

**EMERGING GEO-ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN  
CHINA AND IRAN: AN ANALYSIS OF US RESPONSE (2013-  
2023)**



**RESEARCHER**

Berjis Kamal  
211-FSS/MSIR/F22

**SUPERVISOR**

Ms. Nadia Awan  
Department of Politics & IR

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD**

**2024**

## **SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Emerging Geo-Economic Cooperation Between China-Iran: An Analysis of US response (2013-2023)**" is the original work submitted by Ms. Berjis Kamal, a student of MS in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences. This research work has been successfully done under my guidance and supervision. She has fulfilled all the requirements for the award for the MS degree ordinance at the University. This is important to certify that this thesis has not been submitted for attainment of any Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, or Fellowship from any other university.

**Signatures:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Ms. Nadia Awan**  
Department of Politics & IR  
Faculty of Social Sciences

## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that this thesis entitled " **Emerging Geo-Economic Cooperation Between China and Iran: An Analysis of US Response (2013-2023)**" is my original work. This research work was completed under the supervision of Ms. Nadia Awan and submitted to the Department of International Relations as satisfying the requirements for the degree MS in international relations. I have properly referenced and cited the sources of information in my thesis. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree.

---

Berjis Kamal  
211-FSS-MSIR/F22

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....   | <b>i</b>   |
| <b>DEDICATION</b> .....  | <b>ii</b>  |
| <b>List of Figures</b> .....   | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....   | <b>iv</b>  |
| <b>ABSTRACT</b> .....  | <b>v</b>   |
| <b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....   | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....  | <b>1</b>   |
| 1.1 Rationale of Study .....   | 2          |
| 1.2 Statement of Problem.....  | 2          |
| 1.3 Research Objectives .....  | 3          |
| 1.4 Research Questions .....   | 3          |
| 1.5 Significance of Study .....  | 3          |
| 1.6 Delimitations of Study .....   | 4          |
| 1.7 Operational definitions.....   | 4          |
| 1.8 Literature Review .....  | 5          |
| 1.8.1 Research Gap .....   | 14         |
| 1.9 Theoretical Framework.....   | 15         |
| 1.10 Research Methodology .....  | 20         |
| 1.10.1 Research Design.....  | 20         |
| 1.10.2 Data Collection .....   | 21         |
| 1.10.3 Data Analysis .....   | 22         |
| 1.10.4 Research Ethics .....   | 22         |
| 1.11 Organization of the study .....   | 22         |
| <b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....   | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>THE CHINA-IRAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</b> ..... | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>2.1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....  | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>2.2 Perspective of Neighboring Middle Eastern Countries</b> .....                               | <b>26</b>  |
| 2.2.1 Security .....   | 28         |
| 2.2.2 Economic Independence .....  | 28         |
| 2.2.3 Diplomatic Autonomy.....   | 29         |
| <b>2.3. Implications for Regional Stability and Power Dynamics</b> .....                           | <b>30</b>  |
| <b>2.4 Analyzing Responses and Strategies</b> .....  | <b>31</b>  |
| <b>CHAPTER 3</b> .....   | <b>35</b>  |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE.....</b>   | <b>35</b> |
| <b>3.1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>   | <b>35</b> |
| <b>3.2 Trade and Investment Flows.....</b>   | <b>36</b> |
| 3.2.1 Oil and Energy Trade.....  | 36        |
| 3.2.2 Steady Energy Supply for China.....  | 36        |
| 3.2.3 Revenue for Iran.....  | 37        |
| 3.2.4 Infrastructure Investments.....  | 37        |
| 3.2.5 Transportation Infrastructure .....  | 37        |
| 3.2.6 Energy Sector .....  | 37        |
| 3.2.7 Telecommunications .....   | 38        |
| 3.2.8 Integration into BRI .....   | 38        |
| <b>3.3 Joint Ventures and Technological Exchange.....</b>  | <b>39</b> |
| 3.3.1 Industrial and Technological Collaboration.....  | 39        |
| 3.3.2 Joint Ventures .....   | 39        |
| 3.3.3 Technology Transfers .....   | 39        |
| 3.3.4 Research and Development (R&D) .....   | 40        |
| <b>3.4 Financial and Banking Integration .....</b>   | <b>40</b> |
| 3.4.1 Alternative Financial Systems .....  | 40        |
| 3.4.2 Barter Trade .....   | 40        |
| 3.4.3 Non-Dollar Transactions.....   | 41        |
| 3.4.4 Banking Cooperation .....  | 41        |
| <b>3.5 Emerging Trends in China-Iran Relations.....</b>  | <b>42</b> |
| 3.5.1 Economic Partnership .....   | 42        |
| <b>3.6 Strengthening Iran's Position .....</b>   | <b>42</b> |
| 3.6.1 Economic Resilience.....   | 42        |
| 3.6.2 Strategic Depth.....   | 43        |
| 3.6.3 Economic Partnership .....   | 43        |
| <b>3.7 Joint Ventures and Technological Exchange.....</b>  | <b>43</b> |
| 3.7.1 Industrial and Technological Collaboration.....  | 43        |
| 3.7.2 Financial and Banking Integration.....   | 44        |
| <b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>   | <b>48</b> |
| <b>IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOPOLITICAL ACTORS IN THE REGION ESPECIALLY<br/>IMPACT ON US INFLUENCE IN THE REGION.....</b> | <b>48</b> |
| 4.1 INTRODUCTION .....   | 48        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>4.2 Military and Strategic Collaboration</b> .....                        | <b>49</b> |
| 4.2.1 Arms Sales .....   | 49        |
| 4.2.2 Technological Transfers.....   | 50        |
| 4.2.3 Defense Agreements .....   | 50        |
| 4.2.4 Joint Naval Exercises .....  | 50        |
| 4.2.5 Enhanced Defense Ties .....  | 51        |
| <b>4.3 Diplomatic Maneuvers</b> .....  | <b>52</b> |
| 4.3.1 Regional Diplomacy .....   | 52        |
| 4.3.2 Mediation Role in Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations.....                     | 52        |
| 4.3.3 Sanctions Evasion .....  | 52        |
| 4.3.4 Oil Storage and Clandestine Shipments.....                             | 53        |
| 4.3.5 Economic and Financial Support .....                                   | 53        |
| <b>4.4 Implications on Regional Balance of Power</b> .....                   | <b>54</b> |
| 4.4.1 Strengthening Iran's Position .....                                    | 54        |
| 4.4.2 Shifting Alliances.....  | 57        |
| 4.4.3 Implications of Shifting Alliances .....                               | 58        |
| <b>4.5 Implications for Key Geopolitical Actors</b> .....                    | <b>59</b> |
| 4.5.1 United States .....  | 60        |
| 4.5.2 Middle Eastern Countries.....  | 62        |
| 4.5.3 Israel Increased Security Concerns .....                               | 63        |
| <b>4.6 Potential U.S. Responses to Emerging China-Iran Partnership</b> ..... | <b>64</b> |
| 4.6.1 Economic Measures .....  | 64        |
| 4.6.2 Strategic Partnerships.....  | 65        |
| 4.6.3 Pursuing Diplomatic Channels with China and Iran.....                  | 65        |
| <b>CHAPTER 5</b> .....   | <b>68</b> |
| CONCLUSION .....   | 68        |
| <b>KEY FINDINGS</b> .....  | <b>71</b> |
| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....   | <b>75</b> |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....  | <b>78</b> |



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First of all, I am deeply grateful to Allah, who gave me the strength, ability, and knowledge to carry out this research work and complete it successfully. With Allah's help, I was able to write my thesis and navigate through difficult times.

Secondly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my respected supervisor, Ms. Nadia Awan, whose professional attitude and guidance made this research work possible.

I am also profoundly thankful to my parents and family for their continuous support and encouragement throughout my research journey. Finally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my friends who assisted me during my research work.



## **DEDICATION**

This research work is wholeheartedly dedicated to my respected parents and family. I dedicate this research to my late mother Gullzarda Abbasi for being a source of motivation for me. I also dedicate this work to my loving father Kamal Ahmed Abbasi for being a great mentor who worked hard for my better education and life.

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1 (Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, 1970) Compiled by Researcher..... | 17 |
|--|----|

## **List of Abbreviations**

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AIIB  | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank   |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BRI   | Belt and Road Initiative               |
| EU    | European Union                         |
| GCC   | Gulf Cooperation Council               |
| GDP   | Gross domestic product                 |
| IAEA  | International Atomic Energy Agency     |
| NATO  | North Atlantic Treaty Organization     |
| SCO   | Shanghai Cooperation Organization      |
| SDGs  | Sustainable development goals          |
| UAE   | United Arab Emirates                   |
| UN    | United Nations                         |
| USA   | United States of America               |
| USIP  | United State Institute of Peace        |

## **ABSTRACT**

This study delves into the historical contexts and international dynamics influencing China-Iran relations, focusing on the U.S. response. Using qualitative methods and a theoretical framework, it explores global actor's roles and financial dependencies in shaping politics. A contextual investigation approach provides a nuanced understanding of the China-Iran relationship, emphasizing progressivism as a core value in international relations. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has strengthened economic and geopolitical ties with Iran, a key junction in the BRI, offering Iran substantial economic benefits and increased relevance. Historically, China-Iran relations evolved through various phases, influenced by broader geopolitical dynamics and domestic transformations. The ancient Silk Road fostered early connections. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 marked significant shifts, challenging Western hegemony. Iran's post-revolution anti-Western sentiment led to closer ties with non-Western powers like China, driven by a shared interest in counterbalancing U.S. influence and fostering a multipolar world. Western sanctions on Iran further deepened its economic and political ties with China, which sought to secure energy resources and expand its influence in the Middle East. China's BRI has deepened Sino-Iranian ties, enhancing global trade connectivity through infrastructure development. For Iran, the BRI offers significant economic opportunities and boosts its geopolitical significance as a key transit route linking Asia and Europe. The interdependence framework explains the motivations behind the China-Iran partnership: both seek to mitigate vulnerabilities and enhance strategic autonomy. The U.S. perceives China's growing presence in the Middle East as a challenge to its influence, responding with diplomatic efforts, strengthened regional alliances, military presence, and economic tools to limit China's and Iran's strategic option.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Trade relations between Iran and China have roots dating back to at least 200 B.C. Along ancient Silk Road these nations' established cultural and economic ties, laying groundwork for future interactions. Despite distance that separates them geographically, Iran and China share long history of mutual respect and diplomatic engagement. In modern era, relationship between Iran and China has grown multifaceted influenced by geopolitical shifts and economic developments. It's essential to understand this evolution to comprehend dynamics of current Iran China relationship. (Belal, 2020).

In 1980s, during Iran-Iraq War, Iran faced severe arms embargo from Western nations. To bolster its military capabilities, Iran turned to China, initiating phase of military cooperation. China became significant supplier of arms to Iran providing critical military equipment that was vital for Iran's war efforts (USIP, 2023). 1990s witnessed shift from military collaboration to economic cooperation (Belal, 2020). China's rapid industrialization led to surge in energy demands prompting increased imports of petroleum products from Iran (Omeed, 2023). This transition laid foundation for strong economic relationship, especially in energy sector. As China transformed into net oil importer in early 2000s, Iran's role as major energy supplier became increasingly prominent. Iran provided significant portion of China's energy needs resulting in deepening of their economic ties. China's need for energy resources and Iran's abundant reserves created symbiotic relationship.

In recent years Iran has found reliable partner in China, particularly amidst U.S. sanctions. China's economic and political support has become pivotal for Iran in dealing with diplomatic isolation, regional tensions and economic challenges (Belal, 2020). U.S withdrawal from Iran

nuclear deal and subsequent sanctions intensified Iran's pivot towards China. This partnership aims to translate economic strength into political influence and ensure mutual interdependence between two nations. Trade between Iran and China soared with China consistently being Iran's largest trade partner for decade. Iran's trade with China reached almost \$16 billion in 2022, showcasing economic dependence Iran has developed on China. Notably, China's crude oil imports from Iran broke records in December 2022 (USIP, 2023). This economic cooperation is further solidified by 25 year strategic agreement signed in 2021, reinforcing both economic and security collaboration (USIP, 2023).

## **1.1 Rationale of Study**

Reasoning for leading this study lies in basic significance of understanding and tending to unpredictable connection among China and Iran and weighty impact of US. This three dimensional dynamic is portrayed by authentic complexities, developing partnerships and significant worldwide ramifications. Centrality of Iran as significant power in Middle East, coupled with China's emerging influence, necessitates thorough analysis. Past strategy shifts and international occasions have displayed sweeping effect of discretionary choices on local strength and worldwide relations. In this way exhaustive comprehension of authentic setting, strategy suggestions and international elements is fundamental for making successful techniques to improve steadiness and harmony in district.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

The growing alliance between China and Iran, marked by deepening economic, strategic, and diplomatic ties, presents a significant challenge for the United States in managing its interests in the Middle East. This evolving partnership, driven by mutual economic goals and strategic interests, disrupts traditional power dynamics in the region and compels the U.S. to reassess its

approach. The challenge lies in striking a delicate balance between acknowledging the sovereign rights of nations to form their own alliances and protecting U.S. interests and regional stability. Addressing this complex interplay requires a careful examination to develop an effective strategy that maintains regional peace, respects national sovereignty, and aligns with broader U.S. global objectives.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To analyze emerging trends of China-Iran relation and current implications on regional balance of power and interests of key geopolitical actors, particularly United States.
2. To explore impact of China's Iran economic partnership contribution to enhancement of economic interdependence and geopolitical alignment.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

3. What are emerging trends of China-Iran relation and current implications on regional balance of power and interests of key geopolitical actors, particularly United States?
4. How can China's Iran economic partnership contribute to enhancement of economic interdependence and geopolitical alignment?

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

This study holds critical ramifications at different levels. Right off bat grasping complexities of China Iran relationship is vital for policymaker's representatives and partners associated with worldwide relations. It gives significant encounters into certain events and technique decisions that have shaped this relationship enabling instructed, key decisions for future. Close to read up's disclosures are crucial for educational investigation adding to astute perception of worldwide relations technique and split difference. It adds nuanced point of view on elements of force belief system and exchange in contemporary international scene. Additionally study's

relevance extend to general populace promoting greater awareness and understanding of ongoing efforts at rapprochement and their potential impact on global peace and security. This investigation intends to educate and engage with larger audience by providing insight into China Iran relationship, enabling educated discussion and common ground on topics of global concern. At last more serene and stable worldwide situation is in interest of global local area making this study fundamental undertaking with broad ramification for territorial and worldwide agreement.

## **1.6 Delimitations of Study**

Delimitations of this study center on scope and timeframe. Firstly this research distinctly focuses on analyzing China Iran relationship and its repercussions globally. It is limited to this specific bilateral relationship and does not extensively delve into other global geo-economic interactions or broader international relations maintaining narrow focus to ensure depth and precision. Secondly study is bounded by data and information provided in initial text restricting its analysis to context and events presented without projecting beyond scope of available information. Future developments or events outside specified timeline are not considered within purview of this study.

## **1.7 Operational definitions**

**Interdependence:** Interdependence theory, in realm of international relations, posits that states and actors are interconnected and mutually reliant on each other in various ways. It suggests that actions and decisions of one state can have significant effects on other states and vice versa. This theory assumes that in globalized world, nations have common interests and face shared challenges that necessitate cooperation. Interdependence can occur in several forms, including economic, security (mutual defense agreements) and environmental.



**Bilateral Relations:** Bilateral relations refer to interactions, agreements and engagements between two distinct sovereign entities, typically countries. These interactions can encompass diplomatic, economic, social cultural and political exchanges aimed at enhancing cooperation, resolving disputes and promoting mutual interests.

**Geopolitics:** International affairs includes investigation of political, monetary and vital associations among states and different entertainers taking into account topographical elements and their impact on global relations. It investigates how geographic area, assets and actual highlights influence political way of behaving and worldwide elements. Geopolitics also concerns how nations become prosper as well as how relations between Nations affect other nations and thus relationship of China and Iran is matter of concern and topic of discussion in international relations.

**Nuclear Proliferation:** Nuclear proliferation is spread of nuclear weapons and technology to nations or non-state entities beyond original nuclear-armed states. It frequently alludes to obtaining or advancement of atomic abilities by extra nations raising worries about security, dependability and potential for atomic struggles. Since Iran has been sanctioned due its promotion of nuclear program, countries like U.S and its neighbors are concerned about its relationships with China.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

Iran growing reliance on China has become critical factor in navigating diplomatic isolation regional tensions and economic challenges. Strong economic ties between two nations exemplified by their significant trade and strategic agreements underscore China burgeoning influence over Iran. Literature review digs into authentic foundations of their relationship and breaks down late multi-layered collaborations among China and Iran especially in domains of

economy security discretion. Other than it explores times of their creating relationship, from military support during Iran-Iraq Fight to basic focus on energy trade and hypotheses late years.

According to U.S Institute of peace, historical roots of Iran-China relations can be traced back to at least 200 B.C., demonstrating their deep-rooted cultural and economic connections along ancient Silk Road (The Iran Primer, 2023). Relationship has undergone significant shifts over centuries notably marked by their revolutions in 20th century that redefined their global positions. Break in diplomatic relations between Iran and United States in 1980 provided opportunity for China and Iran to strengthen their ties, both economically and strategically, against common adversaries (Primer, 2023).

As per Alireza nadir, Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) proved to be pivotal phase in strengthening Sino-Iranian ties, with China emerging as significant arms supplier to Iran due to Western arms embargoes (Nader, 2023). This period marked shift from Western nations as suppliers to China, North Korea and Russia, thereby setting stage for future cooperation. Following war, trade dynamics transitioned from arms sales to energy trade, aligning with China's rapid industrialization. China's soaring energy demands led to increased imports from Iran, particularly petroleum products. Nader Habibi on Stimson Center writes that 1990s saw significant surge in bilateral trade, predominantly driven by energy trade, showcasing China's strategic utilization of Iran's abundant natural resources (Habibi, 2023). Basherah Omeed writes on CSCR that imposition of major sanctions on Iran's nuclear and energy sectors by United States and United Nations in 2010 marked new phase (Omeed, 2023). Despite sanctions, China remained critical trading partner for Iran. Iran grappled with economic isolation and challenges, China emerged as key importer of Iranian oil and invested in Iran's oil and gas industry.

