

Evaluation of China's Middle East Policies: Current Situation and Future Trends

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Abstract

China has achieved remarkable economic growth since the early 1990s, especially between 2000 and 2020. Its economic development in the post-Cold War period has been characterized by extraordinary and sustained expansion driven by well-planned reforms and strategic policies. After the Cold War, China adopted a new foreign policy approach towards the Middle East region. This change has been influenced by various factors, primarily the dynamics of the arms market among Middle Eastern countries, the repercussions of the Arab Spring, the increasing energy needs caused by China's rapid economic expansion, and the emergence of a problematic political personality in China. China's policy vis-à-vis the United States has significantly impacted economic, political, and social areas, positioning China as a critical partner for the countries in the region. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of China's Middle East foreign policy from cultural, economic, and political perspectives over the last two decades. To achieve this, a thorough review of the existing literature was conducted, incorporating insights from a wide range of sources, including observations of Chinese diplomacy and the status quo in the region. This multi-faceted approach ensures a robust and nuanced understanding of China's foreign policy in the Middle East.

Keywords: Chinese Diplomacy, China, Africa, Middle East, USA.

Çin'in Ortadođu Politikalarının Deđerlendirilmesi: Mevcut Durum ve Gelecekteki Eđilimler

Öz

Çin, 1990'ların başlarından bu yana, özellikle de 2000 ile 2020 yılları arasında kayda deđer bir ekonomik büyüme elde etmiş ve Sođuk Savaş sonrası dönemdeki ekonomik gelişimi, iyi planlanmış reformlar ve stratejik politikalar tarafından yönlendirilen olađandışı ve sürekli

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genişlemeyle karakterize edilmiştir. Soğuk Savaş sonrasında Çin'i Orta Doğu bölgesine yönelik yeni bir dış politika yaklaşımı benimsemeye yöneltmiştir. Bu değişim öncelikle Orta Doğu ülkeleri arasındaki silah pazarının dinamikleri, Arap Baharı'nın yansımaları, Çin'in hızlı ekonomik genişlemesinin yol açtığı artan enerji ihtiyaçları ve Çin'de zorlu bir siyasi kişiliğin ortaya çıkışı gibi çeşitli faktörlerden etkilenmiştir. ABD karşısında Çin politikasının ekonomik, politik ve sosyal alanlardaki önemli etkisi olmuş ve Çin'i bölge ülkeleri için kritik bir ortak olarak konumlandırmıştır. Bu çalışma Çin'in Orta Doğu dış politikasını son yirmi yılda kültürel, ekonomik ve politik açılardan incelemektedir. Bu amaca ulaşmak için ilgili döneme ilişkin mevcut literatürün bir incelemesi yapılmış; bölgedeki Çin diplomasisi ve statükoya ilişkin mevcut gözlemlerden öngörüler elde edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin Diplomasisi, Çin, Afrika, Orta Doğu, ABD.

Introduction

Middle East has been considered home to the cradle of civilization for more than 5000 years. What is so special about this region is that many early civilizations were born at the heart of the Middle East. The first civilizations that emerge in the areas include the Sumerians, Babylon, Acadians, Egyptian empire, Assyrians, Greek, and Roman empires (Cleveland & Bunton, 2016). These ancient civilizations significantly impacted the modern world. They were the first civilizations to use calendars, practice year-round agriculture, build the first city-states, form the first law systems and centralized governments, create writing systems, and build advanced trade systems (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2015).

The current day situations in the Middle East region are experiencing serious political turmoil as many independent countries were built in the last century including Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The region is best known for its significant and critical mines, minerals, and other natural resources. It hosts 35% of the total discovered oil and 40% of the total discovered natural gas reserves in the world (Tong, e.t., 2018, p.780). For this reason, it is important for nations, especially the EU, the USA, Russia, and China. The dynamics of the region have been constantly changing due to outside interventions.

