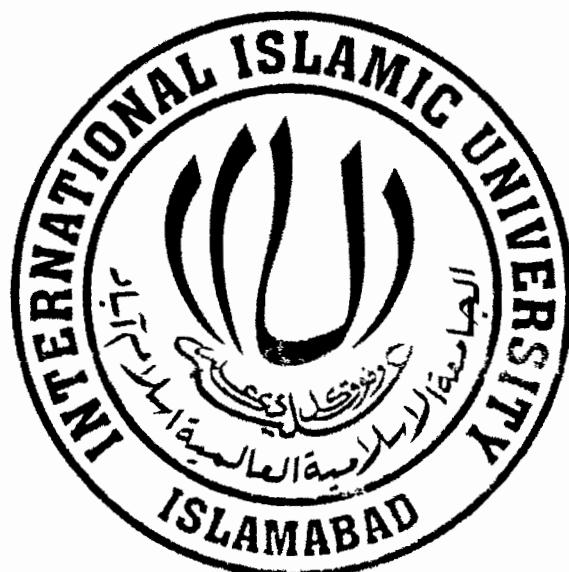


Ph.D Thesis

**CHINA'S SOFT POWER IN MIDDLE EAST: CHALLENGES AND
PROSPECTS**



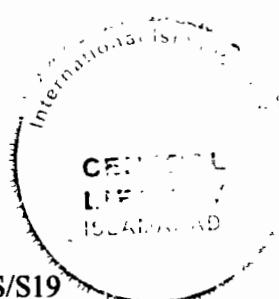
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CHINA'S SOFT POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS



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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Discipline of Social Sciences with Specialization in International Relations at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences International Islamic University, Islamabad.

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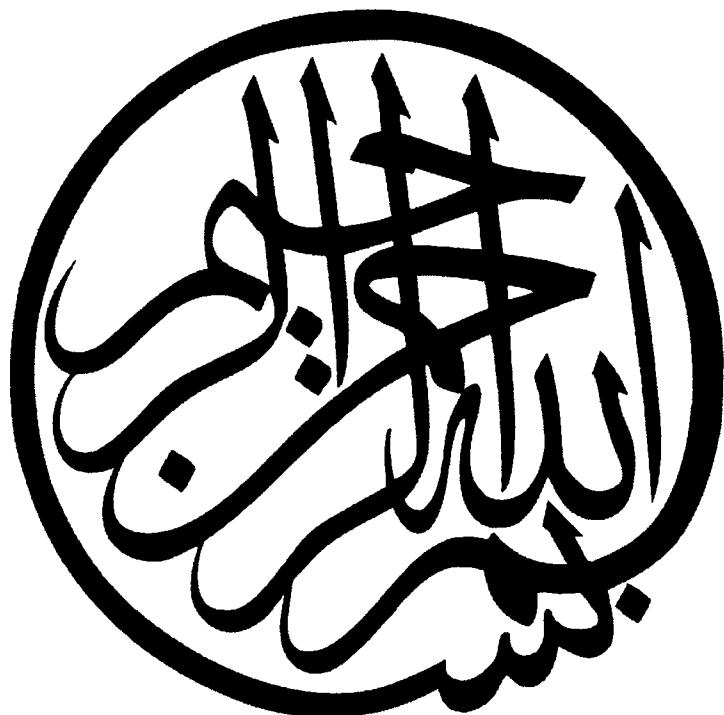
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*In the Name of Allah, the
Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful!*

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has neither as whole nor part thereof been copied from any source. It is further declared that I have prepared this thesis entirely on the basis of my personal effort, made under the sincere guidance of my respected Supervisor and Colleagues. No portion of the work presented in the thesis has been submitted in support of any degree or qualification of this or any other University or Institute of Learning.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my research work to MY PARENTS, TEACHERS, Colleagues AND to those who are sincerely working for the entire humanity !

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First and foremost, I bow my head and submit in the humility to Allah Almighty who is true and only one, for bestowing me with an opportunity for undertaking and successful completion of my thesis.

