

China's BRI and Germany's Baghdad Railroad - a Realist Analysis of Hegemonic Conflict and the Circumvention of Maritime Power

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Abstract : In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Britain dominated global trade and finance in large part due to its maritime superiority. Germany, a land power, sought to undermine Britain's position as the primary hegemon but ultimately could not challenge Britain's maritime position or capabilities. This drove Germany to seek alternative strategies to weaken Britain's position. Notably, it pushed Germany to create a reliable overland link through the Balkans to the Middle East via railroad. This article will seek to draw parallels between the German-British hegemonic conflict of the early 20th century and the Chinese-American hegemonic conflict taking place today using both secondary historical sources and current scholarly discussions of the changing international sphere. In doing so, it will provide useful insights into how China might attempt to outflank American power. The article will demonstrate that in many ways, the strategic positions and approaches of the early-20th century Germany and modern China are similar. Both countries were faced with a vastly superior foe with respect to maritime and economic power, and in both cases, their response was to undermine their rival hegemon by creating new overland infrastructure. Furthermore, in both cases, a major goal of creating new overland links was to gain further access to and control over Middle Eastern energy markets. It seems that in the modern day, China is conducting such a policy on a much grander scale than Germany did in the early 20th century—which may result in negative consequences for the US strategic position.

Keywords : belt and road Initiative, hegemonic conflict, maritime power, realism

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