China's foreign interactions with the Middle East region date back about two thousand years (Singh, 2016). They both shared similar but painful historical narratives with glorious but fitful and bitter experiences of decolorizations by the Western world. However, they don't cooperate as much as expected, regardless of their historical similarities. Energy, counter-terrorism, and the flow of commerce have always been the national interests of China and the United States in the region. China, which has become a world power in the last two decades, has started intervening in the Middle East region and building new relations with the area's states regarding economic, political, and military perspectives. China has started playing a significant role in the Middle East region, and it is essential to update the recent developments.

This study reviews China's major interventions in the Middle East region and discusses important approaches and findings from the last two decades. It is expected to contribute to the current literature involving various countries in the Middle East region and China's recent collaboration efforts, especially economically.

Literature Review (2000-2020)

This section summarizes the Middle East region's past and present according to its social, political, cultural, and economic perspectives. In the next parts, China and USA relations are discussed, as well as China's social, cultural, political, and economic influences on the region.

The Middle East in the Past and between 2000-2020

The Middle East region today includes 16 independent states, including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and parts of Iran and Egypt (Pan e.t., 2015, p. 447). Some resources include Turkey on the list; however, it is excluded in this study. Additionally, Israel should not be considered for the Middle East region due to its economic and political structures.

This region is so unique for people worldwide that it has always taken special attention throughout history due to the religious roots of three major divine religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Jilo e.t. 2017, p.15). Throughout history, several empires conquered the region in the post-classical era. The Persian empires controlled the Middle East between the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD. In the later periods, the Roman Empire started invading the region around 60 BC. They held it until Islam was born in the 6th century AD.

In the later decades, The Ottoman Empire conquered the Middle Eastern states for four centuries, between the 16th and 20th centuries (Pappe, 2014). Ottoman started ruling the region in the 14th century, but they started an official invasion in 1517 when the Abbasid Empire handed over two holy cities (Macca, Medina) to the Ottoman sultan. Turks were not Arab origin and had no ties to their ethnicity; therefore, they ruled the states regarding their religious beliefs and tolerance to the other nations. Only half of the Ottoman citizens were Muslim in the mid-19th century.

One of the most influential nations and ethnicities in the Middle East is considered as Israel. The foundation of the Israeli state was paved during the late Ottoman periods in the region when a large Jewish community was welcomed in the Palestinian region from Spain (Hever, 2010).

The Middle East region's social and political problems started during and following World War II (WWII). The Middle East states have been struggling for the last eight decades. Most of the problems have arisen due to interventions from external and outside countries, such as the USA, Russia, the EU, and China in the region. People of the Middle East have been living in similar conditions both economically and politically since WWII. They are economically unstable, which causes a lack of freedom and human rights violations under dictatorship or autocratic regimes (Mitchell, 2003).

According to the 2018 World Bank reports, 16 Middle East countries generated over 2.2 trillion GDP (current USD), which only constitutes around 2.5% of the total. Considering their population, 320 million, and 4,2%, this rate is approximately equal to the world GDP per capita (11,312 USD) in 2018. Although the GDP per capita of Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) exceeds the world average, their population is so low that it lowers the average for the region. The economic growth rate of the Middle East has been seen as an emerging economy but less than other emerging markets such as India and China (The World Bank, 2018).

China and the USA Relations

The relationship between China and the USA, the world’s two largest economies, has developed significantly in recent years. It has moved from a period of hostility and conflict to a period of sincere dialogue and constructive cooperation. For instance, both countries have engaged in regular high-level diplomatic talks, signed numerous trade agreements, and collaborated on global issues such as climate change and nuclear non-proliferation.

