

BILL, Simon. *Bandwagoning with the Belt and Road: Russia's changing attitude towards the Chinese presence in Central Asia post-Crimea*. Praha, 2019. 78 pages. Master's thesis (Mgr.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of International Studies. Department of Russian and East European Studies. Supervisor Prof. Jan Šír, Ph.D.

Abstract

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has considered the Central Asian states to be a part of its exclusive sphere of influence. In recent years, however, China has also increased its presence in the region, investing heavily in the energy and transportation sectors. This is exemplified by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), specifically its Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) component, which was launched in September 2013. As China increased its presence in the region, and Russia launched its own initiative, the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), the two powers seemed to be on a collision course. However, relations between the two never deteriorated as predicted. Instead, the opposite has happened. In 2015, Russia found itself internationally isolated due to its controversial actions in Ukraine and embraced China's initiative. This dissertation will seek to explain Russia's increasingly accommodating attitude towards China's growing investment and influence in Central Asia, despite Russia's zealous protection of its exclusive sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space and the two powers' diverging interests in the region. Using a case study comparing Russia's stance towards the Chinese presence before and after the annexation of Crimea, this dissertation will examine Russia's shifting stance through the lens of realist balance of power theory. Specifically, it will argue that Russia has engaged in 'soft' bandwagoning behaviour.

Keywords

Russia, China, Central Asia, Belt and Road, Silk Road Economic Belt, Bandwagoning, Balance of Power