

Why is the Arab - Chinese recent cooperation receiving a large global attention, in the current era, and how is this relationship going to have an impact on the rest of the world?

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Chinas' current presence in the Middle East

Abstract

The world has recently witnessed Chinas' presence in the Middle East, through various events. Some of these significant events were the Arab - Sino Summit that was held in Riyadh, with the presence of the Arab state leaders and the Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Under the Arab - Sino Summit important points were discussed, including regional conflicts and help find a solution to end them, as well as maintaining the Arab - Chinese relationship and the development of the states.

Furthermore, China is brokering in order to help restore the diplomatic relationship of two regional complex states, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Moreover, the restoring of the Saudi - Iranian relationship would be considered a breakthrough in the some of the complexities that the region is facing. Especially that each country is representing a sect in Islam. Where Saudi Arabia represents the Sunni Muslims and Iran represents the Shia Muslims.

Due to the sectarian conflicts that the region has witnessed, it is no surprise that this forms a huge step in the beginning of peace and stability in the Middle Eastern region.

This paper will be introducing the Arab - Sino relationship, when it started and how it is moving further. Furthermore, it will be analyzing the different events that have been happening in the Middle East together with China. From the Arab - Sino summit and what the significant points that were agreed upon were, to how the different Arab State leaders and the Chinese President refer to each other, in terms of respect for each other.

Moving on to Saudi - Iranian relationship when and why it ended, as well as what it means for the region and some regional conflicts, that both of these states restored their relationship. All of these points will be analyzed through a number of theoretical literature.

This paper then concludes how this current Arab - Chinese relationship could affect the region as well as the rest of the world, and why this relationship has received a global attention.

Introduction

The Sino - Arab relations have always been viewed as one of the most significant and influential sections of china's foreign relations, and a key area for china's diplomacy. Even before the founding of the Islamic religion and the shaping of the Arab empire, some friendly contacts have been made between China and the Arab region.¹

Since the 1950s, China gradually established formal diplomatic relations with all the Arab countries one by one. In this process, bilateral connections between China and the whole Arab world have been broadened to diverse fields and deepened to various levels. The central principle upheld throughout the whole experience of China-Arab relations is friendship and cooperation, while the core spirit prevalent in this bilateral relation is mutual respect and support. This makes a general review over the whole evolutionary development of Sino - Arab relationship in three stages.²

More than 2000 years ago, contacts between China and the Arab world were made by some merchants who traveled back and forth along the Silk Road that extended from inland China all the way through Central Asia to the Middle East.³ The Arab sea journeys and their geographic writings alongside the historical Chinese journals about their commercial and diplomatic exchanges with the Arab region. This had an important role in the establishment of the civilized dialogue that has been going on between the both the Sino and the Arab culture, since the 7th century until now.⁴

Chinese influence was extended to Ctesiphon of Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt, together with its commodities. In this way, the original contacts were established between the civilizations thriving in the valleys of the Yellow River, the Nile and the two Mesopotamian rivers, which are admired by archaeologists as the three earliest and most spectacular types of civilizations in the world. The Grand Four Inventions of China were spread to Arab regions along the Silk Road, while the Arab knowledge of mathematics, astronomy and medicine was also passed on to China.⁵

¹ Fuchang, Yang. (2018). China-Arab Relations in the 60 Years' Evolution, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 4:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145](https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Farjani, Mohsen. n.d. *The Arab - Sino relations: Paths of civilizational dialogue between the Arabs and China (in the middle Ages)* (Translated from Arabic by me).

⁵ Fuchang, Yang. (2018). China-Arab Relations in the 60 Years' Evolution, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 4:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145](https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145)

The process of China's establishment of formal diplomatic relations with all the member states of the League of Arab States began on May 30th 1956, when China established its official relations with Egypt, and ended on July 21st of 1990, when a formal diplomatic relation between China and Saudi Arabia was set up.⁶

During the past many years, the friendly relations between China and the Arabs have been developing continuously, without any tension or hostile confrontation. Both parties coordinated and cooperated with each other in international affairs, offering mutual support on commonly concerned issues without any hesitation or idle indifference. Meanwhile, they also adopted a non-interference policy towards the internal affairs of the other party.⁷

The international situation has changed considerably during the past half century, but the general pattern of bilateral relations remains intact, because of the similarities shared by both parties in their historical experiences, the same problems shared by both parties in their historical experiences, the same problems encountered, and their common interests. In this sense, mutual support is a natural outcome that can gratify both parties.⁸

However, since 9/11, the Islamic religion has been put into the spotlight of viciousness and hostility, and Arab countries have been the first group encountering unfair and hostile treatment. Furthermore, the global financial crisis that broke out in 2008, bringing difficulties and impacts to various countries, as well as dealing a serious impact to the global economy. Under such a situation, China and the Arabs should strengthen their cooperation so as to jointly respond to challenges.⁹ Faced with such situation and in order to promote its traditional friendships, China has adopted three measures.¹⁰

The first measure is the Chinese-Arab Friendship Association that was established at the end of 2001, for the purpose of channeling support to Arab countries and setting up a platform for the non-official exchanges and communications between both parties.

⁶ Fuchang, Yang. (2018). China-Arab Relations in the 60 Years' Evolution, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 4:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145](https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The second measure was the post of Chinese Special Envoy for Middle East Affairs was created in 2002, whose duty clarify Chinese Middle East issues and to make mediations between various relevant actors of Arab-Israel conflicts that have troubled the whole region for over a half century.¹¹ The third and last measure was the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum was organized in 2004, providing a more flexible and broader platform for mutual contacts and exchanges between both parties in various fields. This forum has not turned itself into an empty document of declaration, as some so-called forums do. In the framework founded by this forum, a lot of work has been done, concerning a wide variety of aspects of both official and non-official relations, including exchanges and communications on politics, economy, culture and humanitarian affairs.¹²

China and the Arabs both support the core interests of the other party. The Arabs adhere to the principle of one China, while China supports the Middle East peace process and the establishment of a Palestine State in accordance with the peace proposal of the Arabs (PRC-LAS, 2004: September 14). Moreover, after September 11th confronted with words and actions of hostility against Arab countries, both parties emphasized that they “condemn any form of terrorism, and oppose any tendency to connect terrorism with specific ethnic groups or religion” (PRC-LAS: September 14).¹³

In 2004, when the United States promoted its “Great Middle East Initiative” by pressuring Arab countries to accept its own values, China together with the Arabs declared that they both “respect and support the self-made choice of development model based on one’s own domestic conditions”. In addition to that, the Iraq issue, both parties maintain that “the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq should be fully respected, and that the Iraqi people should be given full right of self-determination on their own future.”¹⁴

These sincere mutual supports not only fit the fundamental interests of both parties, but also help to maintain regional stability. This is how the traditional China-Arab friendship is continuing to be maintained.¹⁵

¹¹ Fuchang. Yang, (2018), China-Arab Relations in the 60 Years’ Evolution, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 4:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145](https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Impeccable friendship between China and the Arabs has been built on the basis that it is one of the most important sections of its foreign relations. Furthermore, the Sino-Arab relations have been also built on the basis of similar historical experiences and common goals of development. Their bilateral relations have been filled with friendly cooperation, without any tension nor conflict between the two nations. The Chinese treat the Arabs as real brothers, reliable partners and good friends. The friendly relations between China and the Arab world will be developed in a sustained and steady way.¹⁶

The Sino-Arab relations have been for quite some time under large global attention, as it has been a relation without any tension nor conflict, as well as it is continuously maintained ever since the start of it. The mutual respect between both nations and the respect that they have for each nations integrity and internal politics, has played a large role in the maintaining of this relationship. Furthermore, the respect of each other's politics has also played a role in having a peaceful and well developed relationship between the two. As mentioned above, the United States has been interfering in the Middle Eastern internal politics, as they would want to implement their own values onto other nations.

The global attention grew when President Xi Jinping was being warmly welcomed than president Joe Biden, whose trip to Saudi Arabia in July, which actually was his first trip as president, had an air of desperation; where oil prices were high, an election loomed and he needed help. However, the Saudis sent him empty-handed.¹⁷

President Xi however, went home with a large amount of investment deals and other announcements. He was due to meet the Saudi leadership, including the crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman. Moreover, on president Xi Jinping schedule was a summit with Gulf leaders and a further meeting with figures from across the Arab world.¹⁸

This is where I would like to introduce the problem formulation that I want to research in my thesis and that is: *Why is the Arab - Chinese recent cooperation receiving a large global attention, in the current era, and how is this relationship going to have an impact on the rest of the world?*

¹⁶ Fuchang, Yang. (2018). China-Arab Relations in the 60 Years' Evolution, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), 4:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145](https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2010.12023145)

¹⁷ The Economist, (2022), Arabs looking East. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2022/12/07/the-gulf-looks-to-china> (Last accessed May 21st 2023)

¹⁸ Ibid.