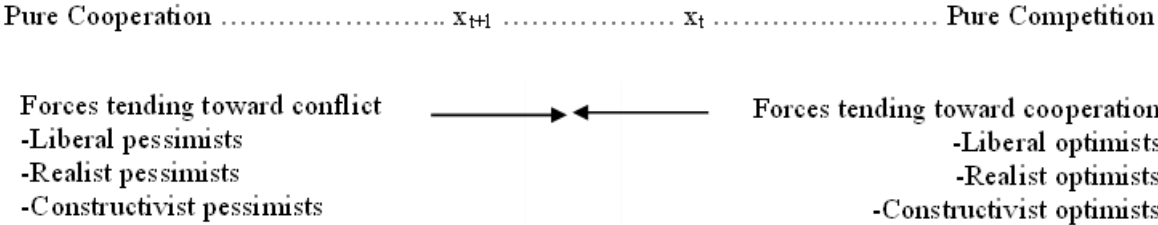
Moreover, with China’s rapid emergence as an economic powerhouse and military power in Asia, and its potential to challenge the US hegemony, this transformation is not just a development, but a crucial shift that demands our attention. It is at this point that both countries are finding common ground in trade, investment, and security issues (Yo‘Ldoshev, 2024, pp. 22-23).

According to World Bank records, the world’s total GDP reached 85 trillion US dollars by the end of 2018. The USA (20.58 trillion) and China (14.14 trillion) were the only two countries whose total nominal GDP exceeded the 5 trillion US dollar threshold. These two countries make up almost 40% of the total world GDP score. The USA and China have been competing economically, but they are also the biggest trade partners (The World Bank, 2018).

The relations between China and the USA have been fluctuating and taken unexpected turns due to the political changes during the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations in the USA, as well as the economic surpass of China in the world and for the next three years following the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York, USA decisionmakers and administrators started dealing with the terrorist organizations, which enabled China to become a strategic competitor (Fraihat & Leber, 2019, p. 11).

China’s economic advantages against the USA also affected political and cultural dominance, especially in North Africa and the Middle East. Realist pessimists support the idea that rising powers generally tend to be troublemakers in the international systems throughout history (Friedrichs, 2019, p.1645). For example, Samuel Huntington pointed out, “The external expansion of the UK and France, Germany and Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States coincided with phases of intense industrialization and economic development” (Huntington, 1991, pp. 5-7). In terms of the future behaviors of the PRC, Friedberg (2005) constructed a model that involves contending causal forces, as indicated in the figure below.

Figure 1. USA and PRC relationship model after 1990s



Source: De Graaff & Van Apeldoorn, 2018



As indicated in the above figure, the PRC-USA relations have been complicated following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s (De Graaff & Van Apeldoorn, 2018, p. 115). The relation is based on cooperative and competitive elements. The factors indicated in the above figure will determine its future. X_{t+1} indicates larger and more powerful elements than x_t , as it involves more partners.

In the case of the Middle East region, the USA and China have been cooperating against a common enemy (e.g., ISIS) since the internal war and conflicts in Syria, in addition to continuing their competitive relationships in terms of economic and political perspectives (Tong, e.t., 2018, p. 781). Recent studies showed that although the USA and PRC are trapped in structural contradictions because of the disagreements over North Korea, South Korea, and Japan's political disputes in the Asia-Pacific region, they have found more tactical and functional areas for expanding engagements in the Middle East region. Although the USA and PRC have been engaged with each other in the Middle East, the PRC currently does not seem to displace the US dominance in their political affairs soon (De Graaff & Van Apeldoorn, 2018, p. 120).

The strategic competition between the two powers was incredibly intense during the Donald Trump administration. During this period, a conflict phase began that some strategists described as a new Cold War. The tension in bilateral relations has been attributed to the inevitable exacerbation of contradictions and conflicts between the "former" superpower, the USA, and the newly rising China.

It is thought that this tension has intensified not only in terms of trade and technological wars but also due to global economic stagnation problems, the Taiwan issue, nuclear armament in North Korea and Iran, and disagreements over Russia's role. Despite these difficulties, there is a need to recognize the need for both countries to promote healthy, standardized, and benign relations of competition and cooperation, recognizing that there is no geopolitical conflict of interest, border issues, or resource disputes between them.

Both cooperation and competition mark the relationship between China and the United States, and China's economic rise challenges the United States. The strategic nuclear relationship between the two countries has also become central to US policies towards China, reflecting the complexity of security relations. Despite its difficulties, thanks to China's integration into the international community and its role in global governance, both nations must act as significant partners in the world economy and trade despite their different political systems and social structures.