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Rizwan Ghani Rind
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEW&C Airborne Early Warning and Control

AFVs Armored Fighting Vehicles

AIIB Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

ASEAN Association of South East Asian Nations

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

BCE before the Common Era or before the Current Era

BRI Belt and Road Initiative

BRICS Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

CNN Cable News Network

CPEC China–Pakistan Economic Corridor

CRA Contingent Reserve Arrangement

DIA Defense Intelligence Agency

EU European Union

GCC Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP Gross Domestic Product

HST “ Hegemonic Stability Theory

ICJ International Court of Justice

IMF International Monetary Fund

IOs International Organizations LoN League of Nations

NDB New Development Bank

N.D. No Date

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OBOR One Belt One Road

PCIJ Permanent Court of International Justice

PLA People's Liberation Army

PLAAF People's Liberation Army Air Force

RAF Russian Air force

RAND Research and Development

RMB Renminbi

SAARC South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SCO Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SIPRI Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

SORT Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty

START Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

UN United Nations

UNSC United Nations Security Council

UK United Kingdom

US United States

USAF United States Air Force

WB World Bank

WTO World Trade Organization

WW-I World War I

WW-II World War II

ABSTRACT

With the expansion in Chinese economy as well as its increasing influence in the global world order, China adhered to a modern strategy that focuses on progressing its image peacefully in the world. Middle East is of paramount and overriding global significance as the region is the world's largest energy provider; however, China's soft power in the Middle East is slightly researched. This study examined China's nature of soft power and its core objectives in the Middle East through an in-depth analysis concentrating on economic and political engagements. The study further explored that China's pivot towards the Middle East is mainly driven by its need to make safe its energy sources, along with other economic and political interests. Although China's policy of peaceful rise through soft power under Xi Jinping is primarily concentrated on economic and trade perspectives, yet Beijing has to struggle hard to maintain its neutral narrative as Chinese interest in the volatile region grow. Meanwhile, China's deepening engagement with regional countries on both side of fierce rivalries can drag China into controversies unrelated to its core objectives. Besides this, the major powers will also monitor China's growing influence in the regional stability and political dynamics.

Keywords: China, Soft Power, Middle East, Competition, Middle East Politics, International Politics, Major Powers

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INTRODUCTION

By the end of the Cold War, the world shifted into a uni-polar power structure the disintegration of the Soviet Union led to a new era in which America's widespread political and diplomatic influence and military strength added to the new widespread perception of an America-centric world order, predominantly in the 1990s. The United States converted the global economy into a capitalist structure by adopting a neo-liberal economic policy that encouraged elements such as free trade and open markets. This research work covered the time periods of Chinese involvement in the Middle East from 2001 to 2020.

During US world order, North American and states of Western Europe got largely benefited from the capitalistic system. However, with the turn of the century, the state of affairs changed as new players across the world have been shifting towards the center of the world order, thereby increasingly influencing an alteration in the global balance of power. At the same time, America's power and influence has declined as a consequence of what some scholars call "imperial overstretch", which means the great power's global commitments have become too hard and expensive to sustain. Especially, China is considerably measured to pose a challenge to America's global influence (AEI, 2020)

When in 1976 the Mao regime came to an end, China had the opportunity to strongly redefine its national objectives. It adopted an economic strategy which gave rise to the opening-up of the economy. As China's economy vastly integrated into the global capitalist system, the country thrived to transform into a major global trade and economic power with its economy growing at an average annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of ten percent. As a result of this high growth rate, China is now the world's second largest economy.

Moreover, in the present day China is the leading actor in foreign investments, the world's largest exporter and second-largest importer of merchandise goods. With a population of almost 1.4 billion peoples this economic transformation raised some 800 million people out of poverty. As former president Hu Jintao stated in the annual speech at the National Congress of the Communist Party of China: "China's development has not only enabled its people to move steadily toward prosperity and happiness, but also contributed substantially to the growth of the world economy and the progress of human civilization" (Bukley, 2011).

The unprecedented rise of China that further diffuses the shape of global power, was creating concerns and suspicion amongst other governments. As the Chinese leadership realized that China was no longer an emerging state but was rising to become a global power, it began to adopt a soft power strategy in 2007. The soft power was not only used to show the world its commitment to a peaceful rise and thus to counter the prevailing discourse amongst other states, it was also associated to the transformation of the Chinese nation as a great power (Amesdon, 2019)

The concept of soft power was introduced by Joseph S. Nye in the 1990s. He stated that soft power is the ability to shape someone's preferences through 'attraction', rather than 'coercion', which is the case with hard power. Other academics have ever since increasingly researched and explored the notion of soft power. The variation of 'attractive sources' for soft power particularly has become the subject for scholarly discussions as the notion of 'attraction' is subjective and hence has led to the expansion of the definition of soft power. In the Chinese context, soft power is developed into a more inclusive form of power through attraction. By countering the Western, particularly the American, notion of soft power influence through the implementation of self-defined Chinese conception of soft power, China is trying to attract

adoration and admiration in a different manner (Nye, 2005).