Methodology

My research question can be understood and analyzed from a variety of perspectives, most notably are the number of collected theoretical literature.

Power transition theory which is going to be the theory that will help explain the general topic which is China and the Arab world. Furthermore, this theory analyzes the power transition in the region, where we have always seen Saudi Arabia in an alliance with the United States. Therefore, power transition theory will help provide an analysis of one could say how power states have shifted in the Middle Eastern region, and also provide a minor reason to why the shift happened.

Moreover, I will use regional complex security theory as well, as this theory will be explaining the complexity that this relationship might face along the way. It also shows the different complexities that are already present in the Middle East, especially the complexities that have formed a security threat on the region the past many years.

Furthermore, I will be using Constructivism theory also, to help analyze China's presence in the Middle East, from a cultural perspective. Through some of the qualitative data that has been collected for the thesis, show how China perceives its relationship with the Middle East, and how they sympathize with all the complexities they have been through. Some Chinese politicians have used terms such "*we are brothers*" when talking about Arabs.

I will be using some quantitative data as well. Including a number of scholar articles that are in both languages Arabic and English. I have moreover, collected a number of official government documents.

The quantitative data that I have collected, will help in the analyzing of the history of the Sino-Arab relations as well as how this relationship has developed with time.

Furthermore, the thesis is going to include parts of speeches from different state leaders, and specifically which terms they use when they refer to each other.

The choice of theoretical literature, as well as the chosen qualitative data, are going to help analyze the research question and also come to a conclusion at the end of the thesis. The conclusion will provide a sum up of the thesis and an answer to the chosen research question.

Theory

Power transition theory

Power transition theory was presented more than 60 years ago by Organski. The theory focuses on the dynamics of power between the first- and second-place states in the system. The basic intuition of power transition is that tension rises as the challenger gains ground on the leader.¹⁹

While the original power transition theory focuses on the power and conflict dynamics between a dominant state and a rising challenger in the international system. More recent research has expanded application of power transition dynamics to regional conflicts, civil wars, deterrence and proliferation, democratic peace, national identity and socialization and the international monetary system.²⁰

The power transition model described the international system in a sharply different way that had been previously conceived. Power transition rejected three fundamental assumptions imbedded in the realist angle of vision about world politics.²¹

First, the international system had been conceived as a world governed by few rules, a world in a state of partial or total anarchy. Power transition sees the international order not as anarchical at all, but as hierarchically organized in a manner similar to domestic political system. Actors accept their position in the international order and recognize influence based on differences in the power distribution among nations. This fundamentally different assumption separates power transition from preceding realist models.²²

Second, the power transition conceived the rules governing the domestic and international political system as fundamentally similar. Despite the absence of an enforceable code of international law, there were no major differences in the rules governing the domestic and international arena.

¹⁹ Zhang. Enyu & James. Patrick, (2022), All Roads Lead to Beijing: Systemism, Power Transition theory and the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese Political Science Review.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Organski. A.F.K & Kugler. Jacek, (2011), The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation.

²² Ibid.

Nations, like political groups in the domestic system, were in constant competition over scarce resources in the international order.²³

Third, power transition conceived international competition as driven by the potential net gains that could be accrued conflict or cooperation. The objective of nations was not, as the balance-of-power theory argued, to maximize power; rather the objective was to maximize net gains. Peaceful competition ensued when parties agreed that the net gains from conflict were inferior to the net benefits; conflict emerged when the opposite was true.

Armed with these few fundamental assumptions, power transition produced a dramatically different view of the workings of the international order than alternate realist perspective.²⁴

In order to explore the power transition model, one can start with its perspective of hierarchy in the international order. At the top of the hierarchical pyramid is the dominant nation that, for most of its tenure, is the most powerful nation in the international order. Today that nation is the United States, and its predecessor was England.²⁵

Below the dominant nation are the great powers. As the name implies, these are very powerful countries that cannot match one on one the power of the dominant nation at a given point in time, but have the potential to do so at a future time. Among them is to be found the eventual challenger of the international order. Below that group are the middle powers, further down still are the small powers, and at the bottom are colonies, which have today all but disappeared.²⁶

Power transition maintained a strong connection with the realist perspective on international politics by stressing that power is a critical variable shaping the way in which the international order functions. Yet this is not a power-maximization model. Satisfaction with the way goods are distributed in the international order is the second critical determinant of how smoothly the international order is the second critical determinant of how smoothly the international order operates. Degrees of satisfaction as well as power are critical determinants of peace and conflict.²⁷

²³ Organski. A.F.K & Kugler. Jacek, (2011), *The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Great nations that support the international order are allies of the dominant nation and help determine how smoothly the system runs. Indeed, peace in the international order is assured by the dominant nation with the support of the great powers that are satisfied with the distribution of benefits and the rules by which it is run. For this reason, power transition conceives of alliances as stable and reliable instruments created to support the international order that cannot be easily altered in the short run.²⁸

There are of course nations that are not satisfied, with the way the international order functions, and the leadership of the dominant nation. The elites of some nations are dissatisfied because they do not believe they and their societies are receiving their due from the international order. The number of such countries may be large. Whenever the dissatisfied nations are weak, however, they cannot pose a threat to the dominant nation and the coalition supporting the international order.²⁹

It happens to be only rarely when the dissatisfied nation is also a great power that has managed to catch up with the dominant nation, which is the setting that has created some challenges that later on lead to major conflict.³⁰

This is currently visible between China and the United States of America in the Middle East, where China can be considered a great power in the Hierarchical distribution of power in the international order, and the United States being the dominant nation. However, the great power here being China caught up with the dominant nation being the US and more or less became the dominant nation in that region, with the approval of the small power being the gulf states.

The United states was always an important if not the only strategic partner to the gulf states. The US was the primary and responsible actor for the protection of the Gulf states for several decades since the second Gulf war. Like that the exchange of interests continued between the United States of America and the Gulf states, and no doubt especially when it comes to the stability of the Gulf

²⁸ Organski. A.F.K & Kugler. Jacek, (2011), The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

states in exchange the movement of oil to the United States and the American military deployment in the Gulf region, in order to counter common threats.³¹

However, the new policy that the Biden administration is following by confronting Chinese influence in the East and protecting only American interests in the Middle East, has weakened the American presence in the Middle Eastern region generally and the Gulf region especially. Washington's decision of abandoning the Middle East completely, reflected positively on the development of the Chinese presence in the Gulf region.³²

The challenges could be that the powerful and dissatisfied great nations who have grown in power after the imposition of the existing international order. Their elites face circumstances where the main benefits of the international order have already been allocated. The conditions for conflict are present and, peace is threatened when challengers seek to establish a new place for themselves in the international order, a place to which they believe their increasing power entitles them.³³

Regional security complex theory

The theory of regional security complexes has been developed by B. Buzan and O. Waever, and is one of the main issues marking out so-called Copenhagen School. The theory assumes that security issues can be grouped around geographically separated regional complexes. As the authors note "Anarchy plus the distance effect plus geographical diversity yields a pattern of regionally based clusters, where security interdependence is markedly more intense between the states inside such a complex than between states inside the complex and those outside of it."³⁴

³¹ Al sherif. Radwa Ramadan, (2022), A strategic maneuver: the gulf states in the middle of a Chinese-American competition, Shaf Center Future studies & crisis analysis (Middle East & Africa), <https://shafcenter.org/المناورة-الإستراتيجية-الخليج-وسط-الم/> (Last accessed May 21st 2023), (Translated from Arabic by me)

³² Ibid.

³³ Organski. A.F.K & Kugler. Jacek, (2011), The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation.

