new Cold War has come to the forefront. In 2017, the US-China trade dispute, criticism from the US towards China for the COVID-19 outbreaks, and the Chinese turmoil over Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan showcased the escalating tensions between the two countries (Boylan, McBeath, & Wang, 2020) (Hass & Denmark, 2020; Blanchette, et al., 2022). However, this new Cold War seems more threatening than the old one in several respects (Akita, 2022). Primarily, a significant number of countries worldwide are likely to maintain commercial ties with China despite potential opposition from the West. Furthermore, China has experienced a resurgence following its decline in the last century and has regained its previous ancient standing. This shift was not motivated by a questionable philosophical campaign prompted by national pressures similar to those in Russia (Glahn, 2018). In contrast to the USSR's attempt to redefine its identity as a European empire comprising subjugated ethnic groups, China shows remarkable geopolitical stability and resilience, making it less susceptible to fragmentation (Spencer-Churchill, 2022). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has demonstrated more incredible achievements than the USSR in establishing legitimacy among its people by effectively maintaining a balance between societal stability and economic well-being (Sun & Zhang, 2019).

The intensity of the geopolitical position between the United States and China could have global consequences. The ongoing competition between the U.S. and China is more likely to escalate rather than support the world

in addressing its challenges. In a time of increasing U.S.-China contest, President Joe Biden and his G7 counterparts decided to launch the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative in June 2023. The B3W initiative is founded on principles of Shared values, market orientation, rigorous standards, and transparency in infrastructure partnerships. Its goal is to contribute to reducing the infrastructure deficit in developing nations, estimated to exceed \$40 trillion by 2035. The B3W proposal aims to mobilize regional, international, and private sector funding for climate change mitigation, healthcare access, digital technology, social equality, and gender equality. B3W aims to support low and middle-income countries (WhiteHouse, 2021). B3W explains that the Blue Dot Network (BDN) saw the US join forces with Japan and Australia, even as it facilitated access to other members' involvement in initiatives promoting rising, private sector-led investment opportunities (Ashbee, 2021).

The B3W is "fresh" because it has introduced G7 states and enlarged requests to participate in other democratic countries, including India, Australia, South Korea, and South Africa. The B3W proposal is based on previous US initiatives to increase global development funding and focuses on countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Therefore, a key aspect is whether B3W and BRI will be alternative or complementary initiatives in the post-pandemic world and how this will impact US-China relations. This study compares the sectoral priorities and funding mechanisms employed by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative. The financial framework of the BRI primarily relies on bilateral investment and lending from state-run financial institutions, which have a relatively limited track record of attracting capital from the private sector. In contrast, the B3W initiative aims to generate investment through multilateral and bilateral financing, as well as mobilizing private sector capital.

Following the introduction, Section Two presents the theoretical framework by applying the three main theories of the International Political Economy to the concepts of the Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Section Three outlines the methodology. Section Four offers a brief review of the G7 and Global Affairs. Section Five examines the 2021 G7 Summit in Cornwall and its implications for China. Section Six analyzes the Chinese perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative. Section Seven discusses the rising competition between the US and China. Section Eight addresses the Build Back Better World Initiative and the developing world. Section Nine presents internal conflicts within the G7. Section Ten explores the criticisms of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Section Eleven analyzes whether the Build Back Better World (B3W) serves as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Section Twelve outlines the key findings. The final section concludes the paper.

Theoretical Framework

International Political Economy (IPE) is a relatively new addition to global politics. It is a multidisciplinary academic area of research that studies economics, politics, and international relations. IPE is more purely "the analysis of the complex interactions between economics and politics within the global sphere (Frieden & Lake, 1999). According to Jones, IPE "creates a complex interrelation between political and economic operations on the stage of global affairs" (Jones, 2001). Although the concept of "political economy" has a lengthy historical background, IPE researchers only arrived to link themselves with this new title in the 1970s, when political researchers described IPE as a distinct area of study, separate from economics. The book *Power and Interdependence* by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye Jr. (1977) marked the birth of a modern field of inquiry in International Politics (Keohane & Nye, 2001). Researchers have become increasingly aware of the numerous global connections between politics and economics (as debated by Keohane and Nye in their analysis of the political consequences of the oil crisis in the late 1960s), necessitating an interconnected viewpoint between the two domains. Concepts of international political economy offer possible approaches for explaining recent inquiries. They will establish an approach through which we can analyze G7's initiative, Build Back Better World (B3W), as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). We outline three primary theories of international political economy: mercantilism/economic nationalism, economic liberalism (classical liberalism and neoliberalism), and Marxism/structuralism.

Mercantilism/economic nationalism: Mercantilism is also known as economic nationalism. It is a type of economic policy that supports the development of the army, economy, and state (Nakano, 2004). It supports trade regulations that protect the national industry. In mercantilism, the state supports private enterprises through controlling various aspects of production. Mercantilism fosters cartels, grants tax incentives and provides annuities to favored sectors (Pandora, 1982). This led to the imposition of import duties and prohibited the export of skilled personnel, money, and equipment that could benefit foreign firms. In exchange for safeguards, the state authority allows companies to divert wealth from international markets to their authorities, mainly through taxation (Frieden J. , 2012). These payments support rising state development and geopolitical influence. Mercantilism was the leading financial model in Europe between 1500 and 1800. Today, national and protectionist economic plans are based on mercantilism. Some countries saw the interconnectedness generated by globalization and free markets as a loss of authority. In 2016, Donald Trump's presidential campaign was associated with a neomercantilism approach (Ahmed & Bick, 2017). Trump's mercantilist policies started a trade war with China in 2018 (Lester & Zhu, Winter 2020). When he imposed tariffs on Chinese goods, China retaliated by implementing measures that damaged American exporters. Trump announced a "Part 1" agreement to complete the trade dispute in 2020, although the trade war has not yet been resolved (Bown, 2021). In reality, President Trump implemented a fresh set of import tariffs affecting Chinese items made of cotton and tomatoes, with just a week remaining as president and expressed worries about using slave labor there (CBP, 2021). The theory of mercantilism supports the G7's initiative, in which Europe, particularly the United States, will invest globally through its multinational companies. Overseas investment by Western companies is also supported by their respective states, ultimately benefiting their national economies.