As it has been witnessed in the recent past that China is ever more increasingly present in the region, and the Middle Eastern states have increased their interests with China as well. In comparison to the Western states, in particular the US, China adds no political strings, nor specific conditions to cooperation. Likewise, the Chinese development model, which includes economic growth without the need for political reforms, appeals to several Middle Eastern governments. China is a welcomed actor in the region. The Middle Eastern states are mindful of the economic benefits a good relationship with China will provide them. As China's influence increases, not only in the region, but certainly also in the world, the regional states perceive China as a new power that could counterweight the traditional American influence in the region. (Bowman, 2020)

1. Rational of the Study

In past, the majority of the conducted research on China's global outreach through its soft power strategy has predominantly focused on Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. However, there is a lack of conducted research that concentrates on Chinese soft power in the Middle East. Up till now, the Middle East is of paramount international importance as it is the world's largest energy supplier. Moreover, the Middle East is the world's most disturbed and volatile region, which automatically means that due to this global dependence on the region's energy sources, any turmoil in the region affects the rest of the world. In the light of the transforming world order, it is crucial to understand how regional dynamics are changing as new players are coming into the surface, in this case, China in the Middle East, one of the most important regions in the world. Moreover, analyzing China's sole commitment to soft

power in the Middle East will provide us with a perspective on how nontraditional great power foreign policy is deepening China's relations with the Middle East.

2. Statement of Problem

From the very first day, China approached the Middle East for its ego-economic interests, giving priority to the establishment of strong economic ties with the Middle Eastern states. China's relationship and commitment with the Middle East revolves around energy needs, trade ties and business benefits, as the region is considered a key global cross way and the largest supplier of energy sources. China has significantly increased its economic engagements in the past decade, becoming the biggest trade partner and external investor for many countries in the region, without challenging the US-European led security architecture in the Middle East. Still, the US and Europeans likely feel their interests to be threatened and affected by the Chinese growing economic presence and wider engagements with the region. This thesis explores the China's attitude in the Middle East in the coming times in the context of its soft power policy and investigate its growing significance in the region through economic cooperation and partnership engagements. This study will analyse that China, with its growing intensity, may possibly face local, regional and international reactions from major powers which can be a major challenge for China in the near future.

3. Research Objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To analyze China's growing soft-power endeavors in the Middle East.
- 2) To examine China's geo-economic interest (energy and trade) in Middle East.

- 3) To evaluate the China's extensive geopolitical interests in the Middle East.
- 4) To analyze the regional states and major powers response and reactions to Chinese involvement in the Middle East.

4. Research Questions

The study will shed light on the following questions:

- 1) What are the major endeavors, China made through its soft power in the Middle East?
- 2) How would China achieve its geo-economic interests in the Middle East?
- 3) What are the prospects of Chinese usage of the geopolitics of the Middle East?
- 4) Why will regional states and major powers pose challenges to Chinese geopolitical and geo-economic involvement in the Middle East?

5. Significance of the Study

This study is aimed to explore China's soft power deployment in the Middle East and to postulate an answer to the question what China's foreign policy key objectives are in the Middle East, and how China is using a soft power strategy to gain influence in the Middle East. In order to answer these questions, an assessment will be made through the analysis of the four key soft power forms, economic, cultural, political and military soft power. And the final conclusions and recommendations of this study will further prove beneficial for the regional countries and major think-tanks. Moreover, this study will provide constructive and valuable analysis to the Pakistani leaders and policy-formulators. For the layman and future researcher, this study will uncover critical areas and open new dimensions to comprehend and further explore.

6. Limitations of Study

As this research work describes the China's soft power strategy, limitations are certain to the extent of data-selection and the initiatives that will be highlighted in the research. The limited data selection, however, can be extended by including other initiatives. As sources are lacking that indicate how the Middle East perceives China's soft power strategy, it remains rather unclear to what extent China's soft power strategy is translated in real influence. As China's soft power strategy is a relatively new strategy that China is exercising for last twenty years, it is still unclear how it will develop in the future. However, China has a lot of potential opportunities, as well as challenges, which can upgrade, as well as downgrade China's influence.