³⁴ Jarzabek. Jaroslaw, (2018), The Theory of Regional Security Complexes in the Middle Eastern Dimension. <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-04b92a93-42fd-439d-b10b-4f04b1c4ebe6> (Last accessed May 21st 2023)

The regional security complex (RSC) is qualified around a group of states with a certain degree of security interdependence, which both links them internally and differentiates them from surrounding regions. As such the boundaries of RSCs do not have to correspond to the boundaries of traditional geographical or geopolitical regions.³⁵

Both Buzan and Waever note that, RSCs define themselves as substructures of the international system by the relative intensity of security interdependence among a group of units, and security indifference between that set and surrounding units.³⁶

The geographical proximity plays a major role here, as security issues rarely affect more distant regions and security interactions are strongest between adjacent states. The interdependence and intensity of security interactions between states within one security complex are most visible in the military, political, societal and environmental sectors, and to a lesser extent in the economic one.³⁷

Likewise, the similar dangers and security threats occur mostly in specific regions and rarely impact on large distances. Of course, all the states in the system are to some extent enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence, however, still interdependence between actors in the same region is much stronger than between actors from the different regions or between regions as a whole.³⁸

The theory of regional security complexes distinguishes four levels of analysis on the study of regional security: domestic, regional, inter-regional and global. The domestic level covers the issues of internal security and stability as well as security threats and vulnerabilities generated by the sub-state actors and their interrelations.³⁹

On the regional, or state-to-state level, the security interactions between states within one security complex. This is the level which in theory, plays a major role in defining the security and where most interactions take place. The inter-regional level is on the other hand less important, because of

³⁵ Jarzabek. Jaroslaw, (2018), *The Theory of Regional Security Complexes in the Middle Eastern Dimension*. <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-04b92a93-42fd-439d-b10b-4f04b1c4ebe6> (Last accessed May 21st 2023)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

the nature of system, where interactions between states of different regional complexes are relatively limited.⁴⁰

Lastly, the global level resembles the influence of global and great powers on the given region and their interplay with the regional security structures.⁴¹

The main theoretical tool used to describe the regional differences in the theory of regional security complexes is the concept of securitization. Generally speaking, it assumes that some decision-making centers, described as securitizing actors such as governments, political leaders, lobbies, bureaucratic apparatus etc. start the process of securitization.⁴²

They do that by declaring that the object of security, which is some particularly protected value like the state, society, territory, ideology, culture, economy, identity, environment etc. is existentially threatened. This in turn, sanctions the use of exceptional measures to protect the object of security. The undertaken actions, so-called securitization move, are addressed to the specific recipient. The recipient needs to be convinced that the object of security is indeed existentially threatened and that the undertaken measures are reasonable, necessary and appropriate to avert the danger.⁴³

The regional security complex theory describes the Middle Eastern regional security complex as a standard one, with a polarity determined by regional powers. It is also considered to be a typical conflict formation in terms of amity and enmity, where the politics of security is shaped mainly by interrelations between the regional powers.⁴⁴

At the same time, because of its global importance as a world leading oil and gas supplier as well as its geostrategic location, the Middle East constantly draws great attention from main international actors including all of the global and great powers.⁴⁵

Moreover, the security of the region is also characterized by much greater, than in most other regions, dynamics and variability of the main issues of conflict.

⁴⁰ Jarzabek. Jaroslaw, (2018), The Theory of Regional Security Complexes in the Middle Eastern Dimension. <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-04b92a93-42fd-439d-b10b-4f04b1c4ebe6> (Last accessed May 21st 2023)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

This is clearly observed when one looks at the main sources of instability in the region and reasons for conflicts in the Middle Eastern states during the last few decades. Since the end of the Second World War and during an era of decolonization the Israeli-Arab conflict rose as a central security issue. In the following years, it has to a certain degree absorbed and overshadowed all the other security issues. Since the decade of 1970, it became however, less intense as well as less important.⁴⁶

The Israeli-Arab conflict has been substituted by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has a completely different character and its actual position in the hierarchy of regional security issues is incomparably. A much greater importance shall now be paid to such problems and threats as the Islamic fundamentalism and extremism as well as growing activity of armed and terrorist groups that base those ideologies.⁴⁷

Furthermore, other central issues in the region include sectarian and ethnic violence, instability of political regimes and weakness of state structures, internal economic and social problems in numerous countries, the regional arms race, or growing conflicts for resources and raw materials.⁴⁸

These are some of the factors that shape the regional security complex in the Middle Eastern region. Moreover, the valuable resources that the region has, made it even more of a liability for regional security complexes and an even more of an unstable ground, that withholds many conflicts.

In the theory of Regional security complexes, the Middle Eastern regional security complex is characterized by a high dynamic of local conflicts and strong presence of the United States. The end of the Cold War and a change of global security system has induced a significant change to this regional security complex. As this situation has started an era of unipolar US domination in the Middle East. This domination has seriously changed the balance of power in the region, leading first and foremost to immense rise of power of Israel, the isolation of both Iraq and Iran, as well as the weakening of the former Soviet Union client states particularly Syria.⁴⁹

At the beginning of the 21st century, the security of the Middle Eastern regional complex was in the intervening phase, which meant that its security was influenced mainly by rising dynamics of

⁴⁶ Jarzabek. Jaroslaw, (2018), The Theory of Regional Security Complexes in the Middle Eastern Dimension. <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-04b92a93-42fd-439d-b10b-4f04b1c4ebe6> (Last accessed May 21st 2023)

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

regional and domestic conflicts as well as a constant domination of the United States on a global level, which was overlaid on a regional one.⁵⁰

Moreover, the peace process in the Levant sub-region and the policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran in the Gulf were the central issues. Nonetheless, it seemed very likely that the failure of both of the peace process and the dual containment might lead to the end of the interim period and intensify internal dynamics in the Middle Eastern regional security complex. Furthermore, the recent developments seem to prove those anticipations right.⁵¹

However, recently at the Chinese - Arab summit that was held in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, both sides agreed on emphasizing the importance of concerted regional and international efforts to find political solutions to regional crises and issues in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and relevant agreements and references, especially the crises in Syria, Libya and Yemen.⁵²

Furthermore, emphasizing the need to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of these countries, with an emphasis on rejecting foreign interference in these countries and the need for joint action to confront the terrorist and extremist organizations that operate on their lands, and support the efforts made by Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan to achieve security, stability, development and prosperity as well as combat terrorism.⁵³

Both the Arab states and China in this point of the summit they agreed on helping to find solutions to some regions in the Middle East that are facing regional complexities.

⁵⁰ Jarzabek. Jaroslaw, (2018), The Theory of Regional Security Complexes in the Middle Eastern Dimension. <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-04b92a93-42fd-439d-b10b-4f04b1c4ebe6> (Last accessed May 21st 2023)

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁵³ Ibid.

Constructivism

The theory constructivism sees the world, and what we can know about the world, as socially constructed. This view refers to the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge that are also called ontology and epistemology in research language.⁵⁴

Alexander Wendt (1995) offers an excellent example that illustrates the social construction of reality when he explains that 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean weapons. It is important to understand that the United States and North Korea is perceived in a similar way by these states, as this shared understanding (or intersubjective) forms the basis of their interactions.⁵⁵

This example also shows that nuclear weapons by themselves do not have any meaning unless we understand the social context. It further demonstrates that constructivists go beyond the material reality by including the effect of ideas and beliefs on world politics. This also entails that reality is always under construction, which opens the prospect for change. In other words, meanings are not fixed but can change over time depending on the ideas and beliefs that actors hold.⁵⁶

Constructivists do argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implies that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures. Agency can be understood as the ability of someone to act, whereas structure can be understood as the ability of someone to act, whereas structure refers to the international system that consists of material and ideational elements.⁵⁷

Constructivists argue that states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors. Identities are representations of an actor's understanding of who they are, which in turn signals their interests. They are important to constructivists as they argue that identities constitute interests and actions. For example, the identity of a small state implies a set of interests that are different from those implied by the identity of a large state. The small state is arguably more focused on its survival, whereas the bigger and far stronger state is concerned with

⁵⁴ Theys. Sarina, (2017), Constructivism, Published by E-International Relations, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/> (last accessed May 13th)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

dominating global political, economic and military affairs. It should be noted, though, that the actions of a state should be aligned with its identity. A state can thus not act contrary to its identity because this will call into question the validity of the identity, including its preferences.⁵⁸

It is understood that constructivism is stating the obvious that actions, interactions and perception shape reality. Indeed, that idea is the source of the name of this theory family. Our thoughts and actions literally *construct* international relations. However, this seemingly simple idea, when applied theoretically, has significant implications for how we can understand the world. The discipline of International Relations benefits from constructivism as it addresses issues and concepts that are neglected by mainstream theories - especially realism. Doing so, constructivists offer alternative explanation and insights for events occurring in the social world.⁵⁹ They show, for instance, that it is not only the distribution of material power, wealth and geographical conditions that can explain state behavior but also idea, identities and norms. Moreover, their focus on ideational factors shows that reality is not fixed, but rather subject to change.⁶⁰

Wendt's example can be applied in this topic as well, the Middle Eastern region and specifically the Arab world, can in a way rely and trust China, as it made the first step onto holding a China - Arab state summit for the first time, this shows a sign of friendship as well as a helping hand and stronger bond. They even named the Summit, The Arab - Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development.