Economic liberalism (classical liberalism/neo-liberalism): Economic liberalism is a philosophy that supports the concept of a capitalist model controlled by individual liberty (Adino & Nebere, 2016). This signifies that the government should refrain from participating in business and industrial development and should not interfere with the financial affairs of individuals, groups, classes, or entire communities. Classical liberalism, which emerged from the writings of Adam Smith and his peers, supports the philosophy of liberating people to engage in business growth and reducing the government's responsibility to only strengthen fair competition, leaving the business contest to free market principles (Rapley, 2007). Neoliberalism has emerged with a similar philosophy of empowering private sector participation in people-controlled economies, facilitating the foreign trade of service and goods providers (Rapley, 2007). The fundamental principle of neoliberalism is to create a solid foundation for the private sector, grow the roles and responsibilities of private corporations, and strengthen the economy (Harvey, 2005). The unrestricted movement of financial resources among industries, regions, and nations is welcomed by neoliberal economics. Hurdles to tariff rates, harsh corporate tax frameworks, environmental standards, and bureaucratic obstacles must be addressed and eliminated. This prompted free market competition in the private sector, which may have led to increased productive capacity and improved service delivery. The theory of economic liberalism creates the theoretical foundation for the G7's B3W initiative, which holds a plan for economic and trade relations between the G7 and the rest of the world.

Marxism/structuralism: Marx's approach to political economy provides an analysis of the political philosophy of the capitalist system in connection to its chronological, historical, and political frameworks, which helps to recognize and explain the landscape and workings of the capitalist system as well as the causative factors of inequalities in society and its various versions of (re)production in advanced industrial capitalist societies (Fine & Saad-Filho, 2016). Marx focused on explaining the basic rules for hypothesizing the issues and paradoxes of the capitalist system (Musto, 2008). Marx's explanation is an investigative technique that examines the integral connections of capitalist systems (Sayer, 1979). Consequently, Marx's political economy approach is a constructive and comprehensive methodological framework that offers an explanatory framework for understanding how China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the G7's Initiative for a Build Back Better World (B3W) operate globally.

The global economic slowdown of 2008 and the decline in the US's global dominance led to China's rise. The rise of the developing world has led to impressive financial growth in China, often referred to as the 'China Magic' (Clark, 2012). In 2010, China emerged as a significant international economic player, strengthening its position as a regional power by forming the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) alliance. With significant developments in the current order, which include a decrease in US hegemony and the emergence of new political and economic institutions, new regionalism, activist groups, a decline in economic globalization following the US-China trade conflict, the escape of the UK from the European Union (EU), protectionist policies, a shift from liberalism to economic nationalism, the new US visa plan, separation of the US from the 2015 Paris Climate Accord, and a broader rise in anti-liberal actions all over the West, it is evident that the international political economy plays a vital role in contemporary politics.

This study examines how the B3W serves as a strategic counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), presenting a competing model for global infrastructure development. It also aims to explore how B3W reflects the values and interests of G7 countries and their allies in promoting a rule-based international order through the lens of the international political economy. Applying international political economy theory, this study analyzes the original motivations driving the G7's decision-making process regarding B3W and its potential to redesign global infrastructure development competition among major powers.

Methodology

This study uses three primary theories of international political economy—mercantilism/economic nationalism, economic liberalism (classical liberalism/neo-liberalism), and Marxism/structuralism—to explore the political and economic impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative launched by G7 leaders. Researchers commonly employ analytical methods, particularly percentage and statistical assessments, to systematically evaluate the political and economic potentials of both initiatives. Previous comparative research on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also employed percentages and statistical assessments to demonstrate findings and draw conclusions. In addition to analyzing secondary data, this study incorporated data from academic publications, newspaper stories, and research reports disseminated by various research organizations. The study also gathers and uses institutional data from the websites of public and private institutions to obtain information on the progress and limitations of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative.

G7 and Global Affairs

A notable political alliance comprised Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It serves as an informal world superpower, bringing together influential and democratically developed countries for a similar dialogue (Nelson, 2020). In the last decade, the G7 has taken significant actions to enhance the global financial system, combat tax avoidance, rescue 27 million human lives from AIDS, TB, and malaria, and fund the schooling of many boys and girls in the developing world. In 2015, the G7 played a crucial role in securing the Paris Climate Agreement, aiming to control global emissions (Livingston, 2016). In the context of the critical objectives of the G7, its goals are: 'contributing to the worldwide preservation of COVID-19, enhancing our strength against upcoming epidemics, supporting international trade and investment for economic growth, combating global warming, and protecting the planet's ecosystems, [as well as] promoting our democratic values and genuine democracy (Ghosh, 2021). The G7 includes some of the largest global economies and addressing financial problems is a top priority. There is considerable recognition that the apparent dissimilarities in financial stability have spilled over to affect quality healthcare, and that the health crisis has a significant impact on global economic security. The G7 agreed to implement a possible corporate tax of 15% to combat rising inequality (Brauner, 2021). However, this decision has faced criticism. This forum is also facing backlash for its insufficient emphasis on the green environment and financing for renewable technology in developing countries (Park, 2021).

This is even though G7 ministers also decided to take new initiatives against fossil energy in May: in a pre-

meeting, the G7 declared that it might block global funding for coal projects, require companies to acknowledge their impacts on global warming, and invest more in renewable energy. Environmental advocacy groups have highlighted the guilt of G7 economies paying over US\$30 billion (£21 billion) further to assist oil, coal, and gas from January 2020 to March 2021 but on financing in hygienic energy forms (Rajendran, Krishnaswamy, & Subramaniam, 2023). The challenges facing the G7 leaders are complex and urgent, and resolving these concerns necessitates enhanced diplomatic efforts, cooperation, and implementation (Editors, 2021). However, ideological differences and the absence of a prominent leader within the group hinder the G7's ability to exert unified influence. The migration crises, climate change, food security, and the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) are the main agendas at the G7 Summit 2024. (Mahida, 2024) G7 has again discussed its relations with China and Russia, alongside ongoing global conflicts such as Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza. They proposed a \$50 billion loan for the support of Ukraine (Alina, 2024)

G7 Summit in Cornwall and its Implications for China

During the Cornwall Summit 2021, China was one of the main agenda items. The leaders of the Group of Seven called on China to address issues related to human rights violations, aggressive military exercises, and other international concerns such as climate change, open markets, and women's rights (Dieter, 2021). The leaders of the G7 countries have reaffirmed their commitment to providing 2 billion vaccine doses. This promise entails the delivery of one billion doses in the upcoming year through the ACT-A initiative and its COVAX Facility, which was first announced during the February 2021 summit. The declaration also pledged to increase global vaccine production capacity and commit to expediting the vaccine creation timeline to 300–100 days (WhiteHouse, 2021). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Japan has successfully advocated for increased financial resources and concerted initiatives among the G7 countries. Prime Minister Suga also emphasized the importance of achieving a vaccination rate of 70% among people worldwide by the time of the forthcoming G7 summit. Additionally, he observed that these initiatives offset China's vaccine diplomatic efforts (Bartlett, 2021).