As per report published on Atlantic Council, in recent years China-Iran relationship has deepened across multiple fronts. 25-year strategic agreement signed in 2021 underscores their intent to bolster economic and security cooperation (Jcookson, 2023). According to Georgetown Journal of international affairs, China's role as Iran's largest trade partner for 10th consecutive year and its facilitation of Iran-Saudi Arabia diplomatic ties in 2023 are emblematic of China's growing political influence in region. China's economic influence is evident through substantial growth in bilateral trade, reaching nearly \$16 billion in 2022, up by seven percent from previous year (Jash, 2023). China's consistent crude oil imports from Iran and Iran's potential accession to Shanghai Cooperation Organization highlight their economic collaboration.

Iran and China have been strengthening their strategic defense cooperation, as seen in collaborative military strategies and joint military drills (Jash, 2023). Naval drill involving Iran, China and Russia in Gulf of Oman emphasizes their growing defense ties, underscoring China's interest in regional security dynamics (Jash, 2023). High level diplomatic engagements, such as President Raisi's visit to Beijing in 2023, have solidified their diplomatic ties (Jcookson, 2023). Having different agreements spanning trade, transportation, information technology, tourism and agriculture signifies breadth and depth of their diplomatic collaboration. Historical trajectory of China-Iran relationship illustrates its evolution from primarily arms-based alliance to substantial economic and strategic partnership (Jcookson, 2023). As China continues to exert influence in region, its deepening ties with Iran have implications not only for Middle East but also for global geopolitics (Jash, 2023).

As per the academic research "Why Saudi-Iran agreement doesn't herald active role for China in Gulf" published on East Asia Forum, Iran's perseverance against U.S.-imposed sanctions has led to creative methods of oil trade and diplomatic maneuvers. Literature review delves into

Iran efforts circumvent these sanctions focusing on its strategies to sell oil and maintain its relationships, especially with China (Burton, 2023). Furthermore it analyzes U.S. response to these evasive actions and subsequent dynamics in Iran-China relations. Iran has ingeniously navigated sanctions by adopting subterfuge and financial trickery making it challenging for international bodies like International Maritime Organization to trace oil shipments. Ships carrying Iranian oil have resorted to disabling identification system altering their names and identification numbers and ceasing position reporting near buyer ports. Tactic of bonded storage in Chinese ports allowed Iran to hold its oil without breaching U.S. sanctions, buying time to locate buyers and avoid tariffs.

According to research, in wake of U.S. sanctions in 2018, Iran found support in China, reinforcing their strategic partnership. China stood as steadfast ally, emphasizing their "comprehensive strategic partnership" status (Al Jazeera, 2023). 25-year strategic partnership agreement, signed in 2021, further deepened their relationship, focusing on various sectors like energy, infrastructure, banking, tourism and technology (Burton, 2023). U.S., to counter Iran's attempts to circumvent sanctions, has targeted companies and entities involved in Iranian oil trade, imposing punitive measures against Chinese companies. USA sanctions aimed to deter other nations including China from engaging trade with Iran. In response China condemned USA actions characterizing them as "long arm jurisdiction" and advocating for rights of its enterprises. Deepening of trade relations between Iran and China gained momentum after U.S. sanctions were reimposed. China's acknowledgment of two nations as "comprehensive strategic partners" marked significant milestone (Batrawy, 2023). Subsequent signing of 25-year strategic partnership agreement further propelled their economic and strategic collaboration, albeit in measured manner compared to China's engagements with regional rivals like Saudi Arabia and UAE (Batrawy, 2023).

Aya Bartway writes on NPR that in diplomatic feat brokered by China/Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic ties, indicating significant de-escalation of tensions. This step toward reconciliation involved reopening of embassies and adherence to principle of non-interference in each other's affairs (Batrawy, 2023). China's role as mediator in this diplomatic breakthrough underscores its growing influence and strategic importance in region (Batrawy, 2023). Iran's innovative strategies to evade sanctions and its evolving partnership with China have implications beyond Middle East. Intricate dance of sanctions evasion and diplomatic overtures underscores complexity of global geopolitics. While U.S. response has been targeted sanctions, China's role as steadfast ally to Iran and mediator in regional diplomacy is shaping dynamics of international relations. Understanding these dynamics is essential to foresee trajectory of this evolving relationship (Jazeera, 2023).

The perspectives of neighboring Middle Eastern countries towards China-Iran collaboration are varied and complex, reflecting diverse interests and strategic calculations within region. Some Middle Eastern countries view China-Iran agreement as potential economic threat, fearing that Chinese goods may flood their markets and undermine local industries, similar to concerns expressed within Iran. This economic concern stems from fear of competition and potential for disruption in local economies (Costigliola, n.d.).

Moreover, economic dimension of China-Iran collaboration is significant. In 2022 alone, China exported goods worth \$9.44 billion to Iran, with motor vehicles and parts, vehicle bodies and broadcasting equipment being among top products. On other hand, Iran's exports to China in same year amounted to \$5.72 billion, with ethylene polymers, acyclic alcohols and refined copper being main products. Trade between China and Iran in February 2024 saw China exporting \$774 million and importing \$413 million from Iran, resulting in positive trade balance of \$361 million

(Dorsey, 2021). These statistics highlight substantial economic ties between two nations, which have implications for broader Middle Eastern economy. Additionally, countries like Saudi Arabia, which have their own strategic partnerships with China, may view China-Iran collaboration with caution due to historical rivalry between Iran and Gulf Arab states. This strategic rivalry adds another layer of complexity to dynamics of region, as these countries navigate their relationships with both China and Iran while safeguarding their own interests (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2022).

Furthermore, collaboration is seen by some as challenge to traditional U.S.-led security architecture in region. Countries aligned with U.S. may be wary of growing Chinese influence in Middle East, as it could potentially undermine their own alliances and security arrangements. This geopolitical implication highlights shifting power dynamics in region and emerging influence of non-Western actors. Military collaboration between China and Iran also plays significant role in shaping regional dynamics. Since 2014, there has been renewed growth in official military relations between two countries, including high-ranking military personnel visits, bilateral naval exercises and multilateral exercises with Russia. China's projected military influence in Iran is assessed as increasing over next three years, indicating deepening strategic partnership between two nations. Moreover, impact of China-Iran relationship extends beyond Middle East and has implications for global power relations (Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2021). Partnership is rooted in limited pragmatic cooperation but has evolved in recent years into partnership more pointedly opposed to U.S.-led international order. China views Tehran's opposition to United States as augmenting China's increasing global influence. This strategic alignment between China and Iran is seen as challenge to U.S. hegemony, particularly in Middle East and signals shift towards multipolar world order (Flemes & Wojczewski, 2021a).

The 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement signed between Iran and China has now entered implementation stage. Agreement includes economic, military and security cooperation, with both countries under different levels of United States sanctions. Specific projects or agreements to mark occasion of implementation stage have not been announced, but comprehensive nature of agreement underscores depth of China-Iran partnership. Furthermore, strategic accord between China and Iran is expected to expand Chinese influence in region and challenge U.S. dominance. Middle Eastern countries have varied perspectives on China-Iran coalition, with some viewing it as economic threat, while others see opportunities for increased economic cooperation (Helwig & Schörnig, 2019).

China-Iran strategic partnership is reshaping Middle East's geopolitical landscape, with neighboring countries carefully assessing implications for their own national interests. Economic, strategic and geopolitical dimensions of this collaboration highlight complex interplay of factors shaping regional dynamics and global power relations. As partnership continues to evolve, its impact on Middle East and beyond will likely remain topic of significant interest and debate. Concept of Interdependence Theory in international relations provides valuable framework for analyzing how states maintain their sovereignty and autonomy amidst external pressures and influences. This framework becomes particularly pertinent when examining potential reactions of neighboring countries to China-Iran partnership, as it involves critical components such as security, economic independence and diplomatic autonomy.

Within context of Interdependence Theory, security pertains to state's capacity to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity against external threats in a web of mutual dependencies. Neighboring countries are likely to scrutinize China-Iran partnership from security standpoint, evaluating whether it presents strategic threat or offers counterbalance to other regional powers.

This assessment may prompt them to bolster their military capabilities, engage in alliances, or pursue diplomatic initiatives to mitigate perceived risks (Iran International, 2023).

In Middle East, security concerns are pronounced, given region's history of conflicts and geopolitical rivalries. Countries such as Saudi Arabia have significantly increased their military expenditure, allocating substantial resources to defense in response to regional tensions. For instance, Saudi Arabia's military expenditure amounted to \$67.6 billion in 2021, representing approximately 8.4% of its GDP. Additionally, Middle Eastern nations are among largest importers of arms globally, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and UAE collectively accounting for 35% of global arms imports between 2015 and 2019 (The Diplomat, 2024). These statistics underscore region's focus on bolstering its security posture amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2023). Economic interdependence refers to state's ability to sustain economically. China-Iran partnership's implications for economic dynamics in region are significant, potentially reshaping trade patterns, energy security and market dynamics. Neighboring countries are likely to assess extent to which their economies are vulnerable to disruptions stemming from China-Iran axis and take measures to diversify their economic portfolios. The Middle East plays pivotal role in global energy markets, accounting for approximately 34% of global crude oil exports. Iran's oil exports to China have been instrumental for its economy, particularly in light of U.S. sanctions. However, there is growing recognition among regional actors of need to reduce reliance on oil exports and promote economic diversification to mitigate vulnerabilities associated with commodity dependency (The Diplomat, 2022).

Diplomatic autonomy encompasses state's freedom to pursue its foreign policy objectives without undue external influence. China-Iran partnership may prompt neighboring countries to reassess their diplomatic alignments and alliances to safeguard their interests and preserve balance



of power in region. This could involve diplomatic maneuvers, such as forging new partnerships or recalibrating existing ones, to navigate evolving geopolitical landscape shaped by China-Iran axis (World Economic Forum, 2023). Several Middle Eastern countries have already demonstrated willingness to adapt their foreign policies to maintain diplomatic autonomy. For example, UAE has pursued strategy of diversifying its international partnerships beyond traditional allies, signaling pragmatic approach to safeguarding its interests in rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Moreover, region has witnessed shifts in international alliances, with countries like Qatar restoring diplomatic relations with Iran and Turkey enhancing cooperation with Russia, reflecting realignment of strategic priorities in response to emerging geopolitical dynamics (The Washington Post, 2021).

Interdependence Theory provides robust analytical framework for understanding how neighboring countries may react to China-Iran partnership, considering factors such as security, economic interdependence and diplomatic autonomy. By examining intricate interplay of these dimensions, policymakers can formulate informed strategies to navigate evolving geopolitical landscape and safeguard their national interests in increasingly interconnected world. The emerging geo-economic cooperation between the U.S. and Iran can be analyzed through the lens of structural realism, which emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system and the centrality of state power. From this perspective, the U.S. response to potential cooperation with Iran is driven primarily by concerns over maintaining its hegemonic position in the Middle East and globally. While economic benefits might emerge from engagement, the U.S. views Iran as a rival, particularly in terms of regional influence and nuclear ambitions. Thus, under structural realism, the U.S. is likely to prioritize strategic containment over economic cooperation, fearing that improved ties could bolster Iran's power and challenge U.S. dominance in the region. Any

shifts in policy would be calculated, seeking to balance short-term economic gains with long-term strategic imperatives.

### **1.8.1 Research Gap**

While Literature widely inspects expanding coalition between China Iran and its effect on worldwide international relations, recognizable exploration hole exist concerning reactions and view of adjoining Center Eastern countries toward this coordinated effort. This study properly helping centers around elements between China, Iran and US, neglecting nuanced responses and procedures took on by neighboring nations in Central East. Understanding territorial points of view is critical for all-encompassing examination of geo-political changes happening in Central- East. It is fundamental to research how countries in closeness to China and Iran interpret and change in accordance with advancing relationship. This research will reveal insight into whether neighbor countries view China-Iran association as danger, open door or question of in-distinction. Moreover it would investigate how this collusion impact their international strategies, exchange connections and generally essential positions.

The responses of regional players hold critical ramifications for local stability, security and power dynamics. It's possible that neighbor nations might adjust their conciliatory, financial or security procedures because of developing China-Iran joint effort. Furthermore concentrating on these reactions can uncover expected shifts in collusions, likely irreconcilable circumstances or arising open doors for provincial participation. Hence breaking down how adjoining countries see and answer China-Iran partnership is fundamental for nuanced comprehension of international repercussions in Center East. In summary, current examination fundamentally centers around essential entertainers in this developing international scene and there is particular absence of thorough investigation with respect to responses and procedures embraced by adjoining Center

Eastern countries in light of China-Iran organization. Further examination toward this path is basic to build more complete and nuanced image of moving elements in locale.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

Interdependence Theory, which is given by Robert Keohane and Nye, used in this study to illustrate economic and security factors among nations and various substances in given region. Interdependence theory, which has its roots in international relations, contends that states who are mutually dependent on one another for resources, trade, security, or other interests are more likely to cooperate. As this theory is applied to geo-economic collaboration between China and Iran, it is clear that their strategic alliance is motivated by shared desire for Middle Eastern geopolitical power, energy resources and economic expansion. Iran's substantial oil and gas reserves are compatible with China's appetite for energy resources. One of elements of their partnership is their shared energy dependence. Iran gains from Chinese investments and technological transfers and China acquires dependable energy source to support its accelerating economic growth. . (Saraswat, 2022).

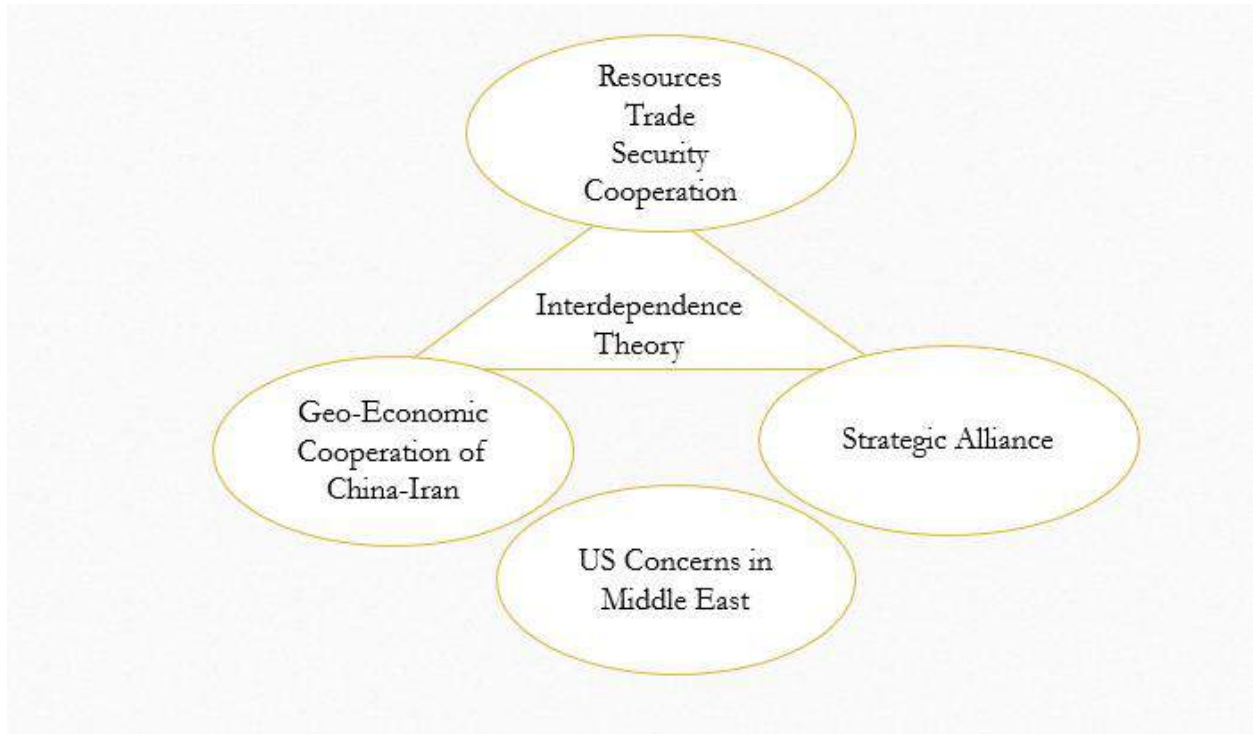
According to interdependence theory, as states become more interconnected, economic relationships can serve as both stabilizing and destabilizing influences (Keohane & Nye, 1977). In the case of China and Iran, their increasing economic interdependence acts as a stabilizing element in their bilateral relations, decreasing the chances of conflict and promoting cooperation on mutual strategic objectives. This alliance poses challenges to U.S. efforts to maintain its dominance, as it disrupts traditional power structures and fosters a multipolar world where economic partnerships wield considerable influence.

The emerging geo-economic cooperation between China and Iran signifies a notable shift in global alliances and power dynamics, making it an excellent case study for applying

interdependence theory in international relations. This theory, advanced by scholars like Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, focuses on the increasing interconnectedness of states and the significance of economic, political, and social ties in influencing state behavior (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

The collaboration between China and Iran is primarily driven by shared economic interests, such as energy trade and infrastructure development, which foster interdependence and reduce the likelihood of conflict between the two nations. This partnership poses a challenge to the traditional dominance of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East by establishing alternative economic and strategic alliances that weaken American influence. The U.S. response to this cooperation can be analyzed through the lens of interdependence theory, as it seeks to navigate and potentially counter these emerging networks by bolstering its own alliances and employing economic sanctions and diplomatic strategies to counterbalance the growing China-Iran partnership. The interdependence between China and Iran highlights the changing dynamics of global power, where economic connections increasingly play a crucial role in shaping international relations and challenging established power hierarchies (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

## Theoretical Framework Figure 1



*(Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, 1970) Compiled by Researcher.*

In reaction to expanding partnership, US has voiced worries about potential geopolitical repercussions, particularly in light of its ongoing sanctions against Iran. United States is concerned that China's growing role in Iran could threaten its efforts to put. (Saraswat, 2022). The US needs to take a sophisticated approach to this. It could look for opportunities for positive collaboration rather than just concentrating on containment. This can entail finding common ground while upholding its basic objectives on problems like regional stability, counterterrorism, or non-proliferation. Additionally, U.S. might strategically use its diplomatic and economic clout to involve China and Iran in conversation aimed at identifying win-win alternatives. (Saraswat, 2022)

The interdependence theory views on China and Iran's geo-economic cooperation as important. Understanding the nature of their connection depends on being able to identify shared

interests that are at work. To protect its interests in area, U.S. must carefully navigate this situation by balancing its strategic objectives with chances for constructive engagement.