7. Theoretical Framework

Soft Power Theory of Joseph Nye

The ideas that constitute soft power are not new. Several great thinkers have contributed with their notions to the concept of soft power as it is known today. Almost a century ago, Antonio Gramsci stated that not the military power, nor the force to control the political and economic arena are the most effective tool to control a state, but ideology and culture. In addition, Hans J. Morgenthau, the founder of the realist school of thought within the field of International Relations, has acknowledged that national power consists of visible and invisible power.

Joseph S. Nye initially introduced the concept of soft power in the 1990s. He later protracted and developed his soft power theory. According to Nye, desired outcomes can be attained without using physical threats or payoffs. By using soft power, others are influenced to reshape their behavior according to your preferences. This is being done without

any practice of threat or exchange as would have been the case with hard command power. On the contrary, soft power relies on attraction. The resources for soft power tend to be associated with the co-optive end of the spectrum of behavior.

A state's capability to effectively exercise soft power rest on the attractiveness of three main assets; its culture, its political values, and its foreign policy. A state's culture becomes attractive and acceptable to others when it embraces and promotes common values and interests. Likewise, a state can have more soft power when its national politics is attractive to other states, for instance by being a strong democracy. Furthermore, a state's behavior in the international arena, either regarding its foreign policy or its behavior within international institutions, does strongly affect the attractiveness of the state. Soft power theory has gained major popularity amongst Chinese academia and officials. In 1993, soft power had been introduced in China in an article by Wang Huning, a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Huning stated that, instead of deploying costly and less effective hard power, states could attract others by having an admirable culture and ideology. However, the article was not really influential, partially caused by the reluctance of conservatives within the CCP to copy strategies of the Western World (Courmont, 2013). After the turn of the century, soft power gained momentum in China. Between 2000 and 2004, 53 Chinese articles were annually published on soft power. This amount accelerated further to an annual average of 314 times between 2005 and 2007 (Lai, 2012).

They agree with Nye that culture, foreign policy, and values are major aspects of soft power. However, Chinese academics have another understanding of attractive institutions and values, emphasizing China's economic development model, the Beijing consensus, as a prominent feature of soft power. Chinese academics stress that China's socioeconomic success and its experience with development give opportunity for soft power. Sophisticated

diplomatic relations and respectable behavior in the international arena are also endorsed to improve a nation's soft power.

Besides the popularity of soft power theory amongst the Chinese academics, Chinese government officials have also embraced soft power. On 30 August 2004, during the Tenth Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad, former president Hu Jintao, stated for the first time in history that China's basic objective should be to combine its own development by enhancing friendships with other states and likewise by promoting a peaceful and stable international environment in which China was to develop soft power sources that would benefit its international status (Lai, 2012, p. 11). Governmental officials were aware that China's rapid economic development was making the world suspicious and concerned (Wang & Lu, 2008, p. 435). Soft power was considered the answer to counter the "threatening rise of China" discourse, and to assure the world that China aimed to commit to a "peaceful rise" (Lai, 2012, p. 2).

In 2007, during the Seventeenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, China formally announces to adopt soft power as a political strategy. In the year that followed, China developed many sophisticated tools of influence to slowly improve its global soft power strategy. In recent years, soft power has become the main strategy of China's foreign policy. Soft power is no longer considered solely a tool to reach great power status, rather China is using it to internationally cultivate a good image, especially in the developing world (Courmont, 2013, pp. 347-350).

With China investing enormous amounts in initiatives that contribute to its national image building, its soft power capacity has grown over the years. China's soft power strategy has mainly

focused on the developing world, particularly Southeast Asia, Africa and increasingly Latin-America (Courmont, 2013, p. 351). Several studies on China's soft power strategy, particularly in Southeast Asia and Africa, have clarified what tools the Chinese government deploys. These tools closely correspond with the ideas of Chinese academics on soft power. China's tools include a soft discourse, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy and trade, developmental aid, and non-interference towards controversial international issues.

8. Literature Review

Historically, emergence of the ties between China and the Middle East dates back to ancient times, when they were associated by trade networks which are now known as the Ancient Silk Roads. Prior to 1980s, China's diplomatic relationship with the region were primarily motivated by its communist ideology. Yet, with the opening up of China to the entire world, China's interests in the Middle East are revived.