Although Europe has engaged in an aggressive approach toward China, the G7 declaration may be seen by Beijing as the outcome of attempts by the U.S. to create a coalition with the EU, which the U.K. opposed. Slave labor exemplifies a harsh reality of behavior. The issue of utilizing various types of coerced labor in worldwide supply chains, encompassing state-endorsed forced labor of marginalized communities and minority groups, particularly within the farming, solar energy, and fabric industries, was specifically directed toward China (Dieter, 2021). In response, the Chinese promptly called for the acknowledgement of the country's sovereignty and integrity of territory, emphasizing the importance of refraining from interfering in China's domestic issues (Radulescu, Gole, & Profiroiu, 2021). In the emphatic text, the G7 leaders specifically mention several controversial topics that inflame Beijing. They call for further investigation into the origin of the coronavirus in China and actively support a \$100 billion initiative to compete with Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, which has constructed significant infrastructure projects in underdeveloped nations.

Chinese Perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative

Including its Maritime Silk Road, China's Belt and Road Initiative has significantly evolved beyond Central Asia and its original aim of creating a New Silk Road initiative (Blanchard, 2020). The geopolitical dimension has increased to more than 140 states across Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America. Simultaneously, the BRI has expanded its aspirations by creating the Digital Silk Road (Ma, 2022) and the Polar Silk Road (Lim, 2018) initiatives, which aim to establish Arctic sea routes, deepen Arctic fossil fuel extraction, and facilitate natural resource mining. The Chinese administration also has four strategic aims (as shown in Figure 2) to start the BRI. Firstly, China, the world's largest consumer of natural gas and oil, saw the BRI as a way to strengthen its energy supplies by obtaining a regional leadership position among its major neighbors (Zhao, Liu, Wang, & Ge, 2019). Secondly, it viewed the proposal as a vital socioeconomic driver furthering its influence and power. Thirdly, China's financial growth and its recent surge in global influence challenge the US's global dominance, shifting the stability of cooperation in Sino-US partnerships (Pei, 2020).

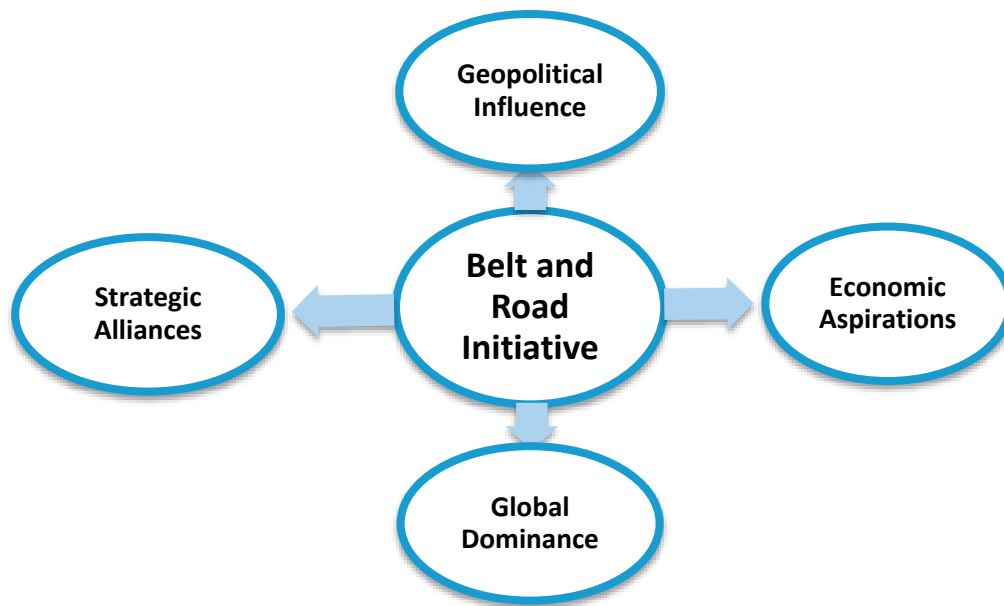
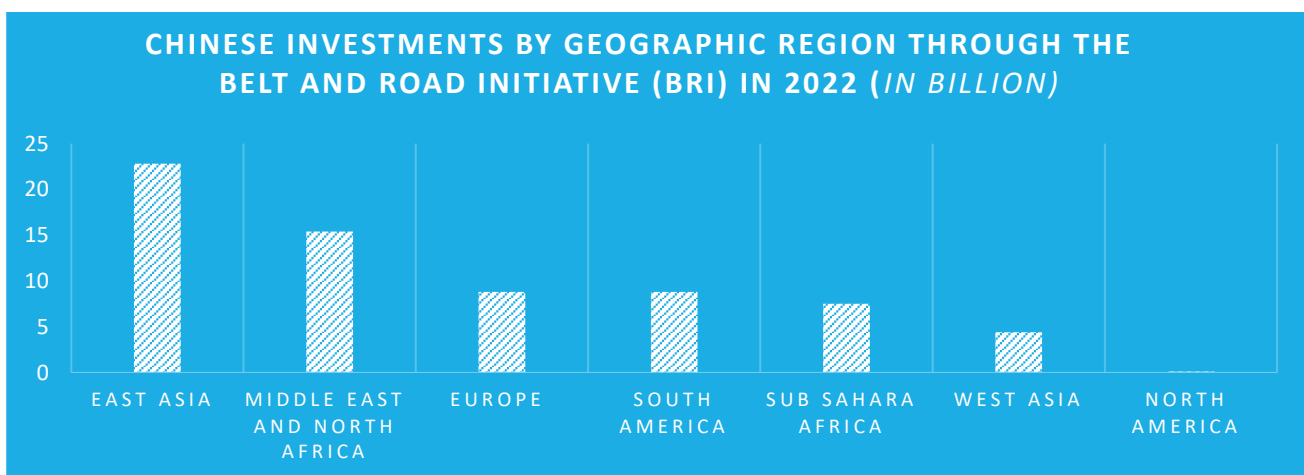