From a constructivist perspective, like Wendt mentioned that the United States would not see the 500 British nuclear weapons as a threat like they see the 5 North Korean nuclear weapons. The same goes for the Arab world, China mentioned some important and not very often talked about points such as the Palestinian case and how it is important to find a solution that can ensure peace in Palestine as well as, the independence of Palestine.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Theys. Sarina, (2017), Constructivism, Published by E-International Relations, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/> (last accessed May 13th)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

The Palestinian case is one of the important complexities in the Middle Eastern region, and it was mentioned in the theory above *Regional security complex theory*.

Because constructivism is a theory of knowledge or tool of analysis positing that reality is socially constructed based on an actor's identity, ideas, interests and understanding of social norms.⁶²

In the agreement that China presented at the China - Arab state summit under the point *Cooperation to achieve sustainable development*, president Jinping made sure to state that *Dedicating the common values of humanity represented in peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom, and respecting the right of the people of the world to choose ways to develop democracy and social political systems that are commensurate with their national conditions and with their independent will. As well as, the refusal of interference in the internal affairs of states under the pretext of preserving democracy.*⁶³

By mentioning the last part of not interfering in any states' internal affairs, from a constructivist point of view president Xi Jinping is in understanding of social norms and that every State has its own social norms and that it needs to be respected.

Furthermore, President Jinping mentioned under the point *Strengthening friendships*, that *promoting dialogue among civilizations and respecting different cultures, rejecting claims of hatred, extremism and clash of civilizations between followers of religions and cultures, emphasizing opposition to Islamophobia in all its form, emphasizing that the Arab Chinese civilizations have made unique contributions to the progress of human civilization and are keen to continue calling for dialogue and communication between civilizations and preserving Global cultural diversity, rejection of discrimination and prejudice against particular civilization and rejection of the clash of civilizations theory.*⁶⁴

This point proves the respect and understanding of the Arab social norms by the Chinese side, and also shows the importance of this point, especially after presenting that there needs to be an emphasizing to the opposition towards any kind of Islamophobia. Islam is the religion that is followed by the majority in the Middle East.

⁶² Toops. Stanley W. & Peterson. Mark A. & Anderson. Sheldon, (2018), *International Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Global Issues*, published by Westview Press. (page 142)

⁶³ Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Each theory is going to explain a different perspective in the thesis, however, when analyzing the different perspectives, they would get connected to each other.

Regional complex security theory explains some of the complexes in the Middle Eastern region such as the Palestinian - Israeli conflict and the Saudi - Iranian complexes. Whereas the power transition theory, analyzes the different powers and their dominance. The great power that has always been perceived as having the dominance over the Middle Eastern region is the United States, however, through this theory there will be an explanation of how a new power in the region is now emerging. Furthermore, in order to understand the power transition in the region we could use constructivism theory in the case of this thesis, which will enable us to understand how China previews the Arab states and their leaders and how the President Xi Jinping refers to them, compared to the United States President.

Empirical analysis

Background of the Chinese - Arab relations

Arab - Chinese relations go way back to more than two millennia, and they both go back to trade through the ancient Silk Road, which established ties that have remained stable through the centuries to this day.⁶⁵

Throughout this history, peace, cooperation, openness, mutual benefit and learning from each other has always been the main topic of exchanges between them. The Arab-Chinese relations did not witness any divisions between both sides. The earliest contact between China and the Middle East can be traced back to the Han Dynasty.⁶⁶

Since its establishment in 1949 AD, and the independence of the Arab countries, relations between the two sides have entered new phases of friendly interaction. Arab liberation movements will not

⁶⁵ Al-Mashwah. Hila, (2022), Reading the Arab-Chinese relations, published in Alittihad online newspaper, <https://www.alittihad.ae/opinion/4336419/قراءة-في-العلاقات-العربية-الصينية>, (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁶⁶ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content, (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

forget China's strong support for them to preserve their sovereignty, protect their interests and combat external interference, while the Arab countries gave China a solid support on many issues.⁶⁷ This old cooperation between the two sides resulted in a distinct historical leap in harmony, understanding and mutual friendliness, which culminated in the support of the Arab countries collectively for the One China principle after the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States issued a statement stressing the need to adhere to and respect this principle.⁶⁸

Furthermore, with the beginning of the 21st century, Arab - Chinese relations witnessed geopolitical and geostrategic shifts of great importance. The current phase of high-level exchanges between the two sides began with the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao, from January 26th to February 5th in 2004 to Egypt, Algeria and the League of Arab States, as part of his European - African tour.⁶⁹ It is known that each of Egypt and Algeria have a special importance in the history of Chinese - Arab relations, as Cairo was the first Arab capital to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1956 AD and the most Arab capitals followed suit since the mid-1950s. While Algeria was one of the three countries that proposed to restore China's permanent membership in the UN Security Council in 1971.⁷⁰

During president Hu Jintao's visit, two major diplomatic steps were taken, in addition to the signing of bilateral agreements for economic cooperation. The first is the establishment of the Arab - Chinese Cooperation Forum, which provided a mechanism for cooperation and became a milestone in the history of relations between the two sides.⁷¹

Second, President Hu Jintao put forward four guidelines for developing a new type of partnership between China and the Arab countries, based on strengthening political relations on the basis of mutual respect, strengthening trade and economic ties, expanding cultural exchanges and

⁶⁷ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁶⁸ Al-Mashwah. Hila, (2022), Reading the Arab-Chinese relations, published in Alittihad online newspaper, <https://www.alittihad.ae/opinion/4336419/قراءة-في-العلاقات-العربية-الصينية> , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁶⁹ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

strengthening cooperation in international affairs with the aim of maintaining world peace as well as promote common development.⁷²

What strengthened the Arab - Chinese relationship is the mutual respect for each other as well as for each other's' cultural norms. Moreover, the expansion of cultural exchange can be seen through a constructivist lens, as constructivism is about understanding of social norms. On many occasions, Chinas leaders have shown understanding and respect for the Arab social norms and culture, and have enhanced the idea of cultural exchange.

At the opening ceremony of the Sixth China - Arab Cooperation Forum in June 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed that China and the Arab countries have enjoyed mutual understanding and friendship since the original Silk Road, and that they are natural partners in building the new Silk Road, which has come to be known as the "Belt and Road" initiative, or as "One Belt, One Road", with a joint effort.

He suggested that the Arab and Chinese sides adhere to the principle of discussion, construction and cooperation in order to, establish a community of common interests and a single destiny.⁷³

In confirmation of this trend, the Chinese president's first visit abroad in 2016, was to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran, which already back then indicated that China is interested in activating neighborhood diplomacy, which includes the Middle East. It thought of developing a "One Belt and One Road" strategy and issued an "Arab political paper" just before the visit. Not long ago i.e. the beginning of 2017, Saudi King Salman visited China, at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, which was considered a strategically important visit, in his month-long Asian tour, during which Riyadh strengthened its efforts.⁷⁴

In order to, diversify the economy away from dependence on oil, and expand the scope of relations between the countries in various fields, especially in the field of defense and security.⁷⁵

The international diplomatic, political and economic tour of President Xi Jinping from July 19th to the 28th in 2018, was to the United Arab Emirates as well as several African countries. The

⁷² Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Republic of South Africa, Rwanda, Senegal and Mauritius and extremely important and unprecedented event, and it carried within it many meanings in its timing, because it came after his re-election as head of the Chinese Communist Party with more openness to the world and a broader and more comprehensive activation for China's human equations in international trade and economy and in win-win cultural exchanges, as well as for facilitating the paths of the "Belt and Road" initiative to the continents of Asia and Africa, the cradle of cultures and the common inheritance in one human civilization.⁷⁶

President Jintings' visit to the concerned countries, we see that it aims to build on what was done previously, with regard to the UAE and to optimally enhance Chinese cooperation with it, through participation and equality. As for African countries, it aims to raise the economic capabilities of these countries, or to employ Chinese capital in projects with specific and tangible benefits that generate revenues for both the Chinese and African sides.⁷⁷