The demise of the Mao regime in 1976 provided the communist China the opportunity to revisit its aims and objectives. This resulted in a gigantic shift of its economic policy. Since 1979, China has opened up to large-scale foreign trade and investments and similarly implemented free market reforms. Thousands of government industries were made private and public subsidies were increasingly being used to boost up capitalist development. By giving cheap labor, which China immensely owns, China accessed the technical know-how of foreign firms, which it later on used in the country's own build-up. The housing for the low-wage urban factory workers was being subsidized by the government, providing the chance for massive development because a lot of labor power shifted to the cities. In order for China to strengthen its infrastructure, funds were granted for the construction of modern infrastructure (Petras, 2012).

The financial capitalist plan that had been taken by the communist government resulted in an “economic miracle”. China developed into a major global trade and economic power with an average annual growth of the real GDP of almost ten percent between 1989 and 2016 (Trading Economics). China superseded Japan as the world’s second-largest economy by having an economic output of 1.33 trillion dollars in 2010. Because China proceeds to grow at the same pace as it has done in the last three decennia, it is due to become the world’s largest economy between 2025 and 2035. Ambitious Geo-economic strategy of China is not only limited to economic prosperity, but also includes proactive international diplomacy and the maintenance and promotion of a strong international arena (Olimat, 2010)

China aims at attaining economic development to consistently improve the living standards of the Chinese people so as to maintain national stability. As a result, China has continuously adopted and developed its foreign economic policy; its geo-economic strategy. Geo-economics is “the exercise of economic tools to defend and promote national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results.” (Ferchen, 2016).

China followed the Zou Chuqu, the “going-out” strategy in 2001. This strategic plan started an outward look for Beijing, striving to discover new markets for its exports, as well as searching for new energy suppliers. China has primarily been active in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin-America, but the Middle East has also increasingly attracted Chinese heed mainly due to the Middle Eastern features (Chen, 2011).

One of China’s main barriers has been energy security. The persistent growing economy has gained increasing amounts of oil. China’s first and foremost interests in the Middle East region is securing its access to energy sources (Alterman, 2017). The Middle East developing

markets, which have the power to become a major trade hub that connects three continents, draws China's attention. The region remains an important location for Chinese contractors to undertake major infrastructure projects (Kāzemi & Chen, 2014).

The geographically well located Middle East is playing a significant role in China's new "One Belt, One Road" initiative, the initiative to re-establish the ancient silk roads, which will connect China, through Eurasia, and the Middle East all the way to Europe. As the Middle East is playing such a prominent link in the OBOR initiative, China is keen in transforming the region in a stable conflict-free region, as conflict could be a pitfall for a successful completion of the initiative.

In addition, China is afraid that as a result of the regional disputes radical Sunni Jihadi ideology spreads among its own Muslim population; the Uighurs and Han Muslims. Preserving security in China's wider neighborhood, including the Middle East, is therefore a key interest. The Middle East is also key to China's desire to develop friendly relationships with regional power and to expand its geostrategic beyond its immediate Asia-Pacific neighborhood. Raising involvement in the region will contribute to China's goal to obtain respect from its dwellers, the regional countries, and the rest of the world. Moreover, it will improve China's status as a great power (Scobell & Nader, 2016).

Another important benefit of China in the Middle East is its armaments trade and military cooperation and co-ordination with regional states. Israel has grown to be China's second largest advanced weapons supplier because most Western countries are hesitant in trading high-tech military sales to China. As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said in a meeting with the Chinese "Israeli know-how is more valuable than Arab oil." (Zhu, 2010).

China is also one of the main weapon suppliers to several states in the Middle East besides being a recipient of Israel's high-tech weapons (Zhu, 2010).

Now that China is increasingly present in the region, the Middle Eastern states have accelerated their interest. As compared to the Western states particularly the U.S., China adds no political strings, nor specific conditions to cooperation. When the United States was reluctant to sell armed drones to the UAE, China was willing to offer Chinese produced Wing Loong drones. Similarly, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is increasingly turning to the Chinese weapon market as tensions with the U.S develops (The New Arab).

Correspondingly, Chinese development model, which encompasses economic growth without the need for political reformation, appeals to several Middle Eastern governmental authorities. China is a welcomed player in the region. The Middle Eastern states are mindful of the economic benefits which they will get by developing relations with China. China's influence raises, not only in the region, but also in the world; the states of the region consider China as a new power that could counterweight the traditional American influence in the region (Alterman, 2017).