Figure 1. Chinese Perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The increasing disunity represents a significant geostrategic shift that has led to deglobalization and the emergence of a dualistic global political structure. This has created a globe caught between two systems operating under different standards and fighting for global dominance (Petricevic & Teece, 2019). Fourthly, numerous global political researchers have relied on hegemonic discourse to understand the development of the BRI. However, the action plan resulted from a much more aggressive Chinese realpolitik focused on tackling US global dominance (Economy, 2018). From this perspective, the BRI exemplifies China’s progress toward a more comprehensive and effective grand scheme designed to influence the world outside China rather than simply adjusting to it (Maçães, 2019). By applying international political economy theory, they argue that the Chinese administration's geopolitical and economic intentions are to engage in the BRI, viewing it as a component of a more substantial initiative by China to establish an alternative global economic order. In particular, China has focused on developing nations (as shown in Graph 1) to create new development pathways that will help reverse the slowing economy and address excess capacity issues. Geostrategically, they try to build alliances in their extremely rapid contest with the existing global dominance of the United States (Lewin & Witt, 2022).



Graph 1. Source: Authors' contribution and data gathered from various reports.

Such initiatives have enabled the international expansion of Chinese preferences and consistency in long-term

geopolitical interests. Consequently, the BRI is China's most crucial policy component. China utilizes the BRI as a comprehensive international intergovernmental channel alongside the G20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Some of these forums are used to introduce new international norms in United Nations organizations and reshape established standards of international geopolitics for world order. By 2035, China aims to become the world's most significant benchmark influence through its strategic approach, as outlined in China Standards 2035 (Angang & Shaojie, 2022).

The Rising Competition between the US and China

Over the past few years, many changes have occurred in global politics. The emergence of national socialist, populist, pro-government, and interventionist attitudes in several developed countries has raised questions about the strength of public support for ongoing social and economic liberalization (James, 2017). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the threat of relying on complex, widely dispersed transnational corporations that may be productive regularly but could be vulnerable in major catastrophes or disruptive political events (Irwin, 2020). The increasing tension between the United States and China, as illustrated in Figure 3, over trade activities, financing, and future technologies, along with their escalating military, diplomatic, and political competition, has raised the idea of "separating" the globe into two major economic blocs. Following the era of organizing interactions with China, U.S. policymakers have pondered its implications for the country's long-term well-being and stability (Boustany & Friedberg, February 2019). Concerns about the potentially dangerous influence of China's economic plans, authoritarian political structure, and assertive foreign policies also affect the reconsideration of established links in other modern industrialized democratic states in Europe and Asia (Small, 2020).

Even as China's global GDP increased from 2 percent to 9 percent in recent years, the U.S. part declined dramatically from over 30 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2010 (Friedberg, winter 2021-2022). The U.S. contribution to production output followed a similar path, increasing from 20% in 1990 to 23% in 2000 before dropping back to 20%. China's industrial production rose from 3% of the global total in 1990 to over 18% in 2010. Baldwin says, "China's superb, milestone industrialization took off around 1990, driven by international companies investing in industries and creating employment opportunities in China." Within just 20 years, one-sixth of the global industry had shifted from outside China to within China, while global industrial production continued to rise (Baldwin, 2016). China was poised to replace the US as the world's leading industrial power in the early 21st century. It emerged as the central financial system along the path of dislodging. However, China is distant from its openness. Even before Xi Jinping came to power at the end of 2012, there were clear indications that China's economic and political strategies were diverging. The Chinese government launched the BRI in 2013. The BRI is a geostrategic initiative that connects China to Asia, Europe, and Africa. With the launch of the BRI, China aimed to expand its global influence and strategic capabilities (Atif & Akbar, 2021). This posed a threat to the US's dominant role, except for any challenges it had faced in the post-war era (Mott, 2020).

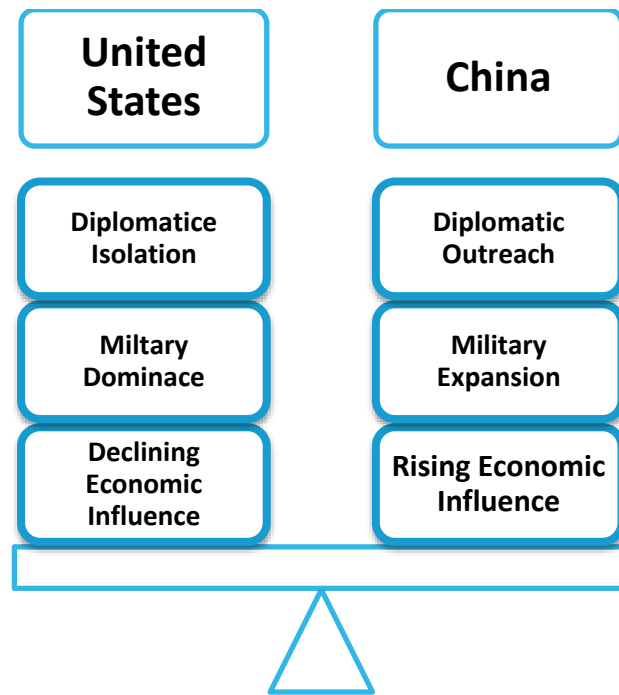


Figure 3. US-China Competition Strategies.

The Trump administration established its first Indo-Pacific strategic plan to counter China’s expanded regional influence (Pitakdumrongkit, *The Impact of the Trump Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy on Regional Economic Governance*, 2019). While Biden sought to discard Trump’s foreign policy, namely “America First,” and many of Trump’s disputed national policies during his presidency, he has restored many features of his predecessor’s diplomatic strategy towards China since taking office (Alvarez, 2021). His government imposed trade sanctions in the area, declaring that tariff rates are a valid foreign policy tool to protect American financial interests. It has expanded the list of Chinese weapons industries whose economic ventures are considered contradictory to U.S. aspirations to slow down and prevent the transfer of U.S. technology to China (Puri, 2022). Biden delivered his first main foreign policy statement in the US Department of State on February 4, 2021. He declared Beijing as an “extremely strong contestant” to the US, stating, “American leadership should fulfill this new era of rising authoritarian regimes, such as the increasing aspiration of China to overtake the USA and the perseverance of Russia to affect and interrupt our democratic values,” and decided to “face China trade violations; block its assertive, forcible acts; and resist China’s strike on individual rights, copyrights, and geopolitical policymaking (Shively, 2024).