The geo-economic partnership between China and Iran represents a pivotal shift in global alliances, highlighting the application of interdependence theory in contemporary international relations. As articulated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, interdependence theory emphasizes the growing interconnectedness of states through economic, political, and social linkages, which in turn shapes state behavior and policy choices (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

This framework is particularly relevant in analyzing the China-Iran relationship, which has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership characterized by substantial economic cooperation and mutual benefits. Additionally, the U.S. uses economic sanctions to undermine the partnership between China and Iran, focusing on key areas such as oil and finance that are essential to their cooperation. The goal of these sanctions is to discourage other nations from engaging with Iran, thus restricting its capacity to establish alternative economic partnerships. However, this strategy also carries the risk of driving Iran deeper into China's economic sphere of influence, as Tehran looks to broaden its alliances and ensure its economic stability (Fulton, 2020).

From the perspective of structural realism China's increasing economic and strategic collaboration with Iran is driven by its need to secure power and counterbalance U.S. dominance, particularly in the Middle East. Structural realism posits that the international system is anarchic, with no overarching authority, meaning states must prioritize their own survival by maximizing their power and security. In this context, China's deepening relationship with Iran is a strategic move in response to U.S. influence in the region. Structural realism explains that China, as an emerging great power, is seeking to challenge the U.S.-led order. By forging stronger ties with Iran, China is balancing against U.S. power in the Middle East, where Washington traditionally

holds sway through its alliances with countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states. Iran offers China a strategic partner to counter U.S. influence, particularly in a region critical for energy and trade routes (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a central component of China's global strategy. Iran's geographic location makes it a key part of this initiative, as it offers access to both the Middle East and Europe. By investing in Iranian infrastructure and strengthening economic ties, China not only promotes its economic goals but also increases its geopolitical influence in a region where U.S. military and political power is strong. Structural realism sees this as a way for China to expand its global influence and reduce U.S. unipolarity (Allison, 2017).

China's economic collaboration with Iran challenges U.S. sanctions, which have been a key tool in American foreign policy to isolate Iran over issues like its nuclear program. By continuing trade and investment in Iran, China erodes the effectiveness of these sanctions, weakening one of the primary levers of U.S. influence in the region. This defiance signals that China is willing to confront U.S. economic power, thereby reducing Washington's ability to unilaterally shape regional outcomes (Zakaria, 2011).

Beyond economics, China's growing military cooperation with Iran, including arms sales and joint naval drills, represents a strategic challenge to U.S. hegemony in the region. Structural realism suggests that states form alliances to counterbalance the power of rivals, and China's military ties with Iran can be seen as part of a broader effort to challenge U.S. military dominance in the Gulf. This partnership could embolden Iran, making it less susceptible to U.S. pressure and reducing America's ability to project power in the region (Waltz, 2010).

China's increasing engagement with Iran is part of its broader aim to create a more multipolar world order, where U.S. dominance is diluted by the rise of other powers. By

strengthening Iran, China contributes to the emergence of a Middle East less dominated by U.S. influence. This fits into China's global strategy of reshaping the international system in ways that favor its rise and reduce U.S. unipolarity. As China and other powers like Russia engage more actively in the Middle East, the region may move away from being a U.S.-dominated sphere of influence, shifting toward a more balanced geopolitical environment (Ikenberry, 2011).

### **1.10 Research Methodology**

This research methodology aims to explore the emerging geo-economic cooperation between China and Iran, analyzing the strategic partnership's implications and the corresponding U.S. response. The thesis adopts a qualitative research paradigm to delve into the intricate economic, political, and strategic dimensions of this cooperation. Given the complexities of international relations and global trade dynamics, qualitative research is particularly suited for examining the nuanced interactions between these nations. This study will investigate the economic agreements and initiatives that underscore the Sino-Iranian relationship and analyze how these developments challenge or complement U.S. foreign policy objectives. By focusing on the strategic interests of China and Iran, the research will elucidate how their growing economic ties could reshape regional power structures and provoke responses from the U.S. aimed at countering or adapting to this evolving alliance.

#### **1.10.1 Research Design**

This thesis utilizes a research methodology designed to systematically analyze the growing geo-economic cooperation between China and Iran and assess the strategic response of the United States. The methodology focuses on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to meet the research objectives, answer critical questions, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. A qualitative research paradigm is employed, as it is particularly effective for



exploring complex international relationships and comprehending the intricate impacts of economic and strategic policies. Through detailed qualitative analysis, the study explores the evolving partnership between China and Iran, emphasizing their shared economic interests and strategic objectives. It also examines the U.S. response to this alliance, including the use of economic sanctions and diplomatic efforts to counterbalance the shift in global power dynamics. By utilizing a mix of primary and secondary sources, such as policy documents, expert analyses, and academic literature, the research provides a thorough investigation into how these geopolitical developments are reshaping international alliances and power structures, contributing to a deeper understanding of modern international relations.

### **1.10.2 Data Collection**

This research utilizes a variety of data sources to examine the emerging geo-economic cooperation between China and Iran and evaluate the U.S. response. Primary sources include official documents from the Chinese and Iranian governments, such as speeches, agreements, policy statements, and press releases, which provide direct insights into their strategic goals and economic plans. These are supplemented by secondary sources, including books, academic journals, research papers, think-tank reports, and media articles, to offer a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical context. These sources are essential for providing background information and expert opinions on the strategic, economic, and political aspects of the China-Iran partnership. The study also analyzes U.S. government documents and statements to critically assess how the United States has responded to this growing alliance, shedding light on its implications for global power dynamics.

### **1.10.3 Data Analysis**

**Narrative Analysis:** Constructing coherent narrative based on collected data is crucial to present chronological evolution of China Iran relationship. It allows for comprehensive storytelling approach making historical/contemporary aspects accessible to audience.

### **1.10.4 Research Ethics**

#### **Data Privacy and Confidentiality:**

All information obtained from primary and secondary research is accurately cited and referenced to comply with legal requirements and protect the rights of creators and inventors. This approach ensures that data sources remain private and that auxiliary data is kept confidential, preventing any distortion during the study process and enhancing the research's credibility.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Regarding ethical concerns, this study remains neutral and does not favor any political side or promote any political bias or agenda on the part of the researcher. By prioritizing ethical practices, the research strengthens its validity and commitment to truth, promotes fair and objective reporting, and ensures accountability in academic research.

## **1.11 Organization of the study**

**Chapter One:** This chapter provides an introduction to the topic of emerging geo-economic cooperation between China and Iran, discussing the historical context and evolution of their relationship. It also outlines the study's significance, the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and methodology

**Chapter Two:** This chapter examines the key drivers and motivations behind the China-Iran partnership, highlighting the strategic and economic interests that underpin their cooperation.

**Chapter Three:** This chapter analyzes the economic interdependence between China-Iran.

**Chapter Four:** This chapter explores the broader implications of the China-Iran cooperation on regional and global geopolitics, including shifts in power dynamics and potential challenges to U.S. influence in the Middle East and beyond.

**Chapter Five:** This chapter presents the study's conclusions, summarizing key findings and offering recommendations for policymakers and future research.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE CHINA-IRAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Strategic partnership between China and Iran has emerged as significant geopolitical phenomenon, reshaping dynamics of global international relations. Over past four decades, relationship between these two nations has evolved from one of cautious cooperation to multifaceted alliance encompassing economic, geopolitical and military dimensions. This essay delves into intricacies of China-Iran partnership, exploring its economic foundations, military collaboration and its profound implications for global geopolitics.

Interdependence theory emphasizes that states are interconnected through various channels, especially economic ones, and their decisions impact one another. The China-Iran partnership can be understood through this lens, as their relationship is built on mutual economic interests and shared strategic goals. The 25-year strategic cooperation agreement, valued at \$400 billion, is a key example of economic interdependence. Iran, struggling under U.S. sanctions, finds in China a vital economic partner, receiving investments and technological support that help stabilize its economy. In return, China secures access to Iran's abundant energy resources, ensuring a steady oil supply critical to its growing economy and ambitions (Al Arabiya English, 2022).

Through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Iran's strategic geographic location becomes a crucial node in China's infrastructure and connectivity project, linking China to European markets. This mutual dependence allows both nations to bolster their economies and global influence (Al Jazeera, 2021). From the perspective of interdependence theory, this relationship creates a situation where China and Iran are bound by shared interests in ensuring

economic cooperation. While this cooperation may not eliminate all tensions, it increases the cost of conflict, promoting stability through mutual reliance.

Structural realism, or neorealism, posits that the international system is anarchic, with no central authority to enforce rules, and states must prioritize their survival and power in this environment. From this perspective, the China-Iran partnership is driven by power considerations, with both states seeking to enhance their security and position in the global hierarchy. China's strategic investment in Iran, including military collaboration, is not just about economic gains but also about increasing its geopolitical influence in the Middle East, traditionally dominated by U.S. hegemony (AP News, 2021). By supporting Iran, China aims to counterbalance U.S. influence in the region, as seen in their defense cooperation, joint military drills, and China's assistance in bolstering Iran's military capabilities.

China's investment in Iran's infrastructure and military sectors can also be seen as a move to protect its economic interests in the region, including securing oil supply routes and expanding its Belt and Road Initiative. From a structural realist viewpoint, China is using its relationship with Iran to alter the regional balance of power, positioning itself as a key player in Middle Eastern geopolitics (Asia Society Policy Institute, 2023). For Iran, the partnership offers an opportunity to challenge U.S. power and reduce its dependence on the West, enhancing its regional influence and advancing its nuclear ambitions with Chinese support (China Daily, 2022).

Both theories highlight how the China-Iran partnership challenges U.S. hegemony and contributes to a multipolar world order. Interdependence theory suggests that economic collaboration between these two nations provides a counterweight to U.S. sanctions and influence. Structural realism, on the other hand, emphasizes how the alliance serves China's broader strategy

to shift the global power dynamic by supporting states that resist Western liberal norms and advocate for alternative world orders (Clingendael Institute, 2020).

## **2.2 Perspective of Neighboring Middle Eastern Countries**

Interdependence theory emphasizes how states' economic and strategic actions affect each other due to their interconnectedness. The China-Iran partnership exemplifies this, with neighboring Middle Eastern countries perceiving the alliance as a potential economic threat. Some worry that an influx of Chinese goods could disrupt local industries and economies, a concern that mirrors Iran's own apprehensions (Costigliola, n.d.).

Trade data illustrates this economic interdependence: in 2022, China exported \$9.44 billion in goods to Iran, including motor vehicles and broadcasting equipment, while Iran exported \$5.72 billion to China, dominated by ethylene polymers and refined copper (Dorsey, 2021). Such robust trade ties underscore the broader economic impact on the Middle East.

For nations like Saudi Arabia, which maintain strategic partnerships with China, this growing economic alignment between China and Iran is approached cautiously, particularly due to the historical rivalry between Iran and the Gulf Arab states (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2022). Through the lens of interdependence theory, this situation shows how economic cooperation between China and Iran can affect regional dynamics, compelling neighboring states to assess how this partnership might impact their own economic interests. Structural realism (or neorealism) argues that states operate in an anarchic system where power and security are the main priorities. The China-Iran relationship aligns with this view, as it is driven by both countries' desire to enhance their power and security in a volatile region. Their partnership extends beyond economics, with significant military collaboration in recent years, including bilateral naval exercises and high-level military exchanges (Finnish Institute of International

Affairs, 2021). This growing military cooperation highlights China's strategic interest in deepening its influence in the Middle East, where the U.S. has traditionally held dominance.

For U.S.-aligned nations like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, the military aspect of the China-Iran relationship is particularly concerning. These countries fear that China's increased military ties with Iran could undermine the security architecture they have developed through their alliances with the U.S. structural realism frames this as part of a broader shift in power dynamics, where China and Iran are working to challenge U.S. dominance in the region. . (Flemes & Wojczewski, 2021a).

Both interdependence theory and structural realism offer insights into how neighboring Middle Eastern countries view the China-Iran partnership. Economically, some nations fear market disruptions from Chinese goods but also recognize potential opportunities for expanded trade and cooperation. From a structural realist perspective, the military collaboration between China and Iran is seen as a deliberate attempt to reshape the balance of power in the Middle East, challenging U.S. hegemony. (Helwig & Schörnig, 2019)

The implementation of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between China and Iran signals the deepening of this strategic relationship. This agreement includes economic, military, and security components, with both nations under U.S. sanctions. The partnership not only expands China's influence in the region but also signals a shift towards a multipolar world, where U.S. dominance is increasingly contested (Flemes & Wojczewski, 2021a).

Concept of Independence Theory in international relations provides valuable framework for analyzing how states maintain their sovereignty and autonomy amidst external pressures and influences. This framework becomes particularly pertinent when examining potential reactions of

neighboring countries to China-Iran partnership, as it involves critical components such as security, economic independence and diplomatic autonomy.

### **2.2.1 Security**

Within context of Independence Theory, security pertains to state's capacity to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity against external threats. Neighboring countries are likely to scrutinize China-Iran partnership from security standpoint, evaluating whether it presents strategic threat or offers counterbalance to other regional powers. This assessment may prompt them to bolster their military capabilities, engage in alliances, or pursue diplomatic initiatives to mitigate perceived risks (Iran International, 2023).

In Middle East, security concerns are palpable, given region's history of conflicts and geopolitical rivalries. Countries such as Saudi Arabia have significantly increased their military expenditure, allocating substantial resources to defense in response to regional tensions. For instance, Saudi Arabia's military expenditure amounted to \$67.6 billion in 2021, representing approximately 8.4% of its GDP. Additionally, Middle Eastern nations are among largest importers of arms globally, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and UAE collectively accounting for 35% of global arms imports between 2015 and 2019 (The Diplomat, 2024). These statistics underscore region's focus on bolstering its security posture amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2023).

### **2.2.2 Economic Independence**

Economic independence refers to state's ability to sustain itself economically without undue reliance on external actors. China-Iran partnership's implications for economic dynamics in region are significant, potentially reshaping trade patterns, energy security and market dynamics. Neighboring countries are likely to assess extent to which their economies are vulnerable to



disruptions stemming from China-Iran axis and take measures to diversify their economic portfolios.

The Middle East plays pivotal role in global energy markets, accounting for approximately 34% of global crude oil exports. Iran's oil exports to China have been instrumental for its economy, particularly in light of U.S. sanctions. However, there is growing recognition among regional actors of need to reduce reliance on oil exports and promote economic diversification to mitigate vulnerabilities associated with commodity dependency (The Diplomat, 2022).

### **2.2.3 Diplomatic Autonomy**

Diplomatic autonomy encompasses state's freedom to pursue its foreign policy objectives without undue external influence. China-Iran partnership may prompt neighboring countries to reassess their diplomatic alignments and alliances to safeguard their interests and preserve balance of power in region. This could involve diplomatic maneuvers, such as forging new partnerships or recalibrating existing ones, to navigate evolving geopolitical landscape shaped by China-Iran axis (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Several Middle Eastern countries have already demonstrated willingness to adapt their foreign policies to maintain diplomatic autonomy. For example, UAE has pursued strategy of diversifying its international partnerships beyond traditional allies, signaling pragmatic approach to safeguarding its interests in rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Moreover, region has witnessed shifts in international alliances, with countries like Qatar restoring diplomatic relations with Iran and Turkey enhancing cooperation with Russia, reflecting recalibration of strategic priorities in response to emerging geopolitical dynamics (The Washington Post, 2021).

Independence Theory provides robust analytical framework for understanding how neighboring countries may react to China-Iran partnership, considering factors such as security,

economic independence and diplomatic autonomy. By examining intricate interplay of these dimensions, policymakers can formulate informed strategies to navigate evolving geopolitical landscape and safeguard their national interests in increasingly interconnected world.

### **2.3. Implications for Regional Stability and Power Dynamics**

To comprehend significance of China-Iran partnership, it's essential to contextualize it within broader historical and geopolitical trends. As Hua Liming, former Chinese ambassador to Iran, aptly noted, "Middle East conflicts like protracted U.S.-Iran dispute hinder Washington's commitment to Indo-Pacific region." This observation underscores strategic benefits for China in expanding its influence in Middle East amid ongoing tensions between United States and Iran. Moreover, Shi Yinhong, professor of international relations at Renmin University, argues that "Washington's deeper involvement in Middle East is favorable to Beijing, reducing Washington's ability to place focused attention and pressure on China." This perspective highlights China's strategic calculations in region and its interest in leveraging China-Iran partnership to mitigate U.S. influence in its periphery (The Diplomat, 2021).

The China-Iran partnership has potential to reshape regional balance of power, as Diako Hosseini, foreign policy expert, cautioned, "Iran should not fall victim to rivalry between China and United States" during period that is "shaping new international order." Hosseini's warning underscores complexities and risks associated with Iran's alignment with China amid intensifying geopolitical competition (Helwig, 2021). Furthermore, analysis on JSTOR reflects on Iran's position, stating that "Despite its drive for independence from foreign control, Iran has become heavily reliant on China economically, diplomatically, and, to some extent, militarily." This dependency underscores challenges Iran faces in maintaining its autonomy and sovereignty while pursuing strategic partnerships with major powers like China. From security perspective, China-

Iran partnership has raised concerns among neighboring countries and traditional U.S. allies in region. Prospect of enhanced military cooperation between China and Iran could prompt neighboring countries to increase their military spending and adjust their defense strategies, as highlighted by analysts (Schub, 2021).

Moreover, analysis from JSTOR suggests that "From Beijing's perspective, Iran serves as important strategic partner and point of leverage against United States." This perspective sheds light on China's strategic interests in region and its willingness to align with Iran to challenge U.S. hegemony alignment of China and Iran may prompt other regional powers to reassess their alliances and strategic partnerships. As noted by analysts, countries may seek new diplomatic engagements or strengthen existing ones to counterbalance effects of China-Iran partnership. Economic diversification and pursuit of alternative trade partnerships could also be prioritized to reduce reliance on China-Iran dominated markets (Flemes & Wojczewski, 2023).

As quotes from various political analysts provide valuable insights into evolving dynamics of China-Iran partnership and its implications for regional stability, security and power dynamics. As partnership continues to develop, it will be essential for neighboring countries and broader international community to carefully assess and respond to these changes to safeguard their interests and promote peace and stability in Middle East.