Trade relations between China and the United States, the world's two largest economies, have not only undergone significant transformations over the past two decades but also face a multitude of challenges. The economic effects of these relationships have been broad and complex, reverberating across various sectors and industries. In particular, the trade disputes that erupted in 2017, initially shaped by concerns about unfair trade practices, have had a profound impact on both the economies of the countries and the global trade environment, further highlighting the wide-ranging implications of this issue (Fung e.t., 2022).

During this period, the world's two largest economies, China and the United States, have been at the center of a trade conflict that underscores the fragility and complexity of their economic interdependence. This interdependence is not only based on the volume of trade but also on the integration of supply chains, the mutual investments, and the shared technological

advancements. This trade conflict threatens to escalate into a full-scale trade war, which could disrupt these interdependencies and have far-reaching consequences for the global economy.

The trade structure between two countries significantly affects their bilateral relations. For instance, changes in the import and export trade structure, such as a shift from raw materials to high-tech products, can lead to a reevaluation of the economic competitiveness of each country and a renegotiation of trade agreements. Overall, the post-2017 period in China-US trade relations reveals a complex interplay of economic, political, and environmental factors. These factors, including changes in trade structure, continue to shape the dynamics between these two global powers.

China's Foreign Policy in the Middle East

As the fastest-developing country in the last two decades, China started playing significant roles in the regions of conflict zones, including the Middle East region (Gao, 2013, p.112). Two central countries that have been building solid relations economically, politically, and security-wise are Iran and Saudi Arabia due to their energy sources, as China has been in great need of energy for its economic development (Friedrichs, 2019, p.1650). Chinese analysts repeatedly stated that "The Middle East is a graveyard of great powers" in 2007, exemplifying France and England in the Levant (1956), the Soviet Union in Afghanistan (the 1980s), the United States in Iraq (2003).

China's foreign policy in the Middle East has been significantly influenced by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to improve trade and commercial ties within the region, especially in the post-Arab Spring period. However, this initiative faces challenges from ongoing civil wars in countries such as Yemen, Libya, and Syria, which threaten the BRI's strategic design by undermining connectivity and threatening infrastructure projects. The relationship between China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has evolved over the past fifty years, driven by China's increasing energy demands and the resulting strategic multilateral cooperation. This relationship constitutes the economic core of China's Middle East policy, which is expected to grow further under the BRI framework (Mordechai, 2022).

Studies revealed that Beijing has been primarily interested in economic partnerships in the Middle East region as well as its domestic, international, and security policies in favor of Eastern China and East Asia (Scobell & Nader, 2016, p.20).

From the historical perspective, China was mainly disengaged from the Middle East region during the Cold War between the two superpowers from 1945 through 1991. However, by the early 1980s, it had become more interested in gaining influence and growing its regional presence. These attempts were majorly aligned with competing with the USA and the Soviet Union and gaining more support for international recognition of Taiwan (Dorsey, 2017, pp. 7-8).

China built its first diplomatic relationships with Middle Eastern countries Egypt and Syria in 1956. However, a breakthrough occurred in the early 1970s, when China was admitted into the United Nations (UN), with Taiwan holding a security seat in the UN Security Council. Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, and Libya supported China in this conflict and recognized China instead of Taiwan (Gao,2014, p.75).

Though Russia and China have more common policies in the Middle East than the United States, China has been more concerned with political stability and economic

cooperation. Russia's significant intentions with the countries in the regions are mostly connected to the security and arms trade. On the other hand, China's relationships are more multi-dimensional, involving oil imports, increasing arms trade, infrastructural development, economic investments, and security matters (Bekkevold, 2019, p.144).

In a recent study on the China-Middle East and North Africa (MENA) relations in the early millennium period, Fraihat and Leber discussed the impacts of Arab Springs on China's foreign policies in the region (Fraihat & Leber, 2019, p.15). They specified gradual proactive diplomatic relations in the past few years. China's role in the MENA revolves around this proactive engagement to cope with the challenges. They suggested that if China plans to expand its economic trade with the countries in the region, it should focus on MENA by increasing academic and knowledge production and reevaluating how to target major regional conflicts.