Regardless of the financial capacity of those countries, or their contributions to the international economy and trade, which is what it means that China attaches great importance to the Middle East and Africa, and places them in an equal position, based on its policy and approach to cooperative relations, based on international legitimacy, regardless of the economic conditions of those countries, or their political ties and ancient strategic relations.⁷⁸

President Xi Jinping talked about several points under this meeting, the most prominent points were:

Economic energy

The essence of the economic relations between the two sides was, and will remain, the promotion of cooperation in the field of energy. China's increasing need for energy resources and the Arab countries' need to obtain stable income from energy, as well as to secure new investment possibilities. The discovery of the Daqing oil field in 1959, and the start of production in 1963, made China confident of self-sufficiency in oil, but the rapid and sustainable economic growth, in

⁷⁶ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the past quarter century, transformed China from a major oil exporter to an importer in 1993, and continued its energy deficit is steadily increasing.⁷⁹

There are different predictions about the continuation of this deficit in the future. According to Hu Jintao Jianyes, a prominent Chinese expert in this field, an important part of China's growing need for oil will come from the transport and petrochemical sectors, and the annual growth of Chinese energy demand will remain at a rate of about 5 to 6 percent until 2020. He also says that Chinese domestic oil will increase by 1.6 - 1.8% annually, over the long term.⁸⁰

Therefore, Chinas' oil imports will reach 250 million tons, equivalent to 825 million barrels, in 2020, and the proportion of oil imports will rise from 38% at the present time to 50 - 60% in 2020. The days of energy self-sufficiency are over forever, unless China finds alternative energy.⁸¹

The Middle Eastern countries possess about two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves, and they have the infrastructure, which is unmatched in transporting and refining oil. Furthermore, the major oil importers, including the United States, the European Union and Japan, have not been able to reduce their dependence on Middle Eastern oil, and China will definitely not be an exception. Moreover, the Gulf Arab states, as traditional friends with China, are of particular importance to Chinas' pursuit of energy security.⁸²

Since 1993, oil imports from the Gulf have been accounting for nearly 40% of Chinas' total imports. It rose to more than 50% in 1996, then increased to 61% in 1998, to remain close. With slight ups and downs, till this day.⁸³

The stable export of oil, at a reasonable price, is the security that producers and exporters seek. Thus, the growth of oil demand in China is good news for Arab oil producers, as has been proven in the past few years. The oil market usually recovers after every price collapse in the global market, and this is attributed to some extent to the increasing demand for oil in Asia,

⁷⁹ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

especially China, which previously contributed 56 and 30 % respectively, to the increasing global demand from 1999 - 2003, after the significant drop in oil prices.⁸⁴

Oil in 1998, it is possible to believe that Chinas' imports from Arab oil producers will be a stabilizing factor for their income from this important strategic commodity. Additionally, the expansion of energy facilities and infrastructure downstream both in China and among Arab oil producers remains a tremendous business opportunity for both sides.⁸⁵

Moreover, in 1997, CNPC⁸⁶ signed cooperation agreements with Iraq on the development of two Iraqi oil fields. This was temporarily interrupted due to the Iraq war. However, the cooperation continued again after a relative stability in Iraq. The same period witnessed cooperation between China petroleum and Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC), another major Chinese company in the field of energy, with Saudi Arabia's' Aramco in the gas sector in the southern part of Saudi Arabia.⁸⁷

Political engagement

What does the Middle East represent in Chinas' foreign policy? If we may ask this question, then the answer would be: in addition to the old incentives that support Sino - Arab relations, such as Chinas' support for Arab issues, its position on the peace process, and the Arab support for Chinas' unification, the recent Sino - Arab rapprochement is also an important political catalyst. Through new elements within the transformation taking place in the regional and global context.⁸⁸ As long as the improvement of relations with the Arab countries, and the strengthening of economic cooperation with them, occupies an important position in Chinas' foreign strategy, there are several reasons for re-evaluating the strategic importance of the Middle East for China.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ China National Petroleum Corporation

⁸⁷ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

Through the beginning of the 21st century, and the unavoidable approach of the Chinese economy to the whole world, the political and strategic importance of the countries of the Middle East, with which China has historical, cultural, religious and economic ties, especially the oil resources available in the region. Therefore, the political and economic cooperation between China and the Arab countries ought to take place without delay, especially after the advantages of these countries became clear.⁹⁰

The opening up of China, advocated by the Chinese Communist Party's strategy, means with a special focus opening up to the West, because the availability of funds, technology, market expertise and management in Western countries will greatly affect the success or failure of China's modernization. Faced with this situation, China needs to reassess the international environment and reconsider its foreign policy, including its strategy towards the Middle East.⁹¹

In view of the status of the Middle East in the global strategy of Western countries, and the potential of large Arab countries to cooperate with China in the fields of energy, trade, finance and investment, as a more active and effective Chinese policy in regional issues will certainly work to expand cooperation with Arab countries, and improve opportunities for economic and political security for China.⁹²

The Level of active Chinese involvement, in the past few years, in Arab issues indicates the degree of revival of Chinese foreign policy, but in a new regional and global context. In addition to the traditional factors, there are new trends that support Arab - Chinese relations. Under the pressure of complex political turmoil, the Arab world expects China, a traditional friend, to play a helpful role in resolving crises.⁹³

While China pursues peaceful development, it also needs the support of the Arab world in the international community. Certainly, both sides want to increase their economic development through closer strategic relations, with political cooperation at the forefront.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

It can be concluded that both the Arab States and the Chinese State, conform to a certain identity and they both are complied with the norms that are associated with that identity. This idea comes with an expectation that some kind of behavior is more acceptable than others. This process is also known as ‘the logic of appropriateness’ in constructivism, where actors behave in certain ways because they believe that this behavior is appropriate.⁹⁵

We now observe that unlike the ideological foundations that shaped the Arab-Chinese political relations during the Cold War era, the pillars of the relationship this time are stronger and far-reaching. Economic ties may be more important than ideological considerations for China at the present time, but if the Asian giant is to play a vital role in the region, the political aspects must have an advanced chance in shaping the future of Chinese - Arab relations.⁹⁶

Therefore, it is not a matter of whether China will be an important trading partner or not, but rather the importance of this partnership will be enhanced by the political role it will play in the regions’ issues. This trend was already evident in the slow Chinese moves in the last two decades in the Middle East, that is, after many years of relative disengagement, during which China tried to avoid obvious interference in solving specific problems, with the exceptions of some condemnations and statements.⁹⁷

The remarkable transformation is its appointment, in September 2002, of Mr. Wang Shiie, a veteran diplomat and former Chinese ambassador to Bahrain, Jordan, Jordan and Iran, as its first envoy to the Middle East. On November 5th 2002, Ambassador Wang began his first mediation in the Middle East. Since then, Wang has visited many Middle Eastern countries involved in the peace process, including Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Israel.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Theys. Sarina, (2017), Constructivism, Published by E-International Relations, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/> (last accessed May 13th)

⁹⁶ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

During his many visits to the Middle East he explained China's position on Middle East problems and tried to persuade relevant parties to return to the negotiating table, as well as showed China's willingness to make more contributions to the peace process in the region.⁹⁹

The other important step that China took was related to the Iraqi issue. Despite its limited participation before and during the Iraq war, when the draft resolution on the transfer of Iraqi sovereignty was discussed in the UN Security Council in May 2004, China raised its proposal, which focuses on the real power of the Iraqi government. The final resolution (1546) reflected China's view of the issue, which was supported by Russia, France and Germany. However, although China's role in Middle Eastern affairs is still limited, its potential cannot be underestimated.¹⁰⁰

Dissimilar to Washington, whose policy in the Middle East aroused widespread suspicion in the Arab world, especially after the Iraq war, China now enjoys a good image in almost all Arab countries. Therefore, it is logical that the Arab countries and the international community expect a greater role for China in the Middle East.¹⁰¹

Given that China usually supports Arab demands, it is unlikely that Beijing will confront the United States directly on major Middle East issues. However, it surprised the world by using its veto power, on February the 28th 2017, against a draft resolution to impose sanctions on Damascus, in a rare bilateral relationship with Russia, which also used the same right, and against the same resolution, in the Security Council.¹⁰²

The recent changes in the region, and what the media and political circles are obsessed with about what has become known as the "deal of the century", provide a good opportunity for China to participate in the affairs of the Middle East with a more advanced and intertwined position. At the same time, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy requires that Beijing objectively formulate a forward-looking strategy towards the Middle East.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The goal of this strategy should be very clear: Strengthen political and economic cooperation between China and the Arab countries, improve the international environment for both sides, and help with the international community to develop stability, peace and security in the region. This applies especially to the Arab Gulf states, because there is no doubt that they stability is consistent with the interests of China and all other countries. However, this stability will not be achieved in the Gulf region as a whole unless full reconciliation is found and a security structure acceptable to all parties is built.¹⁰⁴