The U.S. intelligence community released its 2021 Risk Assessments in April 2021, declaring that “China is a relatively close contender, threatening the United States in several domains, particularly financially, conventional forces, and highly advanced capabilities, and is pressing to modify international norms” (O.D.N.I., 9 April 2021). The first U.S. official report defined China as a relatively close challenger, marking a significant shift in competitive strategy vis-à-vis China. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has remained protected despite any potential peer challenger. Now that America has identified one, it would organize all the necessary tools to prevent and deter competitors.

Building Back Better World (B3W) Initiative and Developing World

The G7 states provided an unexpected commitment of \$600 billion towards development. At the last G7 summit, it was the first effort to establish a “Marshall Plan” for poorer nations in the post-colonial era. The G7’s promise is significant in its commitment to addressing the \$15 trillion global infrastructure investment debt burden by 2040 (Liao & Beal, 2022). The world’s largest democratic countries have devised a strategy, as shown in Figure 4, to compete effectively with China in establishing a twenty-first-century global network.

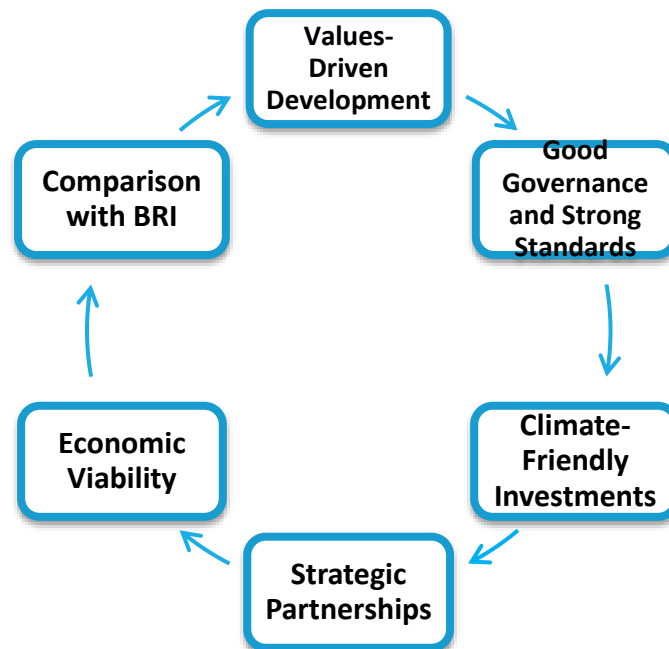
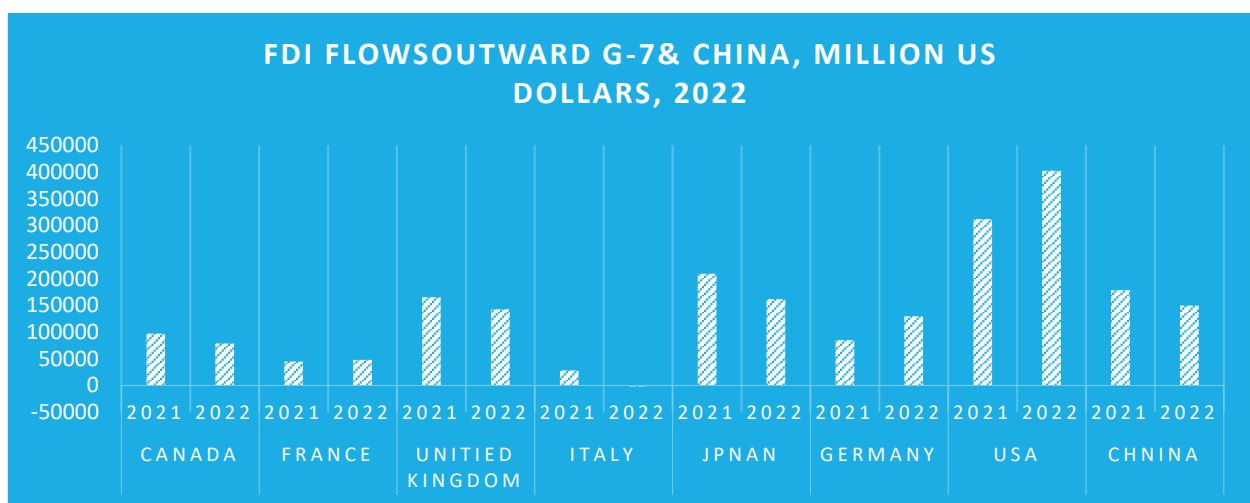


Figure 4. B3W Model.

However, concerns exist that if the G7 confirms that infrastructural development will be a value-based approach, many African and Asian nations may not be eligible for financial support due to their ideological foundations (WhiteHouse, 2022). This could potentially leave these nations reliant on China for funding in the coming decades. According to the Global Democracy Ranking, twenty-three of Africa’s fifty-four states were classified as having complete democratic systems, imperfect democratic countries, or blended dictatorships (EIU, 2021). If the G7 infrastructure commitment purely facilitates democratic countries, just one state by the strict quality requirement twenty-three states by the most easygoing requirement, Africa, might even be eligible for financial support. This is another scary truth for G7. As many African and Asian states do not become eligible for the G7’s funds given their ideological foundations, China will probably be their best and only funder in the upcoming decades (Spanaus, Kiefer, Berger, Neumeister, & Treptow, 2022). Currently, less than 20 percent of the community resides in a complete, democratic country and this percentage is decreasing. The remaining 80 percent of the world’s population is being drawn into China’s financial circle through the initiatives of the G7. The G7’s revived Cold War big game will lead to a more destabilized globe. In contrast, China has made significant infrastructure investments, such as laying the “Peace Cable” along Africa’s eastern coast in 2021 and providing free high-speed connectivity from Djibouti to South Africa and across the Mediterranean to southern France (Martinez, 2022). The concern is that the emerging world will become more split and financially inequitable if an electronic barrier is built against non-democracies, and infrastructure development should not be limited to territories where voting occurs.