Furthermore, according to the UN agreements, China sent around 1,000 peacekeepers to Lebanon during the 2006 war. Alterman and Garver claimed that China started expanding in the region with this deployment. (Alterman & Garver, 2008).

China's approach to securing Middle East oil imports has emerged as a policy emphasizing non-interference in other countries domestic political affairs or human rights issues, promoting sovereignty, and combating terrorism, national separatism, and religious extremism. In response to the current turmoil in the Middle East region, China continues to adhere to the principle of non-interference, which aims to maintain regional stability and promote economic and trade cooperation. Considering recent developments, China's balanced diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli peace process reflects its complex dilemma in balancing economic and strategic goals in the Middle East and the international arena.

China's Reactions to the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was a chain of anti-governmental demonstrations, revolution, and armed rebellion that was initiated in the region of Arab states in the early 2010s. The first incident began against the response to tyrannical regimes and a low standard of living, starting with expanding protests in Tunisia. It was also caused by poverty, unemployment, monarchy, political corruption, and human rights violations (Larroque, 2019, pp. 87-88).

It immediately spread gradually to other Arab states in North Africa and the Middle Eastern regions. Major events caused the downfalls of the leaders in countries such as Libya, Yemen, Egypt, and Tunisia (Al-Turk, 2016, p. 68). Civil uprisings also occurred in other countries that heavily ruined the political balances that are still upsetting such countries, including Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Bahrain, Algeria, Jordan, and Oman. Civil uprising and significant protests were turned into a civil war in Syria by July 2011. The Arab Spring uprising also caused some countries to change people's lives majorly. For example, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia declared economic concessions, municipal elections, women's approval to vote and be elected, and expansion of women's rights.

Studies indicated that China's initial reactions to the Arab Spring were mainly related to the implications for its internal stability. They also expressed unease regarding the rapid spread of the uprisings in the Arab world (Osnos, 2011). The reports suggested that China was initially very satisfied with the political direction in Egypt after 2011. The Chinese leaders were also concerned about the uprisings spreading in their lands.

China was surprised and taken off guard by the Arab Spring. They were primarily concerned with the stability of the Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa (Singh,

2016). For this reason, they initially made routine diplomatic statements regarding the Arab uprisings, especially during the overthrow of Ben Ali (of Tunisia) and Mubarak (of Egypt).

In particular, China reacted seriously to the uprising in Libya because they have extensive interests and collaborations in terms of economic relationships. Approximately 40,000 Chinese citizens and \$18 billion worth of infrastructure projects existed in Libya at the beginning of the Arab Spring. However, with the fascist leaders of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, the scale of the uprising in Libya drew more attention internationally. The USA declared economic sanctions against the Libyan government in 2011. China later decided to send military aircraft and ships to evacuate some 36,000 of its citizens in coordination with Greece and Malta (Sun, 2012).

China acted differently in the case of the Syrian uprising and civil war afterward due to its previous experiences in Libyan events. China has stepped up its engagements and mediations throughout the area, starting with Syria. They lobbied for various political alternatives for the military options. China primarily supported Syria's opposition groups in Syria against the Assad administration for democratic changes and political stability in the country. On the other hand, it continued sending delegations to the Assad administration. Overall, China has maintained a diplomatic balance in Syria.

By the early 2010s, China had dispatched senior delegations to Syria, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Jordan, and Israel for diplomatic consultations. Finally, China is considered to promote comprehensive political diplomacy. China's political views and approaches are evolving into more flexible, mature, and sophisticated regarding their own economic and political gains.