Although how to determine the position of Arab-Chinese relations, and their position in the international community, is under discussion in the Arab and Chinese academic circles, “peaceful development” seems to be agreed upon between the two sides. While the Arabs struggle with conditions of stability; In order to achieve this desired development, China is gradually entering it, and its advantages are being circulated widely among senior policy makers and scholars.¹⁰⁵

Taking into consideration that the Arabs are Chinas’ historical partners in trade and other international affairs, the future tells us that the Arab world, and the Gulf states in particular, will be the first beneficiaries of the “peaceful development” of the two sides. However, to implement a common strategy for this “peaceful development”, the Arabs need the support of the Arab world in both the Middle East and Africa, and at the global levels. China, as an economic power, is making efforts to strengthen its international political position, which makes it urgently in need of recognition by Arab countries of its role in Arab affairs first, and then its support to play effective and influential regional and global roles.¹⁰⁶

The importance of political relations is increasing, but Chinas’ relations with Arab countries, in the next decade, will mainly focus on the continuation of economic cooperation. For China, it will be

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

difficult for it to become fully politically involved, or to transform cultural exchanges, in which it has great potential into practical influence in the region.¹⁰⁷

On the one hand, China wants to play a more important role in security issues in the Middle East, to show its responsibilities and capabilities as a rising power. On the other hand, however China also hopes to derive economic and cultural dividends from its interactions with the Arab world.

Although China has ended its policy of non-interference, it would still be inappropriate for it to benefit from inciting conflicts, as European powers have historically done, and still do today, because doing so would harm its national economic interest.¹⁰⁸

It could be said that historically, the role of economic incentives was marginal in Sino-Arab relations, but it increased in the last decades of the 20th century. However, the desire for a closer economic relationship between both sides is of equal importance at the present time in strengthening Sino-Arab relations, and is expected to have a better situation in the future.¹⁰⁹

The Arab countries and China will make joint efforts to promote the “Belt and Road” initiative, which was designed as a diplomatic and economic framework, based on the principle of broad consultation, joint contribution, and mutual benefit. Practical cooperation in the field of energy will also be update; such as the establishment of basic infrastructure, facilitation of trade and investment as two important aspects of this cooperation, and the exchange of high and new technologies in the fields of nuclear energy, renewable energy, as well as space satellite technologies.¹¹⁰

China has now become part of the complex geopolitical situation in the Middle East, and with its increasing dependence on oil, to withdraw from the region even voluntarily would be a daunting task. As it becomes difficult for China to reverse its old policy of non-interference and respect for state sovereignty, it will face increasing pressure to play a more active role in the regions’ future.¹¹¹ It will also be under strong pressure to secure its economic interests with the Arab countries, without retreating from its desire for safe political participation. This requires that its diplomacy pay

¹⁰⁷ Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

attention to supporting the Arabs in pressing issues, even if this leads to a violation of some of the determinants of its declares positions of non-alignment and non-interference.¹¹²

However, the temptation of the capabilities of the Arab Gulf countries is very great, but China, if it wants an optimal harvest from it, must produce preferential diplomatic strategies formulas for it, in exchange for a fair approach towards the rest of the Arab countries.¹¹³

While China has always maintained diplomatic relations with all the countries of the Middle East, in the future it needs to pay more attention to its economic and political relations with the Arab sides, which represents the majority. This raises questions about how China will seek to overcome the complex, and at times confusing, relations of political, social, ethnic and religious conflicts that have been a prominent feature of this region.¹¹⁴

Saudi Arabia - Iran case

This brings us to the recent and major event that took place in Beijing on March 10th 2023, where China mediated the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both countries are very important states in the Middle East being the face of both Islamic sects; Saudi Arabia being the face of the Sunni Islamic sect and Iran being the face of the Shia Islamic sect. Both sects have faced major rivalries in the Middle Eastern region, to a point where several countries faced sectarian wars between Sunnis and Shias.

It could be defined as one of the major regional security complexes in the region, however, the mediation that China played a large part in, could mean that a security complex in the region is on the verge of becoming stable.

The agreement to restore diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was mediated by China, sheds more light on Beijing's' growing role in the Middle East region, as Beijing hosted intense negotiations between the Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, and his Saudi counterpart, Musaed bin Muhammad Al-Aiban, between March 6th and

¹¹² Dr. Al-faqih. Al-sadeq, (2018), Arab-Chinese relations: a future vision, Published by Araa online newspaper, https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=4557:2018-12-31-12-16-02&Itemid=172&option=com_content , (Last accessed May 14th 2022), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

10th, which resulted in the announcement of an agreement between the two countries to resume diplomatic relations between them after a 7-year rupture following Saudi Arabia's announcement of severing relations with Iran in January 2016, after the attack on its embassy and consulate in Iran.¹¹⁵

There is no doubt that the return of Saudi-Iranian relations will have many repercussions on the main regional issues, including the following:

Enhancing the policy of “zeroing problems” a term used in order to achieve a goal of no complexes or zero complexes: as many countries in the region are now moving in their foreign policy to zeroing in on existing and potential problems, and searching for innovative solutions to settle their differences with neighboring countries, and for more cooperative collective formulas in which everyone wins, especially after the negative repercussions of the Corona crisis.¹¹⁶

In this context, the region has recently witnessed a remarkable growth in the policy of “zeroing problems”, which resulted in the settlement of the Gulf-Gulf disputes, the Turkish - Egyptian dialogue and the work for the return of Syria to the Arab embrace. Here we can say that the agreement would reinforce this trend towards “zeroing problems”, which has become the most prominent title in the foreign policies of the countries of the region, with the aim of focusing on issues of construction, development and prosperity for all their people.¹¹⁷

Both Saudi Arabia and Iran have been rivals in the region for a long time. One could say that their rivalry is one of the most important regional complexities, which has affected a number of countries in the Middle East. One of the affected countries in this rivalry is Yemen. By restoring the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran that will open the door wide for a dialogue between the two countries to settle the Yemeni crisis, as the two countries have many cards through which they can push the two sides of the crisis to sit down together in order to reach understandings to end the conflict and the Yemeni civil war that has been raging for more than eight years.

¹¹⁵ Trends research & advisory, (2023), The return of Saudi-Iranian relations, Dimensions of the agreement and possible repercussions, Research and studies department, <https://trendsresearch.org/ar/insight/-عودة-العلاقات-السعودية-الإيرانية-أبع> (Last accessed 21st May 2023), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, the Saudi - Iranian dialogue may also lead to reaching understandings about reducing or even ending Iranian military presence in both Iraq and Syria, which Israel used as a pretext for carrying out repeated military operations in Syria in particular.¹¹⁸

Another regional complex that can be solved upon restoring the diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, is the political crisis in Lebanon. Especially since Lebanon is witnessing a sharp division between two parties, each of which is linked to one of the two countries (Saudi Arabia and Iran), so that Saudi Arabia and Iran can help the Lebanese to form the government and arrange the economic situation. Furthermore, the announcement of a Saudi - Iranian agreement may undermine Israel's hopes for forming a regional alliance against Iran in accordance with the American desire, which would reduce the risk of any possible conflict between Tehran and Tel Aviv extending to other countries in the region, and it might also allow, in an opposite way, with greater cooperation between Riyadh and Tel Aviv in order to reach a settlement to the Palestinian - Israeli conflict.¹¹⁹

The restoration of relations between the two countries will also encourage the other countries in the region, in application of the domino theory, to sit together in order to resolve other burning conflicts, such as the situation in Libya. In this context, we may find the countries involved in the Libyan conflict also sitting together in order to put an end to this conflict, which is more than 12 years old. All of this would open the way for restoring security and stability in these countries, and then focusing on reconstruction efforts and rehabilitation of infrastructure, which is not an easy matter. That is because there is a study that confirmed that Syria needs about \$400 billion for reconstruction, as well as Yemen which needs about \$25 billion for reconstruction too.¹²⁰

Other than working on the conflicts in the region, by restoring the Saudi - Iranian relations, increasing opportunities for both economic and commercial cooperation in order to achieve development and prosperity for the people of the region as a whole: Settling disputes and disagreements in the region in general, and Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular, would help achieve sustainable development through what it might allow to stimulate trade and joint investments,

¹¹⁸ Trends research & advisory, (2023), The return of Saudi-Iranian relations, Dimensions of the agreement and possible repercussions, Research and studies department, <https://trendsresearch.org/ar/insight/عودة-العلاقات-السعودية-الإيرانية-أبع> (Last accessed 21st May 2023), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

especially in light of what it possesses. Both countries are of great economic potential and oil resources.¹²¹

Confronting terrorism: The settlement of the Saudi - Iranian disputes, and other disputes in the region, will undoubtedly help the countries of the region to dry up the hotbeds of terrorism and besiege the financing of terrorist groups, militias and violent groups, especially those that Iran supports or uses to threaten the stability of other countries in the region. Which will lead to stability and security in the region.¹²²

China says from time to time that global security cannot be achieved without achieving security in the Middle East. In this context, China put forward a five-point initiative to achieve security and stability in the Middle East:

1. The call for mutual respect.
2. Commitment to fairness and justice.
3. Achieving the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.
4. Working together to achieve collective security.
5. Accelerate the pace of development and cooperation.