There are three reasons why G7 needs to regain lost trust in its developmental promise throughout the undeveloped world. First, G7’s alliance with worldwide facilities and funding is transforming its new initiative, the Build Back Better World. The rebranding eliminated the Biden administration’s hallmark national strategy—the Build Back Better Act. The Congressional Budget Office predicts that the federal budget deficit will decrease from \$1.0 trillion in 2022, down from \$2.8 trillion in the previous year. However, from 2023 to 2032, the average annual shortfall was expected to be \$1.6 trillion. The deficit as a percentage of GDP will

initially decrease as pandemic-related spending decreases; however, it is projected to increase to 6.1 percent of GDP by 2032. This deficit level has only been surpassed six times since 1946 (CBO, 2022). Congressional Republicans have introduced a bill requiring a 22 percent reduction in funding for various essential services such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, veterans' benefits, education, and infrastructure (Banerjee & Zipperer, 2022). Admittedly, when a multitrillion-dollar initiative to revitalize America's social and physical infrastructure facilities came to a halt, how believable is it that the U.S. will now prioritize a \$200 billion spending plan on infrastructure from Tanzania to Burma? Second, in an intergovernmental commitment, the G7 member nations and the European Union (EU) faced a significant challenge. The emerging world observes the companionship of countries in worldwide environmental issue agreements, where every state expects the next to be the initial reformer (Lieser, 2022). Third, the EU's promise for the international development move was 1.5 times greater than the United States' promise. Europe has historical relationships with Africa and Asia. Whether Africa and Asia have seen rejoining as neo-colonialists, why Europe has not performed more in the past, and why developing countries are often portrayed as geostrategic movies rather than independent entities.



Graph 2. Source: Authors' contribution and data gathered from various reports.

Graph 2 compares the foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows of G7 countries and China for the years 2021 and 2022. In 2021, China's foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows totaled around US\$146.5 billion, and in 2022, they continued to be strong, playing a significant role in global investment flows. Among the G7 nations, the United States experienced substantial growth in FDI outflows in 2022. Considering undeveloped countries, the seven most developed economies in the world may create policy mistakes. For example, specifying the G7 infrastructure investment in democratic nations will create a massive China that is more powerful in developing countries, undermining the coherent strategy the G7 has planned to achieve.

Internal Conflicts within the G7

Trade Policies

Trump's "America First" policy led to significant trade tensions, particularly with allies in the G7. His administration imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Canada, the European Union, and other allies, which led to retaliatory tariffs and strained relationships (Ilyas, 2024). Only one of the various tariffs mentioned by Trump has been implemented: an additional 10% tax on Chinese imports in addition to the existing taxes. Trump has deferred the 25% charge on imports from Canada and Mexico and imposed a 25% duty on steel and aluminum imports last week. These penalties will not take effect until the first week of March (Wile, 2025).

Climate Change

The Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement was a significant point of contention with

other G7 countries, which are generally more committed to combating climate change (Tausendfreund, Moraal, & Campbell, 2024). The U.S. position against international climate agreements would shake G7 cooperation and global climate efforts (Dinneen, 2025).

NATO and Defense Expenditure

Trump frequently criticized NATO members for not meeting the target of spending at least 2% of their GDP on defense. Trump argued that the United States shouldered too much of the financial burden for NATO's defense (Schuette, 2021). This led to increased pressure on NATO members to boost their defense budgets. By 2024, several European nations had met the 2% GDP target, and discussions were underway about raising the target to 3% or even 4% (Wire, 2025). The DU plan to enhance Europe's defense sector and augment its military capacity may generate approximately €800 billion (£660 billion) and provide immediate military assistance for Ukraine following the cessation of US aid to Kyiv (Henley, 2025).

Digital Taxation

The United States and European G7 nations have disagreed over proposals to impose taxes on digital services, impacting significant American technology firms (Beller, 2018). Securing international political backing for the G7 agreement on corporation taxation would be challenging, particularly for Pillar 2. The possibility of transatlantic trade tensions has diminished but persists, as the politically charged tax discourse is improbable to be resolved through global technical accords. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and other G7 competition authorities released a statement on October 4, 2024, discussing the regulatory issues raised by artificial intelligence (AI) and digital marketplaces (G7italia, 2025).

China Policy

The Trump administration's strong stance on China, which involves trade conflicts and rhetoric on matters such as Hong Kong and Huawei, could lead to differing policies among the G7 (Dekker & Okano-Heijmans, 2020). G7 members differ in how much they rely on China economically; some nations give sustaining trade relations first priority, while others are more ready to adopt a harder posture (Oxford Analytica, 2023). This can lead to variations in the degree of aggressiveness employed in pursuit of economic risk reduction.

Global Governance and Multilateralism

Trump's mistrust of multilateral organizations and treaties might continue to cause conflict with G7 nations that endorse a rules-based world order. On February 4, 2025, President Donald Trump enacted a comprehensive executive order that could fundamentally alter years of American international involvement. Within 180 days, the directive requires thoroughly examining every international agreement the US is bound to and all multilateral organizations it now participates in (White House, 2025). The specific objective of this process is to ascertain whether the funding should be retracted.

Criticisms of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Western and Chinese discourses around the Belt and Road Initiative and their complex interrelations are important to examine. Western skepticism, especially from the US, critiques the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from three perspectives: geopolitical, economic, and security. The United States perceives the program as a vehicle for China to advance its covert aspiration of achieving global supremacy. This is an unfeasible economic plan that just facilitates China's ascendance. Conversely, China presents the Belt and Road Initiative as an economic endeavor aimed at mutual advancement and synergistic cooperation. Some important criticisms of BRI from different scholars are mentioned below.

Firstly, the money that China has invested in BRI projects has caused significant debt burdens for several of its partners. For example, after failing to repay an \$8 billion loan, Sri Lanka was forced to lease the Hambantota Port to China for 99 years (Moramudali & Panduwawala, 2024). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative has required a \$6 billion financial rescue from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Debt distress frequently occurs in BRI projects, and while asset seizure is uncommon, this trend prompts legitimate

questions regarding the viability and methodologies of BRI initiatives. The second criticism of the BRI initiative concerns unequal agreements. Certain projects have been cancelled as some nations, including Malaysia, have labelled BRI initiatives as "unequal treaties" and a kind of "new colonialism," therefore negating them (O'Neill, 2020). The third criticism of the BRI initiative pertains to human rights issues. Discussions on how the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) affects human rights have been spurred by critics who contend that, with increased persecution of dissent and restrictions on freedom of expression, BRI projects can sometimes lead to authoritarianism in partner nations. Furthermore, it has been criticized for not considering democratic development or human rights records in China's approach to investing under the Belt and Road Initiative. This has sparked questions regarding the decline of democratic liberties and workers' rights in nations engaged in BRI projects (Jerabek, 2023).