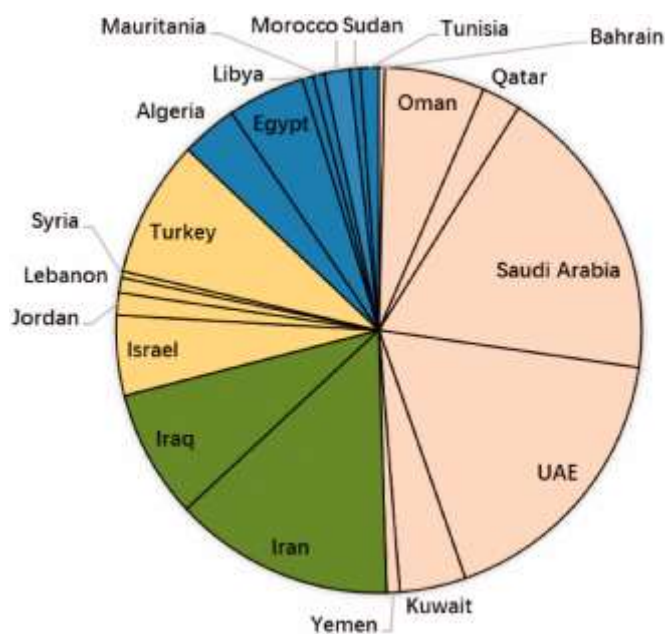
Chinese Economic Relations with the Middle Eastern Countries

China's economic relationship with Middle Eastern countries has been increasing in the last decade except for some periods with significant issues and global economic problems, such as the 2008 global economic crisis, the Syrian civil war, the overthrow of Egypt, Iraq, and Libyan leaders, and the Arab Spring.

Chinese companies participated in the annual Damascus International Fair in late 2018, which shows attempts to secure trade and market access in Syria (Alterman & Garver, 2008). This improvement showed that China has been trying to balance its economic relationships with the Arab world and hopes to restore political stability so that they can continue their economic cooperation, especially with the countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, UAE) that export oil and side natural energy resources and requires infrastructure due to the civil uprising, civil war or other reasons (e.g. Syria, Yemen, UAE).

According to the information illustrated in Figure 2, most of China's total trade with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries was made with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Iran in 2016. The total trade volume was approximately \$230 billion. The trades were weightily concentrated in the energy sector. Besides, the approximate distributions of China's investments in the MENA countries were familiar to the trade volume (Kenderdine, & Lan, 2018, pp.558-559). The top three countries in terms of investment trades included Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt, which cover more than 80% of the total investments.

Figure 2. China’s trade volume with the MENA region by country in 2019



Source: (Fraihat & Leber, 2019)

In a recent study, Xuming and Fulton (2017) focused on the China-Gulf Economic relationship in terms of the “Belt and Road” initiative. In the last decade, China has expanded its trade volumes with six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries(Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain). The US Energy Agency reported the top suppliers for China’s foreign energy needs in 2015, as indicated in the table below.

Table 1. China’s top energy providers in 2019

State	Percentage of Total Imports
Saudi Arabia	16%
Angola	13%
Russia	11%
Oman	10%
Iraq	9%
Iran	9%
Venezuela	4%
United Arab Emirates	3%
Kuwait	3%
Colombia	3%

Source: (US Energy Information Agency)

China’s trade volumes with the Arab nations have fluctuated in the last two decades. The trade volume between China and the Middle East was only \$16,087 million in 2000. Between 2000 and 2014, it upsurged and reached around \$282,460 million, the highest amount in the last decade. In the following two years, it dropped consecutively to \$185,437 million in 2016. This was caused by the 2008 economic slowdown, civil uprisings, the Syrian civil war, the Arab Spring, US sanctions for Iran, and other regional conflicts between the countries,

including Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Oman, Qatar, and UAE. Also, there has been a significant decrease in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Table 2. China's trade volumes with GCC countries in 2018 (in million USD)

Year	Export	Import	Total
2000	6,320	9,767	16,087
2006	19,842	41,417	61,249
2010	41,935	89,301	131,235
2014	122,549	159,911	282,460
2015	115,804	100,395	216,198
2016	102,783	82,654	185,437
2017	100,689	108,270	208,959
2018	101,498	157,390	258,888

Source: (IMF, 2019)

Following the initial shocks of the Syrian civil war and Iranian economic sanctions, China's volume of foreign trade with Middle Eastern countries started rising again in 2016, reaching \$258,888 million at the end of 2018.