## **2.4 Analyzing Responses and Strategies**

Neighboring countries have historically responded to external partnerships and alliances with mix of strategies, often influenced by their own geopolitical interests, economic needs and security concerns. Strategic alliances have been common response, as countries seek to counterbalance influence of emerging partnerships that may threaten their interests. Such alliances serve as means to maintain balance of power in region and safeguard national sovereignty.

Additionally, diplomatic engagement with both new alliance and other regional powers has been common response. By engaging diplomatically, neighboring countries aim to understand dynamics of new partnership and influence its outcomes to align with their interests. Diplomatic channels offer opportunities for dialogue, negotiation and pursuit of mutually beneficial agreements (Toosi, 2021a).

Historically, countries have demonstrated propensity to realign their alliances in response to new partnerships. Realignments occur as nations adapt to changing geopolitical landscapes and seek to capitalize on emerging opportunities. Economic interests often drive such shifts in alliances, particularly when new partnerships offer access to markets, technology, or investment opportunities. Economic partnerships can significantly influence diplomatic and strategic alignments, as countries prioritize their economic prosperity and seek to leverage external partnerships to achieve their economic objectives. Conflicts of interest frequently arise when neighboring countries perceive that external partnerships may impact their economic or security landscape negatively (Toosi, 2021b). Competing interests can lead to tensions and conflicts, as countries seek to protect their national interests and preserve their sovereignty. In response to conflicts of interest, neighboring countries may enter into negotiations with parties involved, aiming to find compromises or assurances that address their concerns. Negotiations serve as diplomatic tool to resolve disputes and mitigate potential conflicts, fostering stability and cooperation in region (Keohane & Nye, 1977a).

Despite challenges posed by conflicts of interest, external partnerships also present opportunities for regional cooperation. New partnerships can spur regional economic integration, offering neighboring countries opportunities to join larger economic blocs and benefit from increased trade and investment. Economic integration fosters interconnectedness and mutual

interdependence among neighboring countries, creating conducive environment for cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, shared security concerns may prompt increased regional cooperation in response to external threats or instability caused by new partnerships (Scobell & Nader, 2014a).

By working together to address common security challenges, neighboring countries can enhance their collective security and promote peace and stability in region. Examples from around world illustrate diverse strategies and responses that neighboring countries have adopted in face of external partnerships and alliances. For instance, South-South Cooperation has been instrumental in addressing global challenges such as climate change (Flemes & Wojczewski, 2021b). Developing countries have formed alliances to amplify their collective voice and influence international agreements, demonstrating power of collaboration in addressing shared challenges. Similarly, China's emphasis on neighboring diplomacy highlights importance of maintaining stable relations with neighboring countries through strategic partnerships. By prioritizing cooperation and mutual benefit, China seeks to foster peaceful and stable environment in its immediate vicinity (Global Times, 2023).

The relationship between Singapore and Malaysia serves as another example of neighboring countries navigating external partnerships. Despite occasional tensions, Singapore and Malaysia collaborate on various fronts, including trade, tourism and infrastructure projects. Their relationship underscores importance of maintaining open channels of communication and engaging in constructive dialogue to manage differences and promote cooperation. Additionally, EU-ASEAN collaboration exemplifies potential for regional cooperation in addressing security challenges. EU's support for ASEAN's peacekeeping efforts highlights value of partnerships in promoting peace and stability in region (Garver, 2022).

The neighboring countries have historically employed combination of strategies to respond to external partnerships and alliances, ranging from strategic alliances and diplomatic engagement to economic partnerships and regional cooperation. While conflicts of interest may arise, negotiations and dialogue offer avenues for resolving disputes and fostering cooperation. Ultimately, pursuit of national interests and promotion of regional stability and prosperity remain central to neighboring countries' responses to external partnerships and alliances.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the relationship between China and Iran has transformed from one of mutual political understanding to a robust geo-economic partnership that reflects the growing economic interdependence between the two nations. This collaboration is not just driven by short-term trade interests but is rooted in strategic goals that align both countries in countering Western influence, particularly that of the United States, and fostering long-term economic resilience. China's increasing involvement in Iran's energy sector, infrastructure development, and trade not only fortifies their bilateral relations but also signals a shifting global economic order. By providing Iran with vital economic support, China challenges U.S. sanctions and helps Tehran remain economically afloat despite its isolation from the West. This emerging economic interdependence is pivotal for both countries as they seek to achieve strategic autonomy from the Western-led global financial and political system.

At the center of this growing partnership is energy cooperation, a crucial pillar of the Iran-China relationship. China, the world's largest energy consumer, relies heavily on external oil supplies to fuel its rapidly expanding economy, and Iran, with its vast reserves of oil and natural gas, stands as a key supplier. Despite international sanctions, China has maintained its trade with Iran, especially in the energy sector. This persistence in the face of U.S. sanctions underscores the depth of China's interest in securing a reliable energy source from Iran, while simultaneously supporting Iran's economy by continuing to purchase its oil, even at a discounted rate. Iran, in return, benefits greatly from this relationship, as China provides a critical market for its energy exports that have been restricted elsewhere due to sanctions (Fulton, 2021).

Economic interdependence refers to mutual reliance between two or more countries in terms of trade, investment and economic policies. In context of China and Iran, their economic partnership can enhance economic interdependence through various mechanisms:

### **3.2 Trade and Investment Flows**

Trade and investment flows between China and Iran are driven by Iran's energy exports, with China being its largest oil customer, even amidst sanctions. China has invested significantly in Iran's oil, gas, petrochemical, and infrastructure sectors, including projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Non-oil trade, such as agricultural products and manufactured goods, is also growing, while both countries use alternative financial mechanisms to bypass U.S. sanctions. This deepening economic relationship bolsters Iran's resilience and aligns with China's regional ambitions.

#### **3.2.1 Oil and Energy Trade**

China is Iran's largest trading partner and Iran is major supplier of oil to China. Despite U.S. sanctions, China continues to import significant quantities of Iranian oil, creating robust trade relationship. This oil trade is critical for both economies—China secures steady energy supply, while Iran gains essential revenue. (The Iran Primer, 2023)

#### **3.2.2 Steady Energy Supply for China**

China's growing economy demands reliable and substantial energy supply. Iranian oil helps meet this need, allowing China to sustain its industrial and economic growth relationship ensures that China has consistent source of energy, mitigating risks associated with fluctuations in global oil market or potential geopolitical disruptions. (PanelSisi Li et al., 2022)



### **3.2.3 Revenue for Iran**

For Iran, oil exports to China provide crucial revenue stream, especially under constraints of U.S. sanctions. This revenue is vital for Iran's economy, supporting its fiscal policies, development projects and social programs stable income from oil sales to China helps Iran manage its economic challenges and reduces impact of international isolation. (World Bank, 2022)

### **3.2.4 Infrastructure Investments**

Under 25-year strategic agreement signed in 2021, China is investing heavily in Iran's infrastructure, including transportation, energy and telecommunications sectors. These investments not only boost Iran's economy but also integrate Iran more closely into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), promoting long-term economic ties. (Crown Center for Middle East Studies , 2021)

### **3.2.5 Transportation Infrastructure**

Chinese investments are enhancing Iran's transportation networks, including development of railways, roads and ports. These improvements facilitate better connectivity within Iran and between Iran and other countries, boosting trade and commerce. Enhanced transportation infrastructure is essential for economic growth, as it reduces logistics costs and improves access to markets. (Garlick, 2020)

### **3.2.6 Energy Sector**

Investments in energy sector include upgrading Iran's oil and gas facilities and developing renewable energy projects. These investments help modernize Iran's energy infrastructure, increase production capacity and promote energy efficiency. For China, securing investments in Iran's energy sector ensures stable and reliable source of energy for its own consumption. (Howey, 2023)

### **3.2.7 Telecommunications**

Development of Iran's telecommunications infrastructure, including expansion of 5G networks, enhances connectivity and digital capabilities. This sector is crucial for economic modernization and integration into global digital economy. China's involvement in Iran's telecommunications sector helps Iran improve its technological infrastructure while providing Chinese companies with access to new markets and opportunities for technological collaboration. (Neill, 2021)

### **3.2.8 Integration into BRI**

By integrating Iran into Belt and Road Initiative, China promotes regional connectivity and economic integration. Iran's strategic location makes it critical hub for trade routes connecting Asia, Europe and Middle East. This integration benefits both countries, as it enhances trade routes, facilitates economic exchanges and strengthens geopolitical ties within broader BRI framework. (Osiewicz, 2018)

The economic interdependence between China and Iran, driven by robust trade and significant infrastructure investments, plays pivotal role in strengthening their bilateral relationship. Oil and energy trade ensures stable energy supply for China and provides essential revenue for Iran, while infrastructure investments under 25-year strategic agreement enhance Iran's transportation, energy and telecommunications sectors. These developments not only boost Iran's economy but also integrate it more closely into China's Belt and Road Initiative, fostering long-term economic ties and mutual reliance. This interdependence enhances strategic partnership between China and Iran, contributing to regional stability and reshaping geopolitical dynamics. (Nader, 2024)

### **3.3 Joint Ventures and Technological Exchange**

Joint ventures and technological exchange between China and Iran have become vital components of their strategic partnership, fostering cooperation across several sectors:

#### **3.3.1 Industrial and Technological Collaboration**

Chinese companies are involved in various joint ventures in Iran, contributing to development of Iran's industrial base. These collaborations often include technology transfers, which help modernize Iran's industries and increase their productivity, creating mutual dependency on technological advancements. (Hamidizadeh, 2016)

#### **3.3.2 Joint Ventures**

These partnerships span multiple sectors, including manufacturing, energy and telecommunications. Chinese firms bring in capital, expertise and advanced technologies, which are crucial for growth and modernization of Iran's industries. For instance, joint ventures in automotive manufacturing, steel production and electronics are pivotal in enhancing Iran's industrial capabilities. (Beraud et al., 2022)

#### **3.3.3 Technology Transfers**

By participating in joint ventures, Chinese companies transfer technology and know-how to Iranian partners. This transfer includes advanced machinery, production techniques and management practices. Such collaborations not only boost productivity and efficiency of Iranian industries but also help Iran reduce its technological gap and increase its competitiveness in global markets. ( Scaringella, 2017)

### **3.3.4 Research and Development (R&D)**

Joint ventures often involve collaborative R&D efforts. These initiatives focus on innovation, development of new products and adaptation of technologies to local conditions. By working together, Chinese and Iranian companies can co-develop technologies that are tailored to needs and preferences of regional markets, fostering innovation and technological progress. (Zhao, 2005)

## **3.4 Financial and Banking Integration**

Financial and banking integration between China and Iran focuses on bypassing U.S. sanctions and maintaining trade through alternative mechanisms. Both countries have shifted away from using the U.S. dollar, favoring local currencies like the yuan and rial for transactions.

### **3.4.1 Alternative Financial Systems**

To circumvent U.S. sanctions, China and Iran have explored alternative financial mechanisms, such as barter trade and using currencies other than U.S. dollar. This financial integration helps both countries mitigate impact of sanctions and facilitates smoother trade and investment flows. (Hongxiang, 2022)

### **3.4.2 Barter Trade**

Barter agreements allow China and Iran to exchange goods and services directly, bypassing need for financial transactions that could be impeded by sanctions. For example, Iran might supply oil to China in exchange for Chinese machinery, technology, or consumer goods. This system enables both countries to continue their trade relationships without relying on traditional banking systems. (Gul, 2023)

### **3.4.3 Non-Dollar Transactions**

By conducting trade in local currencies (the Chinese Yuan and Iranian rial) or other international currencies like euro, China and Iran reduce their dependence on U.S. dollar and global financial systems dominated by Western countries. This strategy minimizes risk of financial disruptions caused by sanctions and strengthens economic ties by creating more resilient and adaptable financial networks. (Liu, 2024)

### **3.4.4 Banking Cooperation**

Chinese and Iranian banks have established correspondent relationships and financial channels to support bilateral trade and investment. This cooperation includes setting up mechanisms for clearing transactions in local currencies and developing payment systems that are less susceptible to sanctions. Such integration helps both countries ensure smooth flow of capital and facilitates cross-border investments. (Eichengreen, 2022)

The economic partnership between China and Iran significantly enhances their economic interdependence through trade, joint ventures and financial integration. Robust trade relationship, particularly in oil and energy, provides critical economic benefits to both countries, while Chinese infrastructure investments integrate Iran more deeply into global trade networks, especially Belt and Road Initiative. Joint ventures and technological exchanges foster industrial modernization in Iran and create mutual technological dependencies. Meanwhile, alternative financial systems and banking integration allow both countries to circumvent U.S. sanctions, ensuring smoother trade and investment flows. This growing economic interdependence not only strengthens bilateral relationship but also has broader implications for regional and global geopolitics, as it challenges traditional economic and strategic alignments and fosters new axis of economic and geopolitical collaboration. (Muhammad Tayyab Safdar and Joshua Zabin, 2020)

## **3.5 Emerging Trends in China-Iran Relations**

Emerging trends in China-Iran relations highlight deeper cooperation across various sectors:

### **3.5.1 Economic Partnership**

China remains Iran's largest trading partner, with significant oil imports despite U.S. sanctions. China's continued import of Iranian oil forms backbone of their economic relationship. This oil trade is critical for both economies—China secures steady energy supply, while Iran gains essential revenue, mitigating impact of international sanctions. (The Iran Primer, 2023). Under 25-year strategic agreement signed in 2021, China is heavily investing in Iran's infrastructure. These investments encompass critical sectors such as transportation, energy and telecommunications. By integrating Iran into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is ensuring long-term economic ties and positioning itself as dominant influence in Iran's economic landscape. (Uzun, 2021)

## **3.6 Strengthening Iran's Position**

Strengthening Iran's economic position has been a crucial part of its cooperation with China. Despite facing international sanctions, Iran has worked to secure its economy, diversify its trade partnerships, and build resilience through strategic economic alliances. China plays a pivotal role in this effort, and several key areas help to bolster Iran's economic position:

### **3.6.1 Economic Resilience**

China's economic support helps Iran withstand U.S. sanctions, thereby maintaining its regional influence economic partnership with China provides Iran with necessary resources to sustain its economy, reducing effectiveness of U.S. sanctions aimed at crippling its economy. (The Economist, 2024)

### **3.6.2 Strategic Depth**

Enhanced military capabilities and strategic partnerships bolster Iran's position vis-à-vis regional rivals like Saudi Arabia and Israel. With Chinese support, Iran can better assert its influence in region, deterring adversaries and projecting power more effectively. (Matamis, 2024)

### **3.6.3 Economic Partnership**

China remains Iran's largest trading partner, with significant oil imports despite U.S. sanctions. This relationship is crucial for both countries: China secures steady supply of energy necessary for its growing economy, while Iran gains essential revenue to support its economy amidst stringent U.S. sanctions. This economic interdependence solidifies their partnership, making it resilient against external pressures. (Wright, 2023). Under 25-year strategic agreement signed in 2021, China is heavily investing in Iran's infrastructure, including transportation, energy and telecommunications sectors. These investments not only boost Iran's economy but also integrate Iran more closely into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This integration fosters long-term economic ties and positions China as key player in Iran's economic development, enhancing mutual economic interdependence. (Kahalzadeh, 2021)

## **3.7 Joint Ventures and Technological Exchange**

China and Iran have developed a multifaceted partnership, particularly focusing on joint ventures and technological exchanges. These collaborations have deepened as both nations face geopolitical pressures and aim to enhance their economic and technological resilience. Some key aspects of their cooperation include:

### **3.7.1 Industrial and Technological Collaboration**

Chinese companies are involved in various joint ventures in Iran, contributing to development of Iran's industrial base. These collaborations often include technology transfers,

which help modernize Iran's industries and increase their productivity. mutual dependency on technological advancements strengthens their economic ties and ensures sustained industrial growth. (Gross, 2012)

### **3.7.2 Financial and Banking Integration**

To circumvent U.S. sanctions, China and Iran have explored alternative financial mechanisms, such as barter trade and using currencies other than U.S. dollar. This financial integration helps both countries mitigate impact of sanctions and facilitates smoother trade and investment flows. By developing alternative financial systems, China and Iran reduce their vulnerability to U.S. economic pressure, ensuring continued economic collaboration. (Hongxiang, 2022)

The China-Iran relationship is characterized by robust economic, military and diplomatic cooperation, significantly impacting regional power dynamics. United States faces complex challenges in navigating this partnership, necessitating multifaceted approach that includes economic measures, strengthened alliances and diplomatic engagements to safeguard its interests and promote regional stability. As China and Iran deepen their ties, their partnership enhances economic interdependence and geopolitical alignment, reshaping balance of power in Middle East and posing formidable challenge to U.S. influence in region evolving China-Iran relationship underscores need for comprehensive and adaptive strategy by U.S. and its allies to maintain stability and address emerging geopolitical challenges effectively. (Aragao, 2024)

The China-Iran relationship, characterized by deepening economic, military and diplomatic cooperation, significantly impacts regional and global power dynamics. This partnership enhances economic interdependence through robust trade, infrastructure investments and financial integration, fostering mutually beneficial economic relationship that withstands



external pressures such as U.S. sanctions. Furthermore, their military and strategic collaboration, including arms transfers and joint exercises, alongside diplomatic maneuvers like regional mediation and sanctions evasion strategies, aligns their geopolitical interests and strengthens their regional influence. (Matamis, 2024)

The economic partnership between China and Iran is cornerstone of their bilateral relations, with substantial trade in oil and significant Chinese investments in Iranian infrastructure. China's role as Iran's largest trading partner, particularly in energy trade, provides Iran with crucial revenue streams and helps sustain its economy despite U.S. sanctions. Concurrently, China's investments under 25-year strategic agreement signed in 2021 in sectors such as transportation, energy and telecommunications integrate Iran more closely into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This integration not only bolsters Iran's economic resilience but also establishes long-term economic ties that contribute to mutual dependency. (The Iran Primer, 2023)

Moreover, joint ventures and technological exchanges between Chinese and Iranian companies enhance Iran's industrial capabilities. These collaborations include technology transfers that modernize Iran's industries and increase productivity, creating mutual reliance on technological advancements. Additionally, exploration of alternative financial systems, such as barter trade and using currencies other than U.S. dollar, helps both countries mitigate impact of sanctions, ensuring smoother trade and investment flows. (The Iran Primer, 2023)