Geopolitical tensions present another criticism, as they are often seen as China's means of increasing its power. The Belt and Road Initiative challenges the supremacy of Western powers, such as the United States and the European Union. In light of China's growing influence in politics and economic dependency, nations in South Asia and Southeast Asia have expressed concerns about its increasing involvement through BRI projects. The BRI intersects with other projects, such as the EU's Global Gateway and multilateral platforms like BRICS, thereby generating conflicting ideas for global growth. The initiative is viewed as China's means of safeguarding its financial interests and reorienting global trade routes (IISS, 2022). The fifth criticism of the BRI initiative concerns environmental issues. Many BRI projects compromise ecosystems and biological diversity by crossing ecologically fragile regions. For instance, species in peril include the saiga antelope and the tiger. Within the BRI, infrastructure expansion sometimes results in deforestation and more pollution, therefore affecting local communities and their environment. China has implemented policies such as the Green Investment concept to help mitigate environmental effects, but their application remains inconsistent (Hughes, 2019).

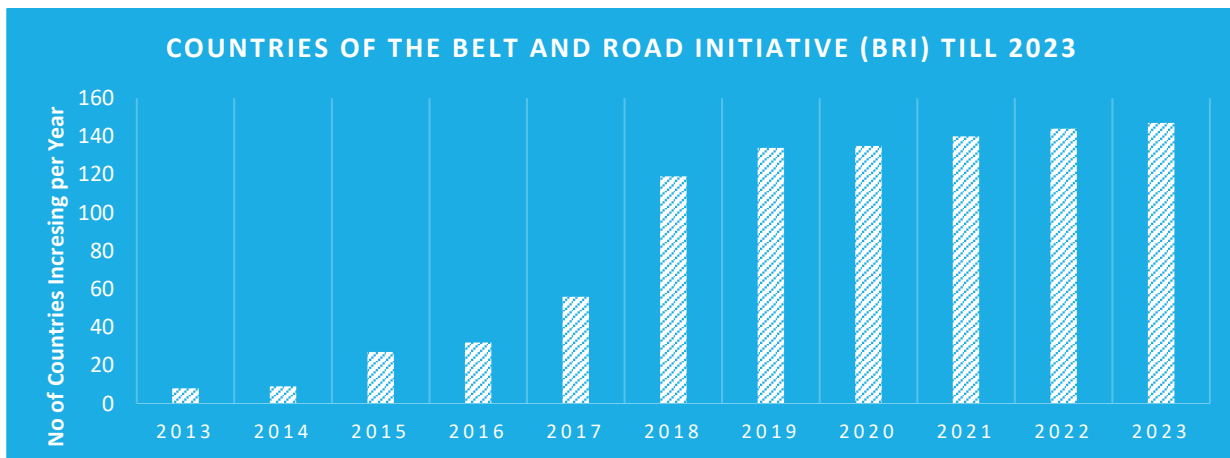
Western countries sometimes present the BRI as a tool for China's geopolitical aspirations rather than as a cooperative development initiative. This narrative contradicts China's portrayal of the BRI as a win-win solution for global economic development. The BRI's initiative has to be appealing everywhere and overcome mistrust if it is to be a successful worldwide project. Critics argue that certain nations find the BRI less appealing due to its opaque and exclusive nature. Western media frequently draws attention to the hazards and obstacles of the Belt and Road Initiative, including debt-trap diplomacy and environmental issues that affect public sentiment against the project (Bhuiyan & Yi, 2024).

Can the Build Back Better World (B3W) serve as an Alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?

President Biden has made significant efforts to prove that the U.S. is capable of leading and the backbone of the liberal international order. He emphasized that common beliefs, democracy, and the principles of liberalism form the basis for integrating the United States with its allied powers. The president also highlighted the potential challenge posed by the increasingly aggressive China. He emphasized the importance of Western democracies collaborating to counter the rise of authoritarian states. However, it is still unclear what the United States plans to do with a new and updated multilateral structure. Biden appears to have preserved some of the strategic policies recognized under the Trump regime's framework of financial nationalism and protectionism (Mishra, 2021). The United States also enforces tariffs on steel and aluminum among many other products purchased from alliance nations. President Biden is also increasing the 'Buy American' initiative, and his government is focusing on establishing domestic production and distribution networks. However, President Biden still indicates a desire to nominate judges to the WTO court or the new Trans-Pacific Partnership. The US-led B3W proposal is a global-development strategy. The G7 nations pledged to fund infrastructure in underdeveloped countries. The action plan aims to confirm that democratic nations can emerge together and be implemented for the benefit of people in the real world (Wallace, 2021). This is presumed in comparison to the BRI, which asserts that a motor for China's self-interest positions the recipient nations

into a cycle of debt. However, there are complex inquiries regarding the B3W proposal, even with existing conceptual frameworks (Crabtree, 2021).

First, the proposal is projected to provide over US\$40 trillion in funding by 2035 (WhiteHouse, 2021). However, it is questionable how Biden plans to acquire cross-party backing at home when US internal infrastructure investment has shrunk (Crabtree, 2021). There are also concerns about the accessibility of funds, given the record-high US debt, and worries that the United States may irresponsibly print more money, thereby fueling inflation. (Khan & Khan, 2022). However, these issues may not be entirely baseless. As several states will suffer financial restoration after COVID-19, price inflation is predicted to remain docile (Borio, 2020). Once manufacturing is fully restarted worldwide, high inflation is likely to subside, and a critical problem will be maintaining a stable supply. However, even as a financially sovereign nation, the Biden administration can charge any legal tender in US dollars. The main question is whether heads, notably Biden, can influence the national electorate on the concept of significant international expenditures. Currently, this may be a challenging aspect (Rubin, 2022). Meanwhile, other G7 states are self-imposing deficit reductions at various levels.



Graph 3. Source: Authors contribution and data gathered from various reports.

Second, while Biden expresses that there are no threads connected, it is hard to believe that the USA will not change its policy if recipient states countries are found to be violating European norms that unite the G7 and promote a better world. The history of the United States also suggests that institutional changes should be implemented as a measure to regulate financial services. Strong opinions in corporate companies and skepticism about the effectiveness of government entities could also pose a significant challenge for G7 to believe in and collaborate with government departments in underdeveloped nations (Mishra, 2021). Third, 147 countries have joined the BRI (as shown in Graph 3) and initiated 2600 infrastructure development projects valued at approximately US\$3.7 trillion in undeveloped nations (Choudhury, 2023). Expected as a substitute for the BRI, G7's infrastructure investment strategy is doubtful regarding cooperation and collaboration with Chinese-initiated developments. This could lead to frequent superficial improvements, disorganization, and haphazard attempts to develop world-class infrastructure. Many argue that the G7's strategy can foster fair competition with China, thereby gaining a competitive advantage globally. However, conflicts can become ineffective and destructive without proper coordination and partnership. The Biden administration's Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative is not better positioned to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative as a zero-sum substitute (Ming, 2022). G7 states can use investments to initiate promising public work projects. For example, Japan has been making significant contributions to infrastructure development in Southeast Asia. B3W does not have to be used as an alternate defensive measure for China's BRI. Both can be aggressive in such sectors and interconnected with others. Another example is that Japan and Italy have been part of the BRI, and synergizing efforts are better than pitting one action against another.