Furthermore, China also declares that it supports the positive momentum and efforts made by the countries of the Middle East to promote dialogue and improve relations, calls for understanding the reasonable security as well as supports the constructive role of the League of Arab States and other regional organizations.¹²³

China, by bringing both representatives from both states to negotiate a possible restoration of diplomatic relations to the major regional complex, can be the start to achieving security in the Middle Eastern region. As both states, Saudi Arabia and China play a major role in the region, especially for Muslims, since each country represents a sect from Islam. Saudi Arabia represents Sunni Islam and Iran represents Shia Islam. If we go back to the regional security complex theory, it is mentioned that central issues in the region include sectarian and ethnic violence, mainly between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims. Therefore, it can be viewed that by restoring the diplomatic

¹²¹ Trends research & advisory, (2023), The return of Saudi-Iranian relations, Dimensions of the agreement and possible repercussions, Research and studies department, <https://trendsresearch.org/ar/insight/-عودة-العلاقات-السعودية-الإيرانية-أبع> (Last accessed 21st May 2023), (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

relations between both Saudi Arabia and Iran, it can be an important step to put the sectarian and ethnic conflicts away.

Palestine - Israel case

The Palestinian - Israeli conflict is considered one of the most critical regional complexes in the region. As it has been going on since 1948, and as a result of this war, Israel established its state on around 78 percent of the area allocated by the League of Nations to the former BMP¹²⁴ after the creation of Transjordan.¹²⁵

Therefore, at the Sino - Arab summit that was held in December 2022, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital, along with all the Arab leaders, the first topic that was discussed was the Palestinian - Israeli conflict. Where they agreed that the Palestinian issue remains a central issue in the Middle East, which requires finding a just and lasting solution to it on the basis of the two-state solution, through ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the United Nations resolutions.¹²⁶

In this context, the affirmation of the illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian and Arab lands, the invalidity of Israel's unilateral practices aimed at changing the status of occupied East Jerusalem, and the importance of the role of the historical Hashemite guardianship over Islamic and Christian sanctities in Jerusalem in protecting the sanctities and its Arab identity. Furthermore, stressing the importance of the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees "UNRWA" and the need to support it to enable it to fulfill its UN mandate, and the need to implement international legitimacy resolutions related to refugees and the protection of Palestinian civilians.¹²⁷

Moreover, the need to call for the convening of an international peace conference with broader participation. More credibility and greater influence, and appreciating the four-point vision put

¹²⁴ The British Mandate for Palestine

¹²⁵ Rassem, Khamaisi. (2010). The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Building the Future Palestine, Euroasian Geography and Economics. 51:6, 716-732. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.51.6.716>

¹²⁶ Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹²⁷ Ibid.

forward by the Chinese President Xi Jinping to solve the Palestinian issue. In addition to, a series of initiatives and visions put forward by the Chinese side on the side of truth and justice in the Palestinian issue, and its support for the Palestinian side to improve their lives, the people and the development of the economy among humanitarian assistance provided to the Palestinian side. Additionally, work for the State of Palestine to obtain full membership in the United Nations.¹²⁸

It is important to mention that China has recognized Palestine in 1988 with which it had maintained political, cultural and economic relations since the early 1960.¹²⁹

This point in the summit was discussed as the first and significant point, because this conflict shapes a critical role in the region. As it is considered the longest on going conflict in the region. As well as it shapes a security complexity in the Middle Eastern region. Therefore, it was important to discuss it in order to provide the peace and stability that the region deserves.

By mentioning the Palestinian - Israeli conflict already in the beginning of the Arab - Sino summit, it brought China closer to the Middle Eastern region and pushed the United States further apart. Moreover, if we take a closer look to the different speeches that were delivered in the Arab - Sino summit in December, we can clearly hear how the different state leaders always when mentioning the people's republic of China, they mention *the friend* afterwards which is an indication of the friendship that they enjoy together. However, when the United States mentions one of these countries it is always connected to the word *ally*.

Furthermore, as mentioned above Washington's' decision of abandoning the Middle East completely, reflected positively on the development of the Chinese presence in the Gulf region as well as the other Arab states. That came especially after President Biden, pledged that he would turn Saudi Arabia into a pariah.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹²⁹ Ergenc, Ceren. (2018). China's relations with the Middle East: a perspective from the region. https://www.ias.asia/sites/ias/files/nwl_article/2019-05/IIAS_NL80_24.pdf

¹³⁰ Baycar, Hamdullah. (2023). China-US. Rivalry Enters a New Phase in the Middle East. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/89789>

Therefore, Biden's visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not warmly welcomed, due to the United States' patronizing attitude, which envisions that regional powers should follow the preferred American path even if it does not fit their national interests.¹³¹

However, China makes sure to always mention, the need to respect each states' internal affairs and politics and this point was even mentioned under the Arab - Sino summit: *Emphasizing the importance of international cooperation in the field of human rights being based on equality and mutual respect, and rejecting the politicization of human rights issues and using them as a tool for exerting pressure on states and interfering in their internal affairs.*¹³²

One can observe that by using the friendship terms and the need to maintain respect and knowing the boundaries of each state, you can earn the trust and respect of other states.

China moreover, did earn the respect of the Arab states also by developing The Global Security Initiative. This Initiative serves as a new guide to achieving peace and security globally. In April this year, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Standards Initiative, which provides clear answers to the question of our time about how countries can achieve common security, and is of great practical importance for promoting peace and stability in the world.¹³³

Additionally, the GSI aims to eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and changing era, and promote durable peace and development in the world.¹³⁴

The second point in the Global Security Initiative was the same point that was agreed on under the Arab - Sino summit in 2022. The point states that all countries need to stay committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. Furthermore, sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs are basic principles of international law and the most fundamental norms governing contemporary international relations. This is the second point in the GSI.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Baycar, Hamdullah. (2023). China-US. Rivalry Enters a New Phase in the Middle East.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/89789>

¹³² Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹³³ The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper. (2023). Official government document.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The second point however, that was agreed upon by the Arab states that were present at the Arab - Sino summit and China was; Reaffirming our countries' firm commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter, including the principles of mutual respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and territorial integrity of states, refraining from the use or threat of force in international relations, respect for the principle of good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of states.¹³⁶

Global Security Initiative for Lasting Peace and Stability in the Middle East.

In February 2023, at the second Middle East Security Forum successfully held in Beijing, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi outlined China's ideas and proposals to introduce the Global Security Initiative and facilitate the construction of a new security architecture in the region. Based on this forum the Chinese Ambassador in Sudan published an article, called Global Security Initiative for Lasting Peace and Stability in the Middle East, following these points:¹³⁷

First, we affirm the dominant and independent position of the Middle East and oppose external interference. There was no such thing as a "power vacuum" in the Middle East. The people of the Middle East are the masters of the future and the destiny of the region, and the security affairs of the Middle East must be in the hands of the Middle Eastern countries.¹³⁸

Already here we can distinguish that there is a big difference with how China perceives the internal affairs of the Middle East should be handled compared to the United States, where they have a sort of dominance approach in the Middle East.