In terms of geopolitical alignment, military and strategic cooperation between China and Iran is significant. China's provision of military technology and arms to Iran enhances Iran's defense capabilities, aligning their security policies and enabling Iran to better protect its interests. Joint military exercises, often conducted with Russia, further demonstrate their strategic partnership and signal their collective strength to other regional and global powers. This military

collaboration complements diplomatic maneuvers, such as China's mediation in Middle Eastern conflicts. China's role in restoring diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia exemplifies its growing influence in regional diplomacy and aligns Iran's foreign policy with China's broader regional strategy, promoting stability and cooperation. (Matamis, 2024)

The implications of this partnership extend beyond economic and military realms, significantly impacting regional and global geopolitics. China's economic support strengthens Iran's resilience against U.S. sanctions, maintaining its influence in Middle East. This support emboldens Iran in its regional policies and strategic initiatives, enhancing its strategic depth and enabling it to assert its interests more effectively against regional rivals like Saudi Arabia and Israel. As China deepens its engagement in Middle East, traditional U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia and UAE may seek to balance their relations by engaging more with China. This realignment could lead to more multipolar regional order, reducing dominance of any single power and fostering more balanced geopolitical environment. (Matamis, 2024)

Furthermore, China-Iran partnership complements Russia's strategy in region, creating counterbalance to U.S. influence. Alignment among China, Iran and Russia challenges U.S. dominance and reshapes geopolitical landscape. This tripartite cooperation presents formidable challenge to U.S. strategies in Middle East, complicating efforts to isolate Iran and maintain regional influence. Evolving geopolitical dynamics necessitate reevaluation of U.S. strategies to effectively address these emerging challenges. (Fite, 2012)

For United States, China-Iran partnership poses significant strategic challenges. It complicates U.S. efforts to isolate Iran and maintain its influence in Middle East, necessitating reevaluation of its strategies. U.S. must adopt multifaceted approach that includes strengthening sanctions enforcement, reinforcing alliances with regional partners through security guarantees

and economic incentives and pursuing diplomatic engagements aimed at regional stability. By enhancing its diplomatic efforts and adopting more nuanced strategy, U.S. can better navigate evolving geopolitical landscape and safeguard its interests. (Aragao, 2024)

In conclusion the growing economic interdependence between China and Iran highlights the strategic significance of their relationship in the evolving global order. Through energy trade, infrastructure investment, and long-term agreements, both nations have fortified their economic ties, enabling Iran to navigate international sanctions and providing China with a steady energy supply and increased influence in the Middle East. This partnership not only reshapes regional power dynamics but also underscores the importance of economic cooperation as a tool of geopolitical strategy. As China and Iran continue to deepen their economic relationship, the implications for global trade, energy security, and international diplomacy become increasingly complex. For other global powers, especially the United States and its allies, the challenge will be to develop flexible and adaptive strategies that address this emerging alliance while maintaining regional stability and protecting their strategic interests.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOPOLITICAL ACTORS IN THE REGION**

#### **ESPECIALLY IMPACT ON US INFLUENCE IN THE REGION**

##### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The strengthening relationship between China and Iran is significantly reshaping the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East and beyond, with far-reaching implications for regional players and the broader global power structure. As China intensifies its economic, political, and strategic engagement with Iran, the United States faces new challenges in maintaining its influence in a region long regarded as a key pillar of its foreign policy. This growing China-Iran partnership, underpinned by shared interests in energy, trade, and countering U.S. hegemony, has the potential to disrupt the balance of power not only in the Middle East but also in the wider Indo-Pacific region (Scobell & Nader, 2016).

Historically, the United States has maintained significant control over Middle Eastern affairs through its military presence, economic investments, and diplomatic strategies. However, it now faces competition from an ascendant China, which offers alternative frameworks for cooperation that bypass U.S.-dominated institutions and sanctions (Vakil, 2021). Iran, increasingly isolated by U.S. sanctions and at odds with key American allies, has embraced China as a crucial strategic partner. The implications of this burgeoning China-Iran alliance extend beyond bilateral relations, influencing regional power dynamics, the stability of the Middle East, and the U.S.'s ability to project its influence in the region (Shariatinia & Azizi, 2020).

Since the end of World War II, the United States has maintained a dominant presence in the Middle East, driven by key interests such as securing energy resources, combating terrorism,

and protecting its primary allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia. However, U.S.-Iran relations have been fraught with tension since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which led to the severing of diplomatic ties and decades of hostility (Parsi, 2012). Over the years, U.S. sanctions, particularly those imposed due to Iran's nuclear ambitions, have sought to curtail Tehran's regional influence and weaken its economy.

Despite these efforts, Iran has built a network of alliances with regional actors, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq, and the Assad regime in Syria, which challenge U.S. interests across the region (Byman, 2016). The U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and the reimposition of severe sanctions further isolated Iran, compelling it to seek alternative partnerships. China's growing role in providing Iran with an economic lifeline and strategic collaboration has become increasingly pivotal, offering Iran a path to circumvent the U.S.-dominated global order (Fulton, 2021).

## **4.2 Military and Strategic Collaboration**

China and Iran have history of military cooperation that has evolved over years, marked by significant arms sales and technology transfers. Key aspects of this cooperation include:

### **4.2.1 Arms Sales**

China has been crucial supplier of military equipment to Iran. Despite international sanctions and embargoes, Chinese arms exports to Iran have included range of weapons systems such as missiles, drones, naval vessels and radar systems. For instance, Iran has procured anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles and advanced drones from China, which have bolstered its defensive and offensive capabilities. These weapons are crucial for Iran's military strategy, particularly in context of protecting its maritime interests in Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. (Chinese arms exports to Iran, 2023)

#### **4.2.2 Technological Transfers**

China has engaged in technology transfers that enhance Iran's indigenous military capabilities. This includes provision of technical expertise, joint development projects and sale of dual-use technologies that can be utilized for military purposes. For example, Chinese companies have provided Iran with advanced electronics, cyber warfare technologies and missile guidance systems. These transfers have enabled Iran to develop its own weapons systems, such as domestically produced missile and drone technologies that are modelled on Chinese designs. (apps.dtic, 2023)

#### **4.2.3 Defense Agreements**

The strategic collaboration between China and Iran extends to formal defense agreements and joint military exercises, which is the sign of military ties and strategic alignment. Notable aspects include:

#### **4.2.4 Joint Naval Exercises**

China and Iran have conducted several joint naval exercises, often including Russia, which signify strategic trilateral partnership. These exercises are designed to enhance interoperability, demonstrate mutual support and project power in key maritime regions. For instance, trilateral naval exercises between China, Iran and Russia held in Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman in recent years have involved complex maneuvers, live-fire drills and anti-piracy operations. These exercises not only showcase military capabilities of participating nations but also send clear message to other regional actors, including United States, about their strategic collaboration. (Al Jazeera, 2024)

#### **4.2.5 Enhanced Defense Ties**

Defense cooperation between China and Iran is formalized through various agreements that cover areas such as intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism and military training. These agreements facilitate regular exchanges of military personnel, joint research and development projects and sharing of strategic and tactical knowledge. For instance, Chinese military advisors have been involved in training Iranian forces and Iranian military officers have attended courses in Chinese military academies. These interactions strengthen military capabilities of both nations and foster deeper understanding and coordination between their armed forces. (Inss.org.il, 2021)

The military and strategic collaboration between China and Iran represents significant shift in regional balance of power. This partnership enhances Iran's military capabilities, allowing it to better resist external pressures and assert its regional influence. For China, this collaboration provides strategic foothold in Middle East, enabling it to protect its interests and project power in region that is critical to global energy supplies and geopolitical stability. (Fouly, 2024)

From perspective of United States and other key geopolitical actors, deepening military ties between China and Iran pose challenge to their strategic interests. Enhanced military capabilities and coordination between China and Iran complicate security dynamics in Middle East, potentially leading to increased tensions and recalibration of alliances. Presence of Chinese military technology and advisors in Iran also raises concerns about proliferation of advanced weapons systems and potential for these capabilities to be used in regional conflicts or against U.S. allies. (Matamis, 2024)

Overall, military and strategic collaboration between China and Iran is crucial element of their evolving relationship, with significant implications for regional security and global balance of power.

## **4.3 Diplomatic Maneuvers**

Diplomatic maneuvers between China and Iran have strengthened their geopolitical partnership, especially in countering Western influence. Key strategies include:

### **4.3.1 Regional Diplomacy**

China's role in regional diplomacy, particularly in Middle East, has grown significantly over past few years. This is evident through its involvement in mediating conflicts and fostering diplomatic relations among regional powers. Key aspects include:

### **4.3.2 Mediation Role in Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations**

China's increasing influence in Middle Eastern diplomacy is exemplified by its mediation efforts between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Historically, relationship between these two regional powers has been characterized by deep-seated sectarian and geopolitical rivalry. In recent years, China has stepped in as neutral mediator to facilitate dialogue and reduce tensions. Successful restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2021, brokered with Chinese mediation, is testament to China's growing diplomatic clout in region. This development not only underscores China's capability to act as peace broker but also signifies its strategic interest in maintaining stability in region critical for its energy security and BRI projects. (The Diplomat, 2023)

### **4.3.3 Sanctions Evasion**

China's support for Iran extends to helping it navigate and mitigate impact of international sanctions, particularly those imposed by United States. This support is multifaceted and includes both direct and indirect methods of sanctions evasion. Key strategies include:



#### **4.3.4 Oil Storage and Clandestine Shipments**

One of primary means by which China assists Iran in circumventing U.S. sanctions is through clandestine oil shipments and storage arrangements. Despite stringent sanctions aimed at crippling Iran's oil exports, Chinese entities have engaged in covert operations to continue importing Iranian oil. This involves complex networks of intermediaries, flagged tankers and transshipment points that obscure origin of oil. For instance, Iranian oil is often transferred between multiple ships in international waters before being delivered to Chinese ports, making it challenging for international authorities to track these shipments. Additionally, China has provided storage facilities for Iranian oil, allowing Iran to maintain steady revenue stream despite export restrictions. (Newsroom, 2024)

#### **4.3.5 Economic and Financial Support**

Beyond oil, China has facilitated Iran's access to international markets and financial systems, circumventing U.S. sanctions on banking and trade. Chinese financial institutions have been involved in processing transactions that bypass SWIFT international payment system, using alternative networks and currencies such as yuan. This financial support extends to investments in Iranian infrastructure and industry, ensuring continued flow of capital necessary for Iran's economic stability. (Jcookson, 2024)

The diplomatic and economic maneuvers by China in support of Iran have significant implications for regional and global balance of power. China's mediation efforts enhance its standing as key player in Middle Eastern politics, capable of influencing major regional dynamics. By fostering better relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, China contributes to regional stability, which is beneficial for its economic interests, particularly in securing energy supplies and advancing BRI projects For Iran, Chinese support is crucial in mitigating economic pressures of

U.S. sanctions, enabling it to maintain its economic resilience and pursue its strategic objectives. This partnership also allows Iran to leverage China's global influence to counterbalance U.S. policies and align with other non-Western powers. . (The Diplomat, 2022)

From perspective of United States and other geopolitical actors, China's diplomatic maneuvers and sanctions evasion tactics present significant challenges. China's ability to undermine U.S. sanctions weakens effectiveness of American foreign policy tools and diminishes U.S. leverage over Iran. Moreover, China's growing influence in Middle Eastern diplomacy threatens to shift traditional power dynamics in region, potentially reducing influence of U.S. and its allies.

Overall, China's diplomatic maneuvers in support of Iran reflect strategic alignment that has profound implications for regional stability, economic dynamics and broader geopolitical landscape. (Kilcrease, 2024)

## **4.4 Implications on Regional Balance of Power**

The deepening China-Iran relationship has significant implications for the regional balance of power in the Middle East:

### **4.4.1 Strengthening Iran's Position**

China's economic support plays critical role in bolstering Iran's resilience against U.S. sanctions, thereby maintaining and potentially enhancing Iran's influence within region. This support manifests in several key ways:

Despite stringent U.S. sanctions aimed at crippling Iran's oil exports, China remains significant buyer of Iranian oil. Chinese purchases provide Iran with crucial revenue stream that helps sustain its economy. This economic lifeline enables Iran to continue funding essential government operations, social services and its military expenditures, which are vital for

maintaining internal stability and regional influence. (Bloomberg.com, 2024).The 25-year strategic agreement signed between China and Iran in 2021 includes substantial Chinese investments in Iran's infrastructure sectors, such as transportation, energy and telecommunications. These investments are not only aimed at enhancing Iran's economic capacity but also at integrating Iran more closely into China's BRI. Improved infrastructure supports economic growth, facilitates trade and enhances Iran's strategic connectivity within region, further solidifying its economic base. (Motamedi, 2021)

China's willingness to trade with Iran across various sectors, including technology, consumer goods and industrial equipment, helps Iran diversify its economic partnerships beyond limited options available due to Western sanctions. This diversified trade reduces Iran's economic vulnerability and dependence on any single market, providing buffer against external economic pressures. (The Iran Primer, 2023).China's military and strategic partnership with Iran contributes to enhancing Iran's strategic depth, thereby strengthening its position vis-à-vis regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. Continued military cooperation between China and Iran includes transfer of arms and military technology. This cooperation is crucial for Iran as it seeks to modernize its military capabilities and maintain credible deterrent against regional adversaries. Chinese arms sales to Iran have included advanced missile technology, drones and other military hardware that enhance Iran's defensive and offensive capabilities. (jstor, 2024)

Enhancement of defense ties is further evidenced by joint military exercises involving China, Iran and other partners like Russia. These exercises serve multiple purposes: they demonstrate military solidarity, provide training and operational experience and send strategic message to regional and global adversaries about strength and unity of these partnerships. Such

exercises also help Iran to refine its military tactics and strategies through exchange of knowledge and expertise with Chinese and Russian forces. (Al Jazeera, 2024)

Defense agreements between China and Iran go beyond arms sales and military drills; they include intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism cooperation and joint efforts in cyber security. These comprehensive defense ties enhance Iran's strategic depth by building robust and multifaceted security relationship with major global power. This partnership provides Iran with critical support in addressing both conventional and asymmetric threats in region. (The Diplomat, 2023).The strengthening of Iran's economic resilience and strategic depth through its partnership with China has several implications for regional balance of power.

Iran's ability to withstand economic sanctions and maintain strong military posture ensures that it remains key player in regional geopolitics. This enhanced position allows Iran to exert greater influence over regional affairs, from conflicts in Syria and Yemen to its interactions with neighboring countries in Gulf. (Iemed, 2023).China-Iran partnership acts as counterbalance to U.S. influence and that of its regional allies, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel. Strategic alignment with China provides Iran with alternative source of support, diminishing impact of Western diplomatic and economic isolation efforts. This shift complicates U.S. policy in Middle East, as it has to contend with more resilient and strategically capable Iran. (The Diplomat, 2023).Bolstering of Iran's position through Chinese support intensifies regional rivalries, particularly with Saudi Arabia and Israel, who view Iran as significant threat. This dynamic could lead to arms race or increased military tensions in region, as these countries seek to counterbalance Iran's growing capabilities. (Matamis, 2024).Deepening of China-Iran ties might influence other regional actors to reassess their alliances and partnerships. Countries in Middle East may seek to

strengthen their ties with China or explore new alliances to hedge against shifting power dynamics. This could lead to more multipolar and complex regional landscape. (Lons, 2024)

Overall, China's economic and strategic support for Iran significantly impacts regional balance of power by reinforcing Iran's position and challenging influence of traditional powers like United States and its allies. This evolving dynamic necessitates reevaluation of regional strategies and alliances, contributing to more intricate and potentially volatile geopolitical environment in Middle East. (Lons, 2024)

#### **4.4.2 Shifting Alliances**

As China deepens its involvement in Middle East, traditional geopolitical landscape is undergoing significant transformations. Increased presence and influence of China are prompting traditional U.S. allies to reassess their strategic alliances and explore new partnerships. Key aspects of this shifting dynamic include:

Traditional U.S. allies in Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE), are increasingly engaging with China. These countries are seeking to diversify their foreign relations to avoid overreliance on United States. China's economic prowess and its less interventionist approach compared to U.S. make it attractive partner. By strengthening ties with China, these countries aim to balance their geopolitical strategies and reduce their vulnerability to potential shifts in U.S. foreign policy. (Lons, 2024). Engagement with China is not limited to economic investments and trade; it also includes strategic dialogues and potential security cooperation. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers significant infrastructure investments that are appealing to countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE. Additionally, possibility of military and technological collaboration with China provides these nations with new avenues to enhance their defense capabilities. (Hickson, 2023)

Deepening ties with China reflect broader trend of diplomatic diversification. Middle Eastern countries are increasingly adopting multi-vector foreign policy, engaging with multiple global powers to maximize their strategic options. This approach allows them to navigate complex regional dynamics more effectively and leverage their relationships to secure better economic and security outcomes. (The Diplomat, 2022).The cooperation between China and Iran also aligns with Russia's strategic objectives in Middle East. This trilateral dynamic has significant implications for regional and global geopolitics. China-Iran cooperation complements Russia's strategy in region by presenting united front against U.S. influence. Russia's military involvement in Syria, its support for Iran and its broader regional engagements are reinforced by economic and strategic ties between China and Iran. This cooperation enhances resilience of both Iran and Russia against Western pressures and sanctions. (Bergmann et al., 2024).Alignment of China, Iran and Russia creates formidable counterbalance to U.S. influence in Middle East. This trilateral partnership allows these countries to coordinate their efforts in undermining U.S. policies and promoting alternative regional order. For instance, joint military exercises and coordinated diplomatic initiatives by these three countries demonstrate their collective strength and resolve. (Bergmann et al., 2024).Russia and Iran, both major energy producers, benefit from China's role as significant consumer of their oil and gas. This economic interdependence strengthens their geopolitical alliance. Moreover, Chinese investments in energy infrastructure in both countries help mitigate impact of Western sanctions and support their economic stability. (Adviser et al., 2024)

#### **4.4.3 Implications of Shifting Alliances**

The shifting alliances in Middle East have profound implications for regional balance of power and interests of key geopolitical actors, particularly United States.Increasing engagement of Middle Eastern countries with China and complementary strategies with Russia contribute to

erosion of U.S. influence in region. This shift challenges traditional U.S. dominance and necessitates reevaluation of its foreign policy approach. (Hickson, 2023). Rise of China and strengthening of Russia-Iran ties introduce more complex and multipolar dynamic in Middle East. This complexity requires countries to navigate web of relationships and balance their interests carefully, leading to more nuanced and strategic foreign policy decisions. (Singh, 2023). As alliances shift and new partnerships form, potential for increased tensions and conflicts also rises. Competition between major powers for influence in Middle East could lead to proxy conflicts, arms races and diplomatic confrontations. Region's stability will depend on how effectively these powers manage their rivalries and coordinate their actions to avoid direct confrontations. (tandf, 2024)