Besides, economic increases in Oman, Qatar, and the UAE have been significant. Dubai and Qatar initiated substantial infrastructure investments and projects for the upcoming worldwide events, including the 2020 World Expo and the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022. China has been cooperating with them to complete their infrastructure projects and investments.

Since the beginning of 2020, the deadly international pandemic, COVID-19, started in China and spread across many countries worldwide, especially since March 2020. The total economic devastation caused by the spread of this dangerous disease. As of July 2020, more than 10 million people were reported infected, and more than half a million people died. Trades and transportation between countries worldwide were halted due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, especially between March and Jun 2020. Therefore, it is still too early to identify the total economic damages caused by China's partnerships with Middle Eastern countries.

Conclusion

China's Middle East policies are multifaceted and focus on securing energy resources, expanding economic ties, and increasing its geopolitical influence while adhering to non-interference and peaceful development principles. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the cornerstone of China's engagement in the region, aiming to support trade, investment, and infrastructure projects despite challenges posed by civil unrest and geopolitical tensions. China's approach is characterized by its reluctance to intervene in the internal affairs of Middle Eastern countries, promote sovereignty, and avoid the imposition of political conditions on its investments and aid. Economic diplomacy has entered a new phase as China seeks to diversify cooperation beyond energy to include finance, post-conflict reconstruction, health,

technological innovation, and green development. This shift aims to respond to new economic demands, promote regional stability, and secure China's political influence.

China's strategic interest in using Iran to strengthen its role in the Middle East and secure BRI transportation routes is evident in the expansion of China-Iran cooperation. However, the presence of the United States as a rival power has led China to adopt a careful balancing policy, maintaining friendly relations with regional states against US pressure. Notably, China's conflict management approach in the region is cautious, as it avoids involvement in internal conflicts and positions itself as a potential neutral mediator.

Looking ahead, China's policies in the Middle East will continue to balance economic interests, particularly in the energy sector. The strategic goal is to expand influence without getting entangled in local conflicts, all while navigating the complex dynamics of the US-China rivalry in the region. This forward-looking perspective sets the stage for further analysis of China's evolving role in the Middle East.

As indicated in the literature reviewed in this study, China is still building its relationships in the Middle East regions based on economic foundations as well as political and diplomatic relationships with two economic and political superpowers: the USA and Russia. European Union (EU) countries are considered secondary powers in the region.

This study examined China's economic, political, and social interactions with the Middle East region in the last two decades. As China and the Middle East nations share similar historical experiences and perspectives, they tend to recognize other parties. However, it has not been too long to initiate close partnerships economically, politically, and socially. Since the turn of the new millennium, they have been promoting their collaboration efforts.

Various issues and unfortunate events have triggered significant changes, uprisings, and revolutions in the Middle East region countries for the last few decades. Iraq-Iran was one of the significant incidents in the region before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War era. China was not heavily involved with the regional states as they were not economically and politically developed.

As China surged up volumes of economic trade post-Cold War era following the early 1990s, it started involving economic and political decisions made by the outer countries such as the EU, USA, and China. China's economy drew much attention worldwide as it became the export leader with \$2.5 trillion in 2019, about \$1 trillion higher than the US. This economic power respectfully influences its political and cultural powers across the globe.

Since China depends on Russian oil and natural gas resources for its energy needs, it is essential to play a mediator role between Russia, the USA, and Middle Eastern countries regarding any conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Syrian civil war, Egypt's uprisings against their governments, and Yemen's.

China's reactions to the Arab Spring were initially passive. However, China was forced to speak out about the unusual events due to its vast trade volumes with the region in the following years. China's ultimate goal, on the other hand, is always to maintain balanced political strategies within the region's countries. From these perspectives, it would not engage its military powers no matter what.

In conclusion, although China has been increasing its trade volumes in the last few years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its rates are expected to shrink significantly in 2020, similar

to other world countries, including Russia, the USA, and EU states. On the other hand, because of the lower demand for fossil fuels during the pandemic, China will be able to reduce energy costs, eventually positively affecting its economic situation.

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