Furthermore, China supports the countries of the Middle East in independently building a regional security structure that is in line with the realities of the region and takes into account the interests of all parties in the spirit of independence and self-reliance, and in exploring a long-term path. Peace and security are characteristics of the Middle East.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹³⁷ Work on the Global Security Initiative for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. (2022). The Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China http://sd.china-embassy.gov.cn/ara/xwdt/202211/t20221110_10944380.htm (Last accessed May 31st) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Second, we encourage unity and cooperation and advocate comprehensive settlement. The future of the countries of the Middle East is closely linked, as the hot issues in the region are interrelated. We must adhere to the vision of common security and pay attention to the reasonable security concerns of each country. We must attach importance to a comprehensive approach, addressing both traditional security threats and non-traditional security challenges such as the pandemic, food and energy.¹⁴⁰

We must stick to cooperation and achieve security through political dialogue and peaceful negotiations, and not have blind faith in force or unilateral measures. Moreover, China will also continue to encourage countries in the region to facilitate reconciliation through inclusive political dialogue and actively participate in the economic and social development of relevant countries, contributing our wisdom and Chinese solution to the political settlement of hot issues.¹⁴¹

Third, we stand for justice and fairness and do not seek selfish political gain. Without fair international rules as a standard, peace and security in the Middle East will not be possible. We must maintain in the international based on international law and the basic norms governing international relations on the basis of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and implement UN Security Council resolutions on dealing with hot issues in the Middle East. In terms of security in the Middle East, China adopts the approach of justice, without painful restrictions, to help these countries eliminate hidden dangers and find ways out of crises and chaos.¹⁴²

This point again shows how China approaches the hot issues that are in the Middle East without wanting to show dominance over the region, nor trying to patronize them. This approach by China can be considered that it made it easier to have power transition in the region. China also opposes all unilateral sanctions and “long-term jurisdiction” not authorized by the United Nations, opposes regime change and the imposition of so-called “solutions”, as well as opposes attempts to force countries in the region to choose sides.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Work on the Global Security Initiative for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. (2022). The Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China http://sd.china-embassy.gov.cn/ara/xwdt/202211/t20221110_10944380.htm (Last accessed May 31st) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Which the region has been facing with the United States' dominance previously, and that they have to preferred American path even if it does not fit their national interests.

China is also ready to work with the Middle Eastern countries to practice true multilateralism and urge the rest of the international community to play a constructive role, thus adding greater motivation to security in the Middle East.¹⁴⁴

Fourth, we advocate mutually beneficial development to consolidate the foundations of security. Development provides a guarantee for more development. China has always attached importance to its development cooperation with Middle Eastern countries. China remains committed to high-quality cooperation with the Belt and Road Initiative and considers it important to promote sustainable security through sustainable development and resolve conflicts through development. This will eliminate the fertile ground for insecurity in the region. Furthermore, China is ready to do its utmost to help Middle Eastern countries in their economic recovery in the post-COVID-19 era, their food, energy and security, as well as support them in improving people's livelihood. By doing so it will pave the way for security in the Middle East.¹⁴⁵

The Chinese ambassador in Sudan finishes his article by adding an African proverb that says; *"If you want to go fast, go alone; and if you want to go far, go together."* He also added that no matter how the international scene develops, China remains a good brother, good friend and a good partner to the Middle Eastern countries and also remains an active participant in addition to a contributor to security in the Middle East. Looking to the future, China stands ready to work with Sudan and other peace-loving countries to implement the Global Security Initiative and jointly build a new security architecture in the Middle East. Our unremitting efforts to secure lasting peace and stability in the Middle East will be a new contribution to building a community with a shared future for mankind.¹⁴⁶

The Chinese ambassador in Sudan wrote this article because he sees the Middle East as the home to some of the oldest human civilizations, and that the Middle East has left an indelible chapter in the

¹⁴⁴ Work on the Global Security Initiative for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. (2022). The Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China http://sd.china-embassy.gov.cn/ara/xwdt/202211/t20221110_10944380.htm (Last accessed May 31st) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

history of the development of human society. Although, the Middle Eastern region has suffered from historical injustice, the ambassador adds, external interference, and endless ethnic, religious, and regional conflicts over the past century. Generations of the people of the Middle East yearn for peace, security and stability. However, how to secure long-term peace and stability in the region has long been a question that has puzzled the world.¹⁴⁷

The Arab - Sino Summit

The Arab countries and the Peoples Republic of China have always had a strong relationship that was built on the basis of mutual respect between both the Chinese and the Arab nations.¹⁴⁸ A relationship with each other for about 2000 years, through the Silk Road by land and sea.¹⁴⁹ This was how the president of the of the Arab Summit referred to the Sino - Arab relations.

President Xi Jinping however, added in his speech that the Arab countries and the Peoples Republic of China trust each other, and they are bonded by brotherly feelings.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, whenever President Jinping refers to the Arab State leaders that were present in the Summit, he used the words colleagues and friends¹⁵¹

The speeches that were held by the Arab State leaders had a respectful characteristic by referring to each other as well as to the Chinese State as either friend or brother, and they often included friendly words, by reminding how the Arab and Chinese civilizations have always had similarities. The use of such terms from a constructivist point of view shows the respect that each country holds for each other. If we compare it to the term that the President of the United States Joe Biden used, against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

¹⁴⁷ Work on the Global Security Initiative for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. (2022). The Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China http://sd.china-embassy.gov.cn/ara/xwdt/202211/t20221110_10944380.htm (Last accessed May 31st) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁴⁸ AlArabiya. Arab - Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development in Riyadh. YouTube. December 09, 2022. 2:14:44. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x7Hw07ltx4> taken from min. 22:45

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. taken from min 23:05

¹⁵⁰ AlArabiya. The Chinese Presidents' speech during the Arab - Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development. YouTube. December 09, 2022. 16:57.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjtGc4RA7I8&t=73s> taken from min 1:50

¹⁵¹ Ibid. taken from min 4:53

Conclusion

As mentioned above the Middle East and China binds them a long-standing relationship, filled with respect for each other. This was very much seen during the Arab - Sino Summit, especially with the terms that they have used when referring to each other. This relationship can be observed from a constructivist point of view, as they show respect towards the sovereignty of each other's countries as well as their history and civilization.

The regional complexes that were mentioned during the summit, especially the Palestinian - Israeli conflict and emphasizing on finding a solution for this historic and ongoing conflict, this was already a strong start for the Summit. That is because, this conflict has shaped a critical complex in the region, involving several regional powers, and formed a destabilization in the region as well. However, we can observe the power transition in the region by the first Arab - Sino Summit that was held in Riyadh and the points that were agreed upon to work on as important points. The points were:

1. Affirming our common keenness to strengthen the strategic partnership between the Arab countries and the Peoples' Republic of China based on comprehensive cooperation and common development for a better future, as a model for friendly relations and friendly cooperation.¹⁵²

In this point, again the emphasis on friendly relations and cooperation, shows from a constructive point of view the respect that they share for each other.

2. Reaffirming our countries' firm commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, including the principles of mutual respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and territorial integrity of states, refraining from the use or threat of force in international relations, respect for the principle of good neighborliness, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states.

Here the State leaders in the Summit agreed upon the emphasis on respecting each states' internal affairs and the non-interference in their internal political affairs. Which proves again the importance of respect that they need to have for each other.

¹⁵² Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

3. Work to preserve the international order based on international law, multilateral action, promote the principles of cooperation, solidarity, justice and fairness in international relations, as well as preserve the interests of developing countries and defend their rights.¹⁵³

These were the main points that were agreed upon. Furthermore, both Arab States and the Chinese State, agreed upon supporting each other in the development of various areas.

The recent event that caught the world's attention, was however, the mediation of China in order to reconcile the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, after they stopped their diplomatic relations for years now. Saudi Arabia and Iran are another regional complex in the Middle East as they both represent a sect in Islam.

Furthermore, the Middle East has witnessed several sectarian wars in the past, where both Saudi Arabia and Iran were involved. The recent sectarian conflict is the Yemen conflict, where both Saudi Arabia and Iran are involved.¹⁵⁴

With China holding the first ever Arab - Sino Summit in Riyadh as well as meddling in order to restore the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it shows that there is a power transition in the region. However, this new power is all about withholding a good relationship and working on enhancing peace in the region. If the points that were agreed upon in the Summit, were taken into action, and peace would be enhanced in the region, this could have a large impact on the rest of the world's peace order.

¹⁵³ Written and published by Alarabiya an online news platform, (2022), <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/12/10/القمة-العربية-الصينية-تأكيد-على-تعزيز-الشراكة-الاستراتيجية> (Last accessed May 13th) (Translated from Arabic by me)

¹⁵⁴ Jalal, Ibrahim. (2023). China and the Saudi - Iran rapprochement: Implications for Yemen. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-and-saudi-iran-rapprochement-implications-yemen>

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