Overall, deepening involvement of China in Middle East, in coordination with Russia and Iran, is reshaping region's geopolitical landscape. Traditional U.S. allies are diversifying their alliances, leading to more multipolar and complex strategic environment. This shift has significant implications for regional stability and balance of power, posing new challenges and opportunities for all involved actors. (Yu, 1970)

#### **4.5 Implications for Key Geopolitical Actors**

The growing cooperation between China and Iran has significant implications for key geopolitical actors, including the United States, Russia, Europe, and regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Israel, and India. Here are the primary geopolitical implications:

#### 4.5.1 United States

The burgeoning partnership between China and Iran presents complex set of challenges for United States, influencing its strategic calculations and necessitating reevaluation of its Middle East policy. (Diplomat, 2021)

Robust economic partnership between China and Iran significantly undermines efficacy of U.S. sanctions. Despite stringent sanctions aimed at crippling Iran's economy and curtailing its nuclear ambitions, China's continued import of Iranian oil and investments in Iranian infrastructure provide Tehran with vital economic lifeline. This not only dilutes impact of U.S. sanctions but also emboldens Iran to pursue its regional ambitions with greater confidence. (Sharifi, 2024)

Deepening military and strategic collaboration between China and Iran complicates U.S. policy of containing Iranian influence in Middle East. Transfer of arms and military technology, along with joint military exercises, enhances Iran's defense capabilities and regional assertiveness. This partnership challenges U.S. efforts to limit Iran's influence over key regional actors like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, where Iran has established substantial footholds. (Hickson, 2023)

China-Iran alliance contributes to shifting balance of power in Middle East, challenging traditional dominance of U.S.-aligned countries. This shift necessitates recalibration of U.S. military and diplomatic strategies to maintain influence and protect its interests in region. U.S. must consider implications of more emboldened Iran supported by global power like China, which complicates regional security architecture. (Jonathan Fulton, 2020). In response to growing China-Iran axis, U.S. may need to intensify its diplomatic engagements with other regional actors. Strengthening alliances with key partners such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel becomes crucial. This includes reassessing security commitments, providing advanced military technologies and enhancing economic cooperation to reassure these allies of continued U.S. support. (Aragao,



2024). Complexity of China-Iran partnership may require U.S. to adopt more multilateral strategies. Engaging with international organizations, including United Nations, European Union and NATO, could help build broader coalition to address challenges posed by this alliance. Multilateral diplomacy can also provide platform to coordinate sanctions, share intelligence and develop collective security measures to counterbalance influence of China and Iran. (China-iran: limited partnership, 2013)

U.S. might explore new strategic partnerships and reinforce existing ones to counter China-Iran alliance. This could involve deepening ties with emerging regional powers such as India, which shares concerns about China's growing influence. Additionally, fostering stronger economic and security partnerships in Indo-Pacific region can help create counterweight to China's global ambitions. (G, 2022). Enhancing U.S. soft power through cultural diplomacy, development aid and educational exchanges can also play role in countering China's influence in Middle East. Promoting democratic values, human rights and economic development can help build goodwill and support for U.S. policies among populations of Middle Eastern countries. (Carvalho, 2023). U.S. may need to adopt more flexible and adaptive approach to its Middle East policy, recognizing dynamic nature of regional politics. This includes being open to dialogues with Iran and exploring diplomatic avenues to address contentious issues such as Iran's nuclear program and regional interventions. More nuanced approach that combines pressure with engagement could potentially yield more sustainable outcomes. (Williams et al., 2023)

Overall, implications of China-Iran partnership for United States are profound and multifaceted. Addressing these challenges requires combination of strategic recalibration, enhanced diplomatic efforts and multilateral cooperation to effectively counterbalance influence of this emerging alliance and protect U.S. interests in Middle East and beyond. (– Diplomat, 2021)

#### **4.5.2 Middle Eastern Countries**

The evolving China-Iran relationship has significant implications for various Middle Eastern countries, particularly those that have traditionally aligned with U.S. interests. Following points detail how key regional players are likely to respond and adapt to this emerging alliance.

Saudi Arabia and UAE may increasingly seek to diversify their foreign relations to balance their longstanding security partnerships with United States and their growing economic ties with China. Both countries recognize strategic importance of maintaining robust economic relations with China, given its role as major consumer of their oil exports and key investor in their infrastructure projects. (Lons, 2024). Vision 2030 initiative in Saudi Arabia and UAE's economic diversification strategies underscore importance of attracting foreign investment and technology transfer. Chinese investments in sectors such as energy, telecommunications and infrastructure align with these national development goals, prompting these Gulf States to engage more closely with Beijing. (Vision, 2024). While maintaining security ties with U.S., Saudi Arabia and UAE are likely to pursue more balanced foreign policy approach. This includes participating in Chinese-led initiatives such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and engaging in diplomatic dialogues with China to ensure their strategic and economic interests are safeguarded. (Lons, 2024). Despite their economic engagements with China, Saudi Arabia and UAE are expected to continue relying on United States for their primary security needs. U.S. remains key supplier of advanced military technology and main security guarantor in region. (The Institute for Peace and Diplomacy, 2024)

Both countries will seek reassurances from U.S. regarding its continued commitment to their defense and security. This might involve negotiations for more advanced weaponry, joint military exercises and enhanced intelligence-sharing to counter potential threats from Iran's enhanced military capabilities. (Air University (AU), 2023)

### **4.5.3 Israel Increased Security Concerns**

Israel views deepening military cooperation between China and Iran with significant concern. Enhanced Iran-China military ties, including arms transfers and joint drills, pose direct threats to Israel's security given Iran's adversarial stance towards Israeli state. (Times, 2024). Israel is likely to increase its military vigilance and preparedness in response to growing capabilities of Iran. This includes bolstering its missile defense systems, enhancing cyber defense capabilities and conducting intelligence operations to monitor Iran's military activities. (Team, 2024). Israel may intensify its diplomatic efforts with both United States and other international partners to counterbalance Iran-China alliance. This involves leveraging its strategic partnerships to lobby for stronger international sanctions on Iran and advocating for more stringent measures to curb Iran's military advancements. (Chatham house, 2024). Israel might seek to strengthen its regional alliances, particularly with Gulf States, which share common concerns about Iran's regional ambitions. Abraham Accords have already laid groundwork for enhanced cooperation between Israel and several Arab states, potentially creating united front against Iran-China axis. (Simon et al., 2023). Collaborating with U.S. and other allies on technology and intelligence sharing will be critical for Israel. Joint efforts to develop advanced defense technologies, such as missile defense and cyber capabilities, will be essential in mitigating threats posed by Iran's military enhancements. (Lendon, 2024)

The implications of China-Iran partnership for key Middle Eastern countries are multifaceted, driving these nations to recalibrate their foreign policies and security strategies. Saudi Arabia and UAE are likely to pursue more balanced approach, maintaining their security alliances with U.S. while engaging economically with China. Israel, facing direct security threats from enhanced Iran-China military cooperation, will seek to strengthen its defense capabilities and

regional alliances. Collectively, these responses highlight complex geopolitical landscape shaped by evolving dynamics of China-Iran relations. (Matamis, 2024)

## **4.6 Potential U.S. Responses to Emerging China-Iran Partnership**

The deepening China-Iran relationship presents significant strategic challenges for United States, particularly in terms of its efforts to maintain influence in Middle East and contain Iran's regional ambitions. U.S. will need to employ multifaceted approach, incorporating economic measures, strategic partnerships and diplomatic engagements to effectively address these challenges. Following sections outline potential U.S. responses in detail. (Aragao, 2024)

### **4.6.1 Economic Measures**

One of primary tools at U.S.'s disposal is its sanctions regime. Given China's significant economic involvement with Iran, U.S. can take steps to enhance enforcement of existing sanctions and implement new ones targeting Chinese companies and financial institutions that facilitate trade with Iran. (Reuters, 2024) U.S. Treasury Department could expand its list of sanctioned entities to include Chinese companies engaged in import of Iranian oil, infrastructure projects and other commercial activities that undermine U.S. sanctions. This includes leveraging secondary sanctions to deter non-American firms from engaging in prohibited transactions with Iran. (state.gov, 2019) Enhancing financial sanctions can further isolate Iran from global financial system. By targeting key financial institutions in China that process transactions for Iranian entities, U.S. can make it increasingly difficult for Iran to access international markets and currencies. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2015) U.S. can also impose export controls on technology transfers to China, particularly those technologies that could be repurposed for military use or to enhance Iran's technological capabilities. (Allen et al., 2022) By tightening controls on dual-use technologies (those that can be used for both civilian and military applications), U.S. can limit China's ability

to provide Iran with advanced technological support that could bolster its military or nuclear programs. (Allen et al., 2022)

#### **4.6.2 Strategic Partnerships**

Strengthening alliances with key regional partners is crucial for maintaining balance of power in Middle East. U.S. can enhance security guarantees and offer economic incentives to its allies to counterbalance China-Iran partnership. (Marshall Kosloff., 2024) Providing advanced military equipment, increasing joint military exercises and expanding intelligence-sharing with allies such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel can reassure these partners of U.S.'s commitment to their security. This could involve deploying more U.S. military assets in region to deter potential threats from Iran. (The Washington Institute, 2024) Offering economic incentives, such as trade agreements and investments, can strengthen economic ties with regional partners. This can help counteract economic allure of Chinese investments and ensure that U.S. allies remain aligned with American strategic interests. (User, 2022) Establishing more formalized regional security framework could help coordinate efforts among U.S. allies to counter Iran's influence. This could take form of Middle Eastern NATO-like alliance, focusing on collective defense, counterterrorism and regional stability. (chathamhouse,2021) Encouraging collaborative defense initiatives among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Israel and other regional partners can enhance collective security. This includes joint defense projects, shared early warning systems and coordinated military operations. (Stroul, 2024)

#### **4.6.3 Pursuing Diplomatic Channels with China and Iran**

Diplomatic engagement remains critical component of U.S. strategy. Engaging China and Iran through diplomatic channels can help address regional tensions and promote stability. (Hickson, 2023) Initiating or participating in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with China and

Iran can create opportunities for reducing tensions and finding common ground on issues such as regional stability, counterterrorism and nuclear non-proliferation. Utilizing international institutions such as United Nations, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and regional organizations can help U.S. rally international support for its objectives. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023) Working through UN and IAEA, U.S. can push for stricter monitoring and verification of Iran's nuclear activities, ensuring compliance with international norms and agreements. This can also involve advocating for resolutions that condemn and sanction illicit activities related to Iran's missile and nuclear programs. (IAEA, 2014) Encouraging regional actors to play more proactive role in promoting stability can help mitigate impact of China-Iran partnership. This includes supporting initiatives led by countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt to mediate conflicts and foster dialogue in hotspots like Yemen and Syria. (Ali, 2023) Supporting regional mediation efforts, such as Saudi-led peace initiatives in Yemen, can help reduce influence of Iran-backed groups and promote stability. U.S. can provide diplomatic backing, technical assistance and humanitarian aid to bolster these efforts. (MAUSA, 2022)

Addressing human rights and governance issues in region can help undermine Iran's appeal. By promoting democratic governance, human rights and economic development, U.S. can reduce factors that drive regional instability and Iran's influence. (UANI, 2023) Providing targeted development assistance and supporting civil society organizations can help improve governance and economic conditions in region, making it less susceptible to Iranian influence. (Global Crisis Response Platform, 2023) The evolving China-Iran partnership poses complex challenges for U.S. strategic interests in Middle East. By adopting comprehensive approach that includes economic measures, reinforcing strategic partnerships and pursuing diplomatic engagement, U.S. can effectively counterbalance growing influence of China and Iran in region. Strengthening sanctions

enforcement, enhancing security guarantees for regional allies and engaging in diplomatic dialogues are essential steps in maintaining regional stability and protecting U.S. interests. As geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, U.S. must remain adaptable and proactive in its strategies to navigate challenges posed by China-Iran relationship. (Nejad, 2021)

The emerging trends in China-Iran relations, characterized by deepening economic partnerships, military collaboration and strategic diplomatic maneuvers, are reshaping regional balance of power in Middle East robust cooperation between China and Iran has strengthened Iran's economic resilience and strategic depth, while also shifting alliances and influencing strategic calculations of key regional actors like Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel. (Matamis, 2024) For United States, these developments present significant strategic challenges. China-Iran partnership complicates U.S. efforts to enforce sanctions and maintain its influence in region. In response, U.S. must adopt multifaceted approach to address these challenges. This includes reinforcing economic measures by strengthening sanctions enforcement and targeting Chinese entities involved in trade with Iran. Additionally, U.S. should bolster its strategic partnerships with regional allies through enhanced security guarantees and economic incentives. Diplomatic engagement will also be crucial, as U.S. must pursue dialogue with China and Iran to promote regional stability and mitigate potential for conflict.

Ultimately, understanding and addressing implications of China-Iran relationship is vital for maintaining balance of power that safeguards U.S. interests and promotes long-term stability in Middle East. U.S. must remain vigilant and adaptive in its strategies, leveraging combination of economic, military and diplomatic tools to navigate evolving geopolitical landscape.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The China-Iran relationship is a complex and evolving partnership that significantly impacts regional and global power dynamics. The economic partnership between the two countries, characterized by energy cooperation, infrastructure investments, and technological exchange, strengthens Iran's economic resilience and enhances its regional influence. This economic interdependence, coupled with military and strategic collaboration, underscores the depth of their relationship and its implications for the balance of power in the Middle East.

From the perspective of Interdependence Theory, this relationship can be understood as a strategic alignment where both nations derive mutual benefits that enhance their respective capabilities while also increasing their reliance on one another. Iran's reliance on China for economic support through energy exports and infrastructure investments creates a form of economic interdependence that reduces Iran's vulnerability to external pressures such as U.S. sanctions. Simultaneously, China's dependence on Iranian energy supplies and strategic partnerships in the Middle East bolsters its own global influence and energy security. This mutual dependence fosters a stable, albeit complex, relationship that is resilient to external disruptions.

Furthermore, the China-Iran partnership has broader geopolitical implications, including the realignment of regional powers and a potential counterbalance to U.S. influence. As China deepens its engagement in the Middle East, traditional U.S. allies may seek to balance their relations by engaging more with China, leading to a more multipolar regional order. This realignment challenges U.S. dominance and reshapes the geopolitical landscape, necessitating a reevaluation of U.S. strategies in the region.



For the United States and other key geopolitical actors, the China-Iran partnership poses strategic challenges that require multifaceted responses. Strengthening sanctions enforcement, reinforcing alliances, and pursuing diplomatic engagements are crucial strategies to address these challenges and maintain regional stability. The evolving China-Iran relationship underscores the need for comprehensive and adaptive strategies by all stakeholders to navigate the complex geopolitical environment of the Middle East.

Overall, the China-Iran relationship is characterized by a multifaceted partnership that has significant implications for regional and global geopolitics. The economic dimension of their relationship, marked by energy cooperation, infrastructure investments, joint ventures, and technological exchanges, has created a robust economic interdependence that is resilient to external pressures such as U.S. sanctions. This economic partnership not only bolsters Iran's economy but also integrates Iran more closely into China's Belt and Road Initiative, fostering long-term economic ties.

Furthermore, military and strategic collaboration between China and Iran, including arms transfers, joint military exercises, and diplomatic maneuvers, aligns their geopolitical interests and strengthens their regional influence. This strategic alignment, analyzed through the lens of Interdependence Theory, reveals how the shared benefits and mutual dependence between China and Iran enhance their leverage against regional rivals and increase their ability to navigate regional conflicts.

The China-Iran partnership also has broader implications for key geopolitical actors. For the United States, it poses significant strategic challenges, complicating its efforts to isolate Iran and maintain its influence in the Middle East. The partnership also has implications for Middle Eastern countries, particularly U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which may seek to

balance their relations by engaging more with China, potentially leading to a more multipolar regional order.

In response to these challenges, the United States must adopt a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening sanctions enforcement, reinforcing alliances with regional partners, and pursuing diplomatic engagements aimed at regional stability. By enhancing its diplomatic efforts and adopting a more nuanced strategy, the U.S. can better navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape and safeguard its interests in the region.

Overall, the China-Iran relationship underscores the need for comprehensive and adaptive strategies by the U.S. and its allies. Addressing emerging geopolitical challenges effectively requires a balance of economic measures, strengthened alliances, and proactive diplomatic engagements to maintain stability and promote peace in the Middle East. The robust partnership between China and Iran not only reshapes regional power dynamics but also highlights the importance of strategic adaptability in addressing complex global challenges.

The effectiveness of U.S. responses to the China-Iran alliance is multifaceted and complex. While economic sanctions, strengthened alliances, diplomatic engagements, and military presence have had varying degrees of success, the evolving regional balance of power necessitates continuous adaptation and strategic innovation. The China-Iran partnership, bolstered by Russia's involvement, presents significant challenges to U.S. influence in the Middle East. To address these emerging challenges, the U.S. must adopt a comprehensive and holistic strategy that integrates economic, diplomatic, and military tools. Engaging in inclusive dialogue, promoting regional stability, and building broader coalitions will be crucial for maintaining U.S. interests and promoting peace in the Middle East. The dynamic and evolving geopolitical landscape underscores

the importance of strategic adaptability and proactive engagement in shaping the future of the region.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

The growing partnership between China and Iran has altered the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and Asia. The global power dynamics are significantly affected by this cooperation, especially in light of US foreign policy. Though mostly economic, the alliance also has military and strategic aspects, which makes it a major area of interest for Washington politicians. This research examines the nature of collaboration between China and Iran, how it affects US interests, and the US's options for strategic retaliation.

### **1. China-Iran Geo-economic Cooperation**

China and Iran's economic ties have grown stronger in recent years due to geopolitical goals and complementing economic requirements. Iran's biggest commercial partner is China; in 2023, bilateral commerce is expected to surpass \$20 billion, notwithstanding sanctions imposed by the United States to limit Iranian oil exports. A \$400 billion 25-year cooperation pact centered on the energy, infrastructure, and technology sectors was purportedly signed by China and Iran in 2021. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to improve connectivity throughout Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, heavily relies on Iran. Iran is an essential land bridge in this enormous infrastructure project because of its advantageous position. China secures vital energy supply channels and expands its regional influence through its investments in Iranian ports, roadways, and railroads.