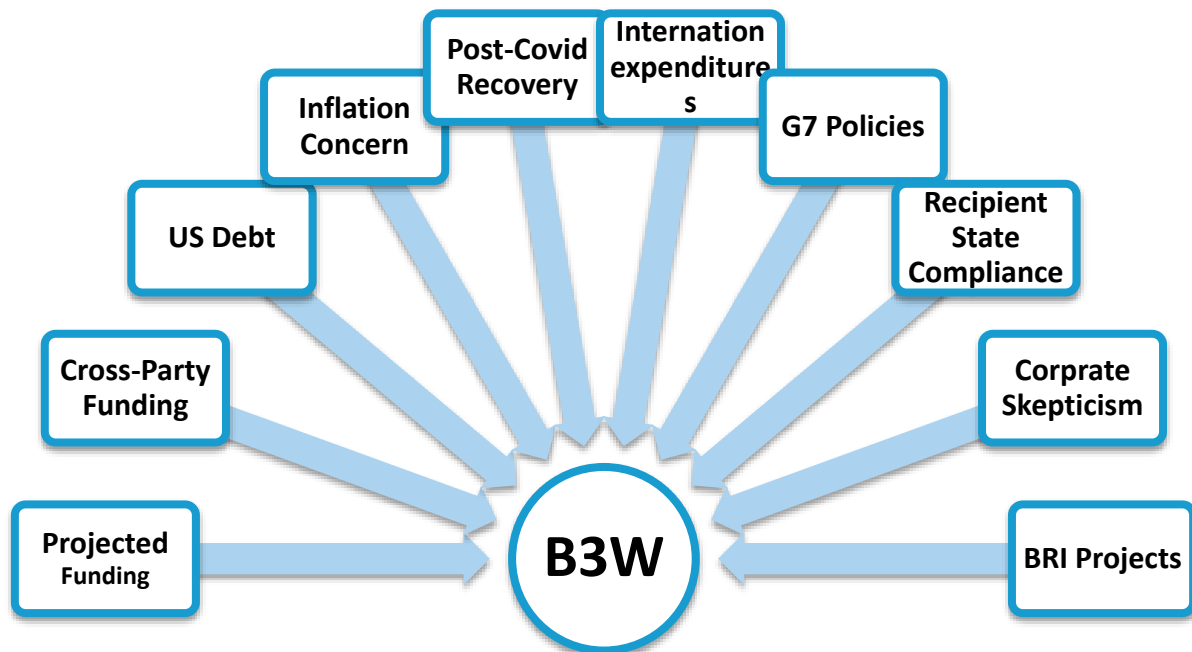


Figure 5. Factors Influencing B₃W's Effectiveness against BRI.

Global challenges ensure comprehensive intergovernmental initiatives (Pitakdumrongkit, 2021). An intergovernmental framework requires states to acknowledge differences (as outlined in Figure 5), resolve conflicts, and coordinate efforts toward shared goals. Biden's anti-China stance is unusual in that it successfully mobilizes the collaboration required to address upcoming global issues, from institutional inadequacies to climate change. The U.S. would ideally be positioned to regain leadership if B₃W were realigned to influence the globe in a manner that fosters a new, balanced society in an equitable manner. However, B₃W remains a significant concept or strategic plan, lacking information on organizing private sector investment, the capital requirements the U.S. and its partner countries are willing to provide, or how to align with their objectives. As some have warned, investing in a framework for creating a comprehensive channel of creditworthy initiatives to decrease threats and enhance private sector participation is a significant task. The U.S. government requires a central facilitator to organize its internal organizations and collaborate with different international partners to support the initiative (Carrai, 2021).

Key Findings

1. The B₃W initiative, launched by the G7 countries (primarily the United States) and announced in June 2021, is based on values-driven, transparent, and sustainable infrastructure development as a democratic alternative to China's BRI. China launched the BRI in 2013 to enhance global trade and economic integration by building infrastructure networks connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa (Aggarwal, 2023).
2. The B₃W initiative's objectives are to address the global infrastructure gap, focusing on climate-friendly, gender-equitable, and socially inclusive initiatives. Meanwhile, BRI wants to increase China's global economic impact by building new trade routes and increasing economic connectivity between China and the rest of the world (Takeda, Helms, & Watkins, 2024) (Liu & Xu, 2025).
3. The B₃W initiative depends on private sector investment and partnerships with international development banks, while Chinese state-owned banks and companies primarily sponsor the BRI (Sheng, 2023).
4. The B₃W initiative counters China's rising influence through the BRI by deepening democratic alliances and promoting Western values. In contrast, the BRI enhances China's global influence by creating economic and strategic partnerships (Sheng, 2023).

5. The B₃W initiative struggles to attract sufficient private sector funding and achieve quick results comparable to those of BRI, while BRI faces criticism for debt-related issues in recipient nations (Hameiri & Jones, 2023).

Conclusions

The G7's initiative addresses Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, which has been supported by states within China's direct sphere of influence. However, some concerns regarding European contributions to global growth initiatives must be addressed. The Build Back Better World (B₃W) proposal was supported at the G7 meeting in the United Kingdom; however, it lacked substantial evidence and was not expected to materialize in the coming years. However, the move is viewed as a form of competition by the world's wealthiest democratic countries, which aim to counter China's growing influence in emerging economies through infrastructure projects. It is possible that global unity and welfare could be best served if the B₃W and BRI proposals ran in parallel. For this to happen, the U.S. and its B₃W stakeholders would need to introduce an action with a distinct character, different from and distinguishable from the BRI schema, without being promoted or defined as an alternative. In the current scenario, the prevailing political environment and ongoing conflicts between the US and China are unfavorable. Nevertheless, as B₃W projects evolve from a commitment to more tangible proposals, the hostile tone of great-power trends might shift, enabling US-led and Chinese investment opportunities in a manner that could ultimately benefit global welfare.

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