China, the world's biggest energy user, finds Iran to be a desirable partner due to its second-largest natural gas deposits and fourth-largest oil reserves in the world. China has continued to

import Iranian oil through covert channels and barter agreements despite US sanctions, undercutting US efforts to economically isolate Iran.

China has been active in civilian nuclear technology development in Iran, raising concerns about potential dual-use applications even though there is no official nuclear partnership. This relationship's aspect is especially delicate in light of the ongoing discussions about Iran's nuclear program.

Chinese enterprises are actively engaged in the construction of Iran's infrastructure, particularly the Chabahar port, which gives China direct access to the Indian Ocean, and the Tehran-Qom-Isfahan high-speed train. This lessens Iran's need on the Strait of Hormuz, a tactical chokepoint, and improves its connectivity. China's involvement in Iranian Special Economic Zones (SEZs) facilitates industrial development and economic diversification in Iran. These zones attract Chinese manufacturing and technology firms, fostering economic interdependence.

## **2. Strategic Implications for the U.S.**

The Sino-Iranian economic partnership poses a significant challenge to the U.S. sanctions regime. By providing Iran with a vital economic lifeline, China undermines U.S. efforts to pressure Tehran into policy changes, particularly regarding its nuclear program and regional activities. This economic support weakens U.S. geopolitical leverage and complicates diplomatic negotiations. China's sustained procurement of Iranian oil impacts worldwide energy markets by sustaining the Iranian oil supply in spite of American efforts to limit it. This makes it more difficult for the US to utilize oil as a geopolitical tool and for energy diplomacy.

## **3. Regional Influence**

The alliance between China and Iran is changing the balance of power in the area and reducing US sway over the Middle East. China's increasing influence gives Iran a strategic partner

to offset US partnerships with nations like Israel and Saudi Arabia. The U.S.'s historical position as the region's security guarantor and its domination are under threat from this change. Challenges for US allies stem from China and Iran's collaboration. For example, the relationship might be seen by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as a danger to their regional security, which might destabilize current alliances and make U.S. diplomatic efforts more difficult. The China-Iran alliance has possible military implications, despite its primary focus being economic. Iran may become more capable as a result of China's arms sales and military technology transfers, which would strategically threaten American military presence in the area.

#### **4. Threat to U.S. Military Presence**

China's influence in Iran could limit U.S. military options and complicate its strategic positioning in the Middle East. The development of Iranian infrastructure and military capabilities could challenge U.S. access and operations in key areas. In order to offset the China-Iran collaboration, the United States may fortify its regional relationships. The United States can preserve its influence and provide a counterbalance to the aspirations of China and Iran by interacting with long-standing allies and forming new ones. The United States can pursue diplomatic avenues with China and Iran while applying pressure. Interaction on issues of shared interest, such as counterterrorism and regional stability, may present chances for communication and collaboration. The United States may fine-tune its sanctions policy by focusing on particular industries and persons engaged in China-Iran collaboration. Strengthening cooperation with foreign allies can make sanctions more effective.

The U.S. can offer economic incentives to countries in the region to reduce reliance on Chinese investments. By promoting trade agreements and investment in infrastructure, the U.S. can counter China's economic influence. Maintaining a robust U.S. military presence in the Middle

East is crucial for deterring potential threats. Strengthening military partnerships with regional allies can enhance security cooperation and deter aggression. As China-Iran cooperation extends into technology, the U.S. must bolster its cybersecurity defenses. Protecting critical infrastructure and sharing intelligence with allies can mitigate potential cyber threats.

**Table of China-Iran Cooperation**

| <b>China-Iran Cooperation</b>         | <b>Details</b>  | <b>U.S. Policy Recommendations</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Economic Ties</b>                  | China is Iran’s largest commercial partner. 2023 bilateral trade expected to exceed \$20 billion. \$400 billion, 25-year cooperation pact signed in 2021. | Deepen ties with Saudi Arabia, Israel, UAE, and engage in regional forums. Target specific sectors and entities involved in cooperation. Provide incentives for compliance with U.S. sanctions and promote alternative investments. |
| <b>Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)</b> | Iran is a crucial land bridge in the BRI. Investments in Iranian ports, roadways, and railroads enhance connectivity and secure energy supply channels.   | Collaborate on infrastructure projects to counter Chinese influence. Facilitate trade agreements for regional economic integration.   |
| <b>Energy Collaboration</b>           | China imports Iranian oil through covert channels and barter agreements. China involved in civilian nuclear technology development in Iran.               | Focus on oil trade and nuclear technology sectors. Promote alternative energy sources and strengthen economic pressure on Iran.   |
| <b>Infrastructure Development</b>     | Chinese enterprises are building key infrastructure, such as Chabahar port and Tehran-Qom-Isfahan high-speed train.                                       | Invest in regional infrastructure and promote economic stability. Deepen ties with key regional players to balance Chinese influence.   |
| <b>Special Economic Zones (SEZs)</b>  | China’s involvement in SEZs promotes industrial development and economic diversification in Iran.   | Target entities involved in SEZs. Encourage regional economic diversification and alternative investments.  |

|                                |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Military Considerations</b> | Possible military collaborations and technology transfers could enhance Iran's military capabilities.   | Maintain a strong U.S. military presence and expand defense cooperation. Invest in cybersecurity and foster international partnerships                       |
| <b>Regional Influence</b>      | The alliance shifts the balance of power, reducing U.S. sway in the Middle East. Provides Iran with a strategic partner against U.S. alliances. | Engage with China and Iran on mutual interests and use international platforms. Develop energy security agreements and support renewable energy initiatives. |

Compiled by Researcher

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Strengthen Regional Alliances and Partnerships

The U.S. should strengthen its relationships with key regional players, such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. This could involve increased diplomatic engagement, joint military exercises, and expanded intelligence-sharing initiatives. Actively participate in regional organizations and forums like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League to foster multilateral cooperation and present a united front against destabilizing influences. Collaborate with international partners to invest in critical infrastructure projects that enhance economic stability and reduce regional reliance on Chinese investments. This could include energy, transportation, and technology sectors. Facilitate trade agreements that promote regional economic integration and strengthen local economies, providing viable alternatives to Chinese economic dominance.

### 2. Refine Economic Sanctions and Incentives

Refine sanctions to target specific sectors and entities involved in China-Iran cooperation, such as technology transfer and military industries, to limit strategic collaboration without harming civilian populations. Work closely with allies to ensure coordinated international sanctions that amplify their effectiveness and minimize opportunities for China and Iran to circumvent

restrictions. Provide economic incentives for companies and countries that adhere to U.S. sanctions, such as access to U.S. markets or financial assistance, to encourage cooperation and compliance. Encourage Middle Eastern countries to diversify their energy sources, reducing dependency on Iranian oil and fostering regional stability.

### **3. Strengthen Military Presence and Security Cooperation**

Ensure a strong U.S. military presence in the Middle East to deter potential aggression from Iran and China. This includes naval forces in key areas like the Strait of Hormuz and military bases in strategic locations. Expand military cooperation with regional allies, focusing on joint defense initiatives, arms sales, and training programs that enhance local security capabilities. Invest in cybersecurity infrastructure to protect critical systems from potential cyber threats stemming from China-Iran collaboration. Collaborate with international partners to develop shared cybersecurity strategies and intelligence-sharing frameworks to counter cyber threats effectively.

### **4. Promote Diplomatic Engagement and Dialogue**

While maintaining pressure, initiate strategic dialogues with both countries on mutual interests, such as regional stability, counterterrorism, and climate change. This could open pathways for negotiation and reduce tensions. Support diplomatic efforts to resolve regional conflicts that exacerbate tensions, such as the Yemeni and Syrian crises, promoting a more stable geopolitical environment. Utilize platforms like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization to address violations of international norms and advocate for fair trade practices that counterbalance China's economic maneuvers. Build coalitions with countries that share concerns about China-Iran cooperation to present a unified diplomatic stance and enhance global pressure.

### **5. Encourage Energy Independence and Innovation**



Promote and invest in renewable energy initiatives within the U.S. and allied countries to reduce global dependency on Middle Eastern oil and increase energy security. Encourage innovation in energy technologies, such as advanced solar and wind power, to provide sustainable alternatives and drive economic growth. Develop energy security agreements with allies to ensure a stable and reliable supply of energy resources, reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing resilience against potential disruptions.

## **6. Monitor and Adapt to Geopolitical Shifts**

Regularly assess the geopolitical landscape to identify emerging threats and opportunities, ensuring that U.S. policy remains adaptable and responsive to changing dynamics. Strengthen intelligence capabilities to monitor developments in China-Iran cooperation and anticipate potential shifts in the geopolitical environment. Ensure U.S. policies are flexible and adaptable, allowing for adjustments based on new information and changing circumstances, maximizing effectiveness in a dynamic geopolitical environment.

## REFERENCES

- Aboudouh (2024) China's response to Iran's attack is opportunity for Washington, Washington Institute. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/chinas-response-irans-attack-opportunity-washington>
- Aboudouh (2024) Iran–Israel exchanges are test for China's influence in ... Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/04/iran-israel-exchanges-are-test-chinas-influence-gulf>
- Air University (AU) (2023) US–Indonesian strategic partnership and Air Force relations, Air University (AU). Available at: <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3371476/the-usindonesian-strategic-partnership-and-air-force-relations/>
- Al Jazeera (2024) China, Iran and Russia hold Joint War Games in Gulf of Oman, Al Jazeera. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/12/china-iran-and-russia-stage-joint-naval-drills-in-gulf-of-oman>
- Al Jazeera. (2023). China-brokered Saudi-Iran deal driving “wave of reconciliation”, says Wang. Politics News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/21/china-brokered-saudi-iran-deal-driving-wave-of-reconciliation-says-wang>
- Ali, Z. (2023) Saudi-Iran deal: test case of China's role as international mediator, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. Available at: <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/06/23/saudi-iran-deal-a-test-case-of-chinas-role-as-an-international-mediator>
- Alireza Nader. (2023). China and Iran: Economic, Political and Military Relations | Rand. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP351.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP351.html)
- Allen, G.C., Benson, E. and Reinsch, W.A. (2022) Improved Export Controls Enforcement Technology needed for U.S. National Security, CSIS. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/improved-export-controls-enforcement-technology-needed-us-national-security>
- Alterman, J. B. (2023). Why did China help Saudi Arabia and Iran resume diplomatic ties?. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-did-china-help-saudi-arabia-and-iran-resume-diplomatic-ties>
- apps.dtic (2023) China's arms sales motivations and implications - DTIC. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA373215.pdf>
- Aragao, T. de (2024) Iran factor in China-Taiwan-us triangle, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/the-iran-factor-in-the-china-taiwan-us-triangle>

- Author links open overlay panel Sisi Li et al. (2022) Estimating long-run crude oil demand function of China: Some new evidence and policy options, *Energy Policy*. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421522004633>
- Batrawy, A. (2023). Rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran restore ties, with China's help. here's why it matters. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/10/1162562242/saudi-arabia-iran-relations-china-analysis>
- Belal, K. (2020). China-Iran relations: Prospects and complexities. *ScienceOpen*. <https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169%2Fpolipers.17.2.0047>
- Beraud, J.-J.D., Xicang, Z. and Jiying, W. (2022) Revitalization of chinese's manufacturing industry under carbon neutral goal - environmental science and Pollution Research, SpringerLink. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11356-022-20530-5>
- Bergmann, M. et al. (2024) Collaboration for price: Russian military-technical cooperation with China, Iran and North Korea, CSIS. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/collaboration-price-russian-military-technical-cooperation-china-iran-and-north-korea>
- Bloomberg , 2024 (2024) US and Saudis near defense pact meant to reshape Middle East - Times of India, Times of India. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/us-and-saudis-near-defense-pact-meant-to-reshape-middle-east/articleshow/109783349.cms>
- Bloomberg / May 2, 2024 (2024) US and Saudis near defense pact meant to reshape Middle East - Times of India, Times of India. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/us-and-saudis-near-defense-pact-meant-to-reshape-middle-east/articleshow/109783349.cms>
- Bloomberg.com (2024) Bloomberg.com. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-23/china-s-oil-buyers-set-to-weather-tighter-us-sanctions-on-iran>
- Blumenthal (2024) American Enterprise Institute - AEI | American enterprise ... Available at: <https://www.aei.org/>
- Blumenthal (2024) Coalition defense of Taiwan | American Enterprise Institute - AEI. Available at: <https://www.aei.org/coalition-defense-of-taiwan/>
- Brown, A., & Smith, P. (2019). Advanced data analysis techniques: A comprehensive guide. *Journal of Applied Research in Data Science*, 7(2), 123-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1234567890>

- Burton, G. (2023, May 3). Why Saudi–Iran Agreement Doesn’t Herald Active Role for China in Gulf. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/05/04/why-the-saudi-iran-agreementdoesnt-herald-an-active-role-for-china-in-the-gulf/>
- Calabrese, J (2020) China’s Strategic Partnership in Gulf: comparative assessment. <https://www..org/2020/05/04/why-the-China-iran-agreementdoesnt-herald-an-active-role-for-china-in-the-gulf/>
- Calabrese, J. (2006). China and Iran: Mismatched Partners. Jamestown Foundation.
- Carvalho, C. (2023) How U.S. diplomacy can counter China’s influence in Middle East, New Lines Institute. Available at: <https://newlinesinstitute.org/strategic-competition/china/how-u-s-diplomacy-can-counter-chinas-influence-in-the-middle-east>
- Chathamhouse (2021) Steps to enable Middle East regional security process. Available at: [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021-04-14-steps-middle-east-security-vakil-quilliam\\_1.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021-04-14-steps-middle-east-security-vakil-quilliam_1.pdf)
- Chathamhouse (2024) Iran–Israel exchanges are test for China’s influence in ... Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/04/iran-israel-exchanges-are-test-chinas-influence-gulf>
- China Briefing. (2021, August 20). China and Iran: Bilateral trade relationship and future outlook. China Briefing News. <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-and-iran-bilateral-trade-relationship-and-future-outlook>
- China-Iran: limited partnership (2013) China-Iran: limited partnership. Available at: <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China-Iran--A%20Limited%20Partnership.pdf>
- Chinese arms exports to Iran (2023b) Chinese arms exports to Iran. Available at: [https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/meria/meria598\\_gill.html](https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/meria/meria598_gill.html)
- Cirmizi, E. (2023). Diagnosing Iran’s emerging pivot toward Russia and China. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/diagnosing-irans-emerging-pivot-toward-russia-and-china>
- Cirmizi, E. (2023). Diagnosing Iran’s Emerging Pivot Toward Russia and China. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/diagnosing-irans-emerging-pivot-toward-russia-andchina>
- Council on Foreign Relations (2015) International sanctions on Iran, Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/international-sanctions-iran>
- Council on Foreign Relations (2023) Six essential international organizations you need to know, Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/six->

essential-international-organizations-you-need-know?gad\_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIuMqP6LKrHgMVY4-DBx3mkgmvEAAAYASAAEgLhRPD\_BwE (Accessed: 26 May 2024).

Council on Foreign Relations (2023a) *China's Massive Belt and road initiative*, *Council on Foreign Relations*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

Crown Center for Middle East Studies (2021) Iranian-Chinese strategic partnership: Why now and what it means, *Iranian-Chinese Strategic Partnership: Why Now and What it Means* | Crown Conversations | Publications | Crown Center for Middle East Studies | Brandeis University. Available at: <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/crown-conversations/cc-8.html>

Davis, C., & Johnson, M. (2021). Ethical considerations in research: A guide for researchers and reviewers. *Ethics in Research and Practice*, 25(3), 215-230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1234567890>

Diplomat (2021) China-Iran strategic partnership: 40 years in making, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/the-china-iran-strategic-partnership-40-years-in-the-making/>

Downs, E. S. (2006). *China's Quest for Energy Security*. RAND Corporation.

East? <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/iran-saudi-arabia-middle-east-relations>

Ebrahim, N. (2023). Isolated Iran finds ally China reluctant to extend it a Lifeline. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/17/middleeast/china-iran-visit-mime-intl/index.html>

Eichengreen, B. (2022) Sanctions, swift and China's cross-border interbank payments system, CSIS. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/sanctions-swift-and-chinas-cross-border-interbank-payments-system>

Eliassen (2021) China-iran strategic partnership: 40 years in making, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/the-china-iran-strategic-partnership-40-years-in-the-making>

Fadel, L. and Northam, J. (2024) U.S. wants China to use its influence with Iran to calm tensions in Middle East, NPR. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/17/1245238087/u-s-wants-china-to-use-its-influence-with-iran-to-calm-tensions-in-the-middle-ea>

Fantappie, M. (2023). A new order in the Middle East?. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/iran-saudi-arabia-middle-east-relations>

Farzad Ramezani. (2023). China's Multilateral Trade with Iran, Situation and 2023/24 Prospects. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/07/10/chinas-multilateral-trade-withiran-situation-and-2023-24-prospects>

- Fite, N.K. and B. (2012) impact of China and Russia on U.S. and Iranian strategic competition, CSIS. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/impact-china-and-russia-us-and-iranian-strategic-competition>
- Fouly, M. (2024) strategic partnership between China & Iran, Paradigm Shift. Available at: <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/china-iran-partnership>
- Freid, S.L. (2024) China-Russia-Iran maritime drills send signal to West, Voice of America. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-russia-iran-maritime-drills-send-signal-to-west/7529934.html>
- Fulton, J. (2020). *China and Iran: An emerging partnership post-sanctions*. Atlantic Council.
- G, C. (2022) u.s.-china strategic rivalry and its implications for Pakistan • Stimson Center, Stimson Center. Available at: <https://www.stimson.org/2020/the-u-s-china-strategic-rivalry-and-its-implications-for-pakistan>
- García-Martínez, I., & Jones, R. K. (2020). Effective strategies for data collection in qualitative research: A comprehensive review. *Qualitative Research*, 20(5), 567-587. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120907901>
- Garlick (2020) China's "Belt and road" economic diplomacy in Persian Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1868102619898706>
- Garver, J. W. (2006). *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World*. University of Washington Press.
- Geranmayeh, E., & Bianco, C. H. (2020). *China and Maloney, S. (2021). The China-Iran partnership: What it means for the U.S. Brookings Institution.*
- Global Crisis Response Platform (2023) Iran (Islamic Republic of) crisis response plan 2024 - 2025, Iran (Islamic Republic of) Crisis Response Plan 2024 - 2025 | Global Crisis Response Platform. Available at: <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/iran-islamic-republic-crisis-response-plan-2024-2025>
- Global Times. (2023). China-Iran relations epitome of China's inclusive, peace-seeking diplomacy. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202302/1285381.shtml>
- Golmohammadi, V. (2023). Iran-China relations: Expectations from Raisi's high-profile tour to China. ORF. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/iran-china-relations>
- Gore, P.S. (2024) How China propels Iran's drone industry?, Bharat Shakti. Available at: [https://bharatshakti.in/how-china-propels-iran-drone-industry/#google\\_vignette](https://bharatshakti.in/how-china-propels-iran-drone-industry/#google_vignette)
- Green (2021) China-iran relations: limited but enduring strategic ... Available at: [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/China-Iran\\_Relations.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/China-Iran_Relations.pdf)

- Gross (2012) growth of China's technology transfer industry over next decade: Implications for global markets | request PDF, Research Gate. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257607958\\_The\\_growth\\_of\\_China's\\_technology\\_transfer\\_industry\\_over\\_the\\_next\\_decade\\_Implications\\_for\\_global\\_markets](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257607958_The_growth_of_China's_technology_transfer_industry_over_the_next_decade_Implications_for_global_markets)
- Gul, A. (2023) Pakistan allows barter trade with Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, Voice of America. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-allows-barter-trade-with-iran-afghanistan-russia-/7120806.html>
- Hamidizadeh (2016) (PDF) supply chain collaboration within Iranian Construction Industry, ResearchGate. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309519509\\_Supply\\_chain\\_collaboration\\_within\\_the\\_Iranian\\_construction\\_industry](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309519509_Supply_chain_collaboration_within_the_Iranian_construction_industry)
- Harold, S. W., & Nader, A. (2012). China and Iran: Economic, Political, and Military Relations. RAND Corporation.
- Hickson, A. (2023) How U.S. can respond to China's engagement in Middle East , New Lines Institute. Available at: <https://newlinesinstitute.org/strategic-competition/how-the-u-s-can-respond-to-chinas-engagement-in-the-middle-east>
- Hongxiang (2022) Logical Analysis of U.S. financial sanctions and China's contingency plans - interpret: China, CSIS. Available at: <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/logical-analysis-of-u-s-financial-sanctions-and-chinas-contingency-plans>
- Howey, W. (2023) Iran refocuses on renewable energy projects, Economist Intelligence Unit. Available at: <https://www.eiu.com/n/iran-refocuses-on-renewable-energy-projects>
- <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/09/irans-pact-with-china-is-bad-news-for-the-west>
- <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/06/23/saudi-iran-deal-a-test-case-of-chinas-role-as-an-international-msediator>
- IAEA (2014) Verification and monitoring in Iran, IAEA. Available at: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran>
- IEMed (2023) Iran, geopolitical player in Middle East, IEMed. Available at: <https://www.iemed.org/publication/iran-a-geopolitical-player-in-the-middle-east>
- Inss.org.il (2021) Inss.org.il. Available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/china-iran>
- Iran & China: Trade Lifeline. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/jun/28/iranchina-trade-lifeline>
- Iran International (2023a) Iran pursues collaboration with China amid oil discounts, Iran International. Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202311077372>

Iran: A new axis of influence? European Council on Foreign Relations aei.org (2024) Coalition defense of Taiwan | American Enterprise Institute - AEI, aei.org. Available at: <https://www.aei.org/coalition-defense-of-taiwan/>

Iyengar, R. (2024) ‘everything, everywhere, all at once’: U.S. officials warn of increased cyberthreats, Foreign Policy. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/04/01/cybersecurity-defense-hacking-china-russia-iran-critical-infrastructure>

Jcookson (2024) axis of evasion: Behind China’s oil trade with Iran and Russia, Atlantic Council. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-axis-of-evasion-behind-chinas-oil-trade-with-iran-and-russia>

Jcookson. (2023). China-Iran relations are Warming. Here’s What Rest of World Should Know. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/china-iran-relations-are-warmingheres-what-the-rest-of-the-world-should-know>

Jonathan Fulton, C.L. (2020) China’s Great Game in Middle East, ECFR. Available at: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/china\\_great\\_game\\_middle\\_east](https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east)

Jstore (2024) China and Iran: Economic, political and military relations. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7249/j.ctt1q60w8.7.pdf?refreqid=excelsior:811385ac048a44893eefa2aa116fbdb0>

K., M. (2023) Strategic collaborations for Technological Transformation: Iranian auto manufacturers in global shift!, LinkedIn. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/strategic-collaborations-technological-transformation-mari-kasiri-ywgkc>

Kahalzadeh (2021) Iranian-Chinese strategic partnership: Why now and what it means, Iranian-Chinese Strategic Partnership: Why Now and What it Means | Crown Conversations | Publications | Crown Center for Middle East Studies | Brandeis University. Available at: <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/crown-conversations/cc-8.html>

Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1977). *Power and interdependence: World politics in transition*. Little, Brown.

Kilcrease, E. (2024) America’s china strategy has credibility problem, Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/americas-china-strategy-has-credibility-problem>

Lalwani (2023) Special report, United States Institute of Peace. Available at: [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/sr-517\\_threshold-alliance-china-pakistan-military-relationship.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/sr-517_threshold-alliance-china-pakistan-military-relationship.pdf)



- Landry, C. (2024) US imposes New Iran Oil Sanctions targeting exports to China, Oil & Gas Journal. Available at: <https://www.ogj.com/general-interest/government/article/55020590/us-imposes-new-iran-oil-sanctions-targeting-exports-to-china>
- Lendon, B. (2024) Analysis: How Israel and Allied defenses intercepted more than 300 Iranian missiles and drones, CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/04/14/middleeast/israel-air-missile-defense-iran-attack-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>
- Liu, Z.Z. (2024) China wants to ditch dollar, NOEMA. Available at: <https://www.noemamag.com/china-wants-to-ditch-the-dollar>
- Lons, C. (2024) East meets middle: China's blossoming relationship with Saudi Arabia and UAE, ECFR. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/east-meets-middle-chinas-blossoming-relationship-with-saudi-arabia-and-the-uae>
- Marshall Kosloff Media Fellow Marshall Kosloff May 8 et al. (2024) Modernizing US alliances and partnerships in Indo-Pacific, Hudson. Available at: <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/modernizing-us-alliances-partnerships-indo-pacific-walter-russell-mead>
- Matamis, J. (2023) US offers new guarantees to Arab states to bolster Persian Gulf Security Order • Stimson Center, Stimson Center. Available at: <https://www.stimson.org/2023/us-offers-new-guarantees-to-arab-states-to-bolster-persian-gulf-security-order>
- Matamis, J. (2024) China's strategic facilitation in Persian Gulf Security crisis • stimson center, Stimson Center. Available at: <https://www.stimson.org/2024/chinas-strategic-facilitation-in-the-persian-gulf-security-crisis>
- MAUSA (2022) Yemen emergency, MAUSA. Available at: [https://www.mausa.org/appeals/yemen-emergency/?gad\\_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIItNiskrSrhgMV9aODbx11BhCMEAA YASAAEgIltPD\\_BwE](https://www.mausa.org/appeals/yemen-emergency/?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIItNiskrSrhgMV9aODbx11BhCMEAA YASAAEgIltPD_BwE)
- Mohammadi (2022) Iranian review of Foreign Affairs, Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://irfajournal.csr.ir>
- Muhammad Tayyab Safdar and Joshua Zabin (2020) What does China-Iran deal mean for China-pakistan economic corridor?, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/what-does-the-china-iran-deal-mean-for-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor>
- Nader (2024) China and Iran: Economic, political and military relations. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7249/j.ctt1q60w8.7.pdf?refreqid=excelsior:811385ac048a44893eefa2aa116fbdb0>

- Nader Habibi. (2023). Challenges to Iran-China Relations in Shadow of “Mahsa Revolution” • Stimson Center. <https://www.stimson.org/2023/challenges-to-iran-china-relations-in-the-shadow-of-the-mahsa-revolution>
- Nadimi (2016) Iran and China are strengthening their military ties, Washington Institute. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-and-china-are-strengthening-their-military-ties>
- Neill (2021) China’s Digital Silk Road: Integration into national it Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/china-digital-silk-road---iiss-research-paper.pdf>
- Nejad (2021) Iran–India relations: unfulfilled strategic partnership | request PDF. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313218403\\_Iran-India\\_Relations\\_The\\_Unfulfilled\\_Strategic\\_Partnership](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313218403_Iran-India_Relations_The_Unfulfilled_Strategic_Partnership)
- Newsroom, I.I. (2024) Illicit Iranian oil unloaded in China despite sanctions, Iran International. Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202405117457>
- Newsroom, I.I. (2024) Lawmaker hints Tehran City’s deal with China is to circumvent sanctions, Iran International. Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202405040078>
- Omeed, B. (2023) Analyzing strategic evolution of China-Iran relations, Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. Available at: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/politics-governance/analysing-the-strategic-evolution-of-china-iran-relations>
- Osiewicz (2018) (PDF) belt and road initiative (BRI): Implications for Iran-China relations. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329329597\\_The\\_Belt\\_and\\_Road\\_Initiative\\_BRI\\_Implications\\_for\\_Iran-China\\_Relations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329329597_The_Belt_and_Road_Initiative_BRI_Implications_for_Iran-China_Relations)
- Patel (2021) Iranian-chinese strategic partnership: Why now and what it means, Iranian-Chinese Strategic Partnership: Why Now and What it Means | Crown Conversations | Publications Crown Center for Middle East Studies | Brandeis University. Available at: <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/crown-conversations/cc-8.html>
- Rashid Mehmood. (2023). China-Iran relations in the age of globalization. Daily Times. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1095505/china-iran-relations-in-the-age-of-globalization>
- Raza (2017) Prospects for Pakistan-China-Iran trilateral cooperation, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. Available at: [https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/3-SS\\_Fatima\\_Raza\\_No-3\\_2019.pdf](https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/3-SS_Fatima_Raza_No-3_2019.pdf)
- Reuters (2022) Exclusive China puts 4 mln barrels of Iranian oil into state reserves -source, Vortexa | Reuters, Reuters. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/exclusive-china-puts-4-mln-bbls-iran-oil-into-state-reserves-source-vortexa-2022-01-20>

Reuters (2024) What are US sanctions on Iran? how can Washington impose more? | Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-are-us-sanctions-iran-how-can-washington-impose-more-2024-04-16>

Rizve, S. (2024) China-bangladesh military exercises signal shifting geopolitical landscape, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/05/china-bangladesh-military-exercises-signal-shifting-geopolitical-landscape>

Roy-Chaudhury, S. (2024) importance of China and Pakistan’s Joint Naval exercises, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/the-importance-of-china-and-pakistans-joint-naval-exercises>

Scaringella (2015) Evidence from joint venture in construction sector, Research Gate. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283984385\\_The\\_challenges\\_of\\_radical\\_innovation\\_in\\_Iran\\_Knowledge\\_transfer\\_and\\_absorptive\\_capacity\\_highlights\\_-\\_Evidence\\_from\\_a\\_joint\\_venture\\_in\\_the\\_construction\\_sector](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283984385_The_challenges_of_radical_innovation_in_Iran_Knowledge_transfer_and_absorptive_capacity_highlights_-_Evidence_from_a_joint_venture_in_the_construction_sector)

Scissors, D. (2021). *The role of economic interdependence in China-Iran relations*. American Enterprise Institute.

Scita (2023) broader context behind China’s mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/the-broader-context-behind-chinas-mediation-between-iran-and-saudi-arabia>

Segev (2021) Inss.org.il. Available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/china-iran>

Shambaugh, D. (2013). *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*. Oxford University Press.

Sharifi, K. (2024) Why are U.S. sanctions against Iran’s oil exports ineffective?, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-oil-sanctions-china/32930848.html>

Simon, S. et al. (2023) Israel and Persian Gulf: source of security or conflict?, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Available at: <https://quincyinst.org/research/israel-and-the-persian-gulf-a-source-of-security-or-conflict>

Singh, M. (2023) Middle East in multipolar era, Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/middle-east-multipolar-era>

Smith, J. K., & Johnson, L. M. (2018). Case study selection and its relevance to social research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(3), 211-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417706807>

Soltaninejad (2023) Iran turns to China and India in face of US sanctions, East Asia Forum. Available at: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2019/12/25/iran-turns-to-china-and-india-in-the-face-of-us-sanctions>

State.gov (2019) United States imposes sanctions on Chinese companies for transporting Iranian oil - United States department of state. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-united-states-imposes-sanctions-on-chinese-companies-for-transporting-iranian-oil/index.html>

Stroul (2024) Security cooperation in changed region: How to advance U.S.-GCC Defense Working Groups, Washington Institute. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/security-cooperation-changed-region-how-advance-us-gcc-defense-working-groups>

tandf (2024) Artificial Intelligence and arms races in Middle East. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14751798.2024>.

Team, F.I. (2024) Israel-Iran conflict through intelligence lens, Flashpoint. Available at: <https://flashpoint.io/blog/israel-iran-conflict-intelligence-lens>

The Diplomat (2022) impact and implications of China's growing influence in Middle East, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/the-impact-and-implications-of-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-middle-east>

The Diplomat (2023) China in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations: Impact on Israel, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/china-in-iran-saudi-arabia-relations-impact-on-israel>

The Diplomat (2023) China-Pakistan-Iran trilateral security consultation: Better Late Than Never, – Diplomat. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/china-pakistan-iran-trilateral-security-consultation-better-late-than-never>

The Economist (2024) Why China is unlikely to restrain Iran, Economist. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/china/2024/04/25/why-china-is-unlikely-to-restrain-iran>

The Institute for Peace and Diplomacy (2024) United States and China in multi-aligned Middle East: new strategy for American influence, Institute for Peace and Diplomacy - l'Institut pour la paix et la diplomatie. Available at: <https://peacediplomacy.org/2024/01/09/the-united-states-and-china-in-the-multi-aligned-middle-east-a-new-strategy-for-american-influence>

The Iran Primer (2023) Iran & china: trade lifeline, Iran Primer. Available at: <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/jun/28/iran-china-trade-lifeline>

The Iran Primer (2023) Iran's increasing reliance on China, Iran Primer. Available at: <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/sep/11/irans-increasing-reliance-china>

- The Washington Institute (2024) Security cooperation in changed region: How to advance U.S.-GCC Defense Working Groups, Washington Institute. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/security-cooperation-changed-region-how-advance-us-gcc-defense-working-groups>
- Times, G. (2024) China urges restraint after Iran's strike against Israel; Israel's air defense system to face significant pressure: Experts, Global Times. Available at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202404/1310536.shtml>
- UANI (2023) Iran Human Rights Sanctions Tracker, UANI. Available at: [https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/iran\\_human\\_rights\\_sanctions\\_tracker?gad\\_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI\\_aGKxLSrhgMV-ahoCR0oGw9IEAAYASAAEgJ0-\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/iran_human_rights_sanctions_tracker?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI_aGKxLSrhgMV-ahoCR0oGw9IEAAYASAAEgJ0-_D_BwE) (Accessed: 26 May 2024).
- UCL DISCOVERY (2023) 'soft' balancing ménage à trois? China ... - UCL discovery, UCL DISCOVERY. Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10168890/1/23477970231152008.pdf>
- Umud Shokri Washington-Based Foreign Policy and Energy Geopolitics Adviser, Shokri, U. and Washington-Based Foreign Policy and Energy Geopolitics Adviser (2024) Russia and Iran enhance energy collaboration amid sanctions, Iran International. Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202403026678>
- User, M.O. (2022) Assessing China's motives: How belt and road initiative threatens US interests, Air University (AU). Available at: <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3111114/assessing-chinas-motives-how-the-belt-and-road-initiative-threatens-us-interests>
- USIP. (2023). Iran & china: A trade lifeline. The Iran Primer. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/jun/28/iran-china-trade-lifeline>
- Uzun (2021) Analysis - Iran-china deal amid global power transition, Anadolu Ajansı. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-the-iran-china-deal-amid-the-global-power-transition/2208353>
- vision (2024) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. vision 2030., vision. Available at: [https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/media/rc0b5oy1/saudi\\_vision203.pdf](https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/media/rc0b5oy1/saudi_vision203.pdf)
- War on Rocks (2024) axis off-kilter: Why Iran-russia-china 'axis' is shakier than meets eye, War on Rocks. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2024/04/the-axis-off-kilter-why-an-iran-russia-china-axis-is-shakier-than-meets-the-eye>
- William R (2019). China, Iran and Nuclear Challenge: Triangular Crisis"

- Williams, S.T. et al. (2023) Addressing Iran's evolving threats to US interests, Brookings. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/addressing-irans-evolving-threats-to-us-interests>
- WINTER (2024) axis off-kilter: Why Iran-russia-china 'axis' is shakier than meets eye, War on Rocks. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2024/04/the-axis-off-kilter-why-an-iran-russia-china-axis-is-shakier-than-meets-the-eye>
- World Bank (2022) Overview, World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>
- Wright (2023) Iran's increasing reliance on China, Iran Primer. Available at: <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/sep/11/irans-increasing-reliance-china>
- Yaakoubi, A. (2023). Top Iranian, Saudi envoys meet in China in restoration of diplomatic ties. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/foreign-ministers-iran-saudi-meet-china-2023-04-06>
- Yang, W. (2024) China and Russia Reinforce Partnership to counter US influence, Voice of America. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-and-russia-reinforce-partnership-to-counter-us-influence/7616175.html>
- Yashfa Ahsan (2024) Navigating Sino-US rivalry: Pakistan's..., Paradigm Shift. Available at: <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/sino-us>
- Yazdanshenas, Z. (2020). Iran's pact with China is bad news for the West. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/09/irans-pact-with-china-is-bad-news-for-the-west/>
- Yu, H. (1970) China's efforts to deepen its ties with Middle Eastern countries: case of Saudi Arabia and Iran, SpringerLink. Available at: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-9633-9\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-9633-9_7) (Accessed: 26 May 2024).
- Zara Ali. (2023). Saudi-iran deal: A test case of China's role as an international mediator. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/06/23/saudi-iran-deal-a-test-case-of-chinas-role-as-an-international-mediator>