The States of the Middle East responded positively to China's raising presence in the region. Both parties showed the desire to generate a platform to develop mutual cooperation in which they both would benefit. The former Chinese president Hu Jintao in 2004 visited Egypt to discuss the establishment of the so-called "China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" (CACF) with Amr Moussa, Arab League Secretary-General, and representatives of the member states. The Forum for China's own status through soft power initiatives by offering mutual benefits and development, and fostering friendships without forming depending alliances with the

combination of ‘going out’ and ‘bringing in’ approaches. Even though the establishment of this multilateral cooperation organization is still very recent, the endeavors have resulted in a successive ‘win-win cooperation’ between the China and Arab world.

The institutional construction has been expanded rapidly after the establishment. Several issue specific sub-communication mechanisms are established dedicated to cooperation in the, political, cultural, economic and humanistic field under the Forum’s framework. For example, the ‘Entrepreneurs Conferences and Investment Seminar’, which focuses on the solid economic facets of cooperation, aimed at tangible benefits to both sides. Another instance is the Energy Cooperation Conference to stimulate entrepreneurs to cooperate, co-ordinate and have constructive dialogues regarding energy development (Kuangyi, 2014).

The President of China introduced a strategic framework to erect a 21st century reinvention of the Ancient Silk Roads; the OBOR initiative in the fall of 2013. By establishing a trade corridor over land, the “Silk Road Economic Belt”, and a trade corridor over sea, the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, China’s geo-economic “going-out” strategy seeks mutual advantages for all parties involved. “The Belt and Road Initiative is a way for win-win cooperation that promotes common development and prosperity and a road towards peace and friendship by enhancing mutual understanding and trust, and strengthening all-round exchanges.” (National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). The plan, which features 63 economies, has the power to transform the international economy. Chinese official sources estimate that upon realization the initiative will directly benefit 63 percent of the global population and will account for a collective annual gross domestic product of US \$2, 1 trillion, which accounts for almost thirty percent of the world’s wealth (Johnson, 2016).

By the ancient Silk Roads trade network the region had been interlinked to the Far East for thousands of years. Because the region connects Asia with Africa and Europe, its geography has strategic significance for BRI's triumph. Most governments of Middle East region responded positively to the concept of reviving the ancient Silk Roads. Sixteen Middle Eastern economies are presently integrated into the OBOR plan. The initiative gives the region economic growth prospects, as trade and investment are set to shift 'two-ways'. Several states, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council states, Egypt and Iran, are strengthening their economies by paying attention on becoming major maritime trade hubs. The OBOR plan coincides perfectly with the ongoing undertakings. Additionally, the initiative strengthens ongoing structural transformations in the Middle East, for example by improved infrastructure construction and industrial capacity building (Grieger, 2016).

Though China has been attempting to improve its ties with the Arab states, an explicit strategy was missing. As a consequence, the government of China issued its first Arab policy paper on January 13, 2016. The blueprint shows China's long-term promise to the region and shows a more active policy in the region. Even though multiple focus lays on the further deepening of their economic relationship, the policy paper also describes China's commitment to peace and development in the region of Middle East. Overall, the paper is divided up into five parts, namely, deepen China-Arab strategic cooperative relations of comprehensive cooperation and common development; China's Arab policy; strengthen China-Arab cooperation in an all-around manner; China-Arab States Cooperation Forum and its follow-up actions; relations between China and Arab regional organizations (Xinhua News Agency, 2016).

China has encountered immense economic prosperity since 1980s; an average annual

growth of around ten percent. China is improving its global economic presence by reaching outwards through financial diplomacy. In accordance with its geo-economic strategy, the government's main objective is cultivating economic ties with other states. China also relied on this typical "business-first approach" as far as the region of Middle East is concerned. In accordance with China's official statistics, the total trade volume with the Middle East raised by 87 percent to \$100 billion from 2005 to 2009. This volume further accelerated to \$222 billion in 2012 (Kāzemi & Chen, 2014).

Moreover, in 2013, China stood the second largest trading partner of the Middle East, while being the biggest trading partner of ten individual states (Sun & Zoubir, 2015). After two years, China turned to be the world's largest exporter to the region. To facilitate further economic expansion, the government of China consistently seeks to enhance its relation with the region. With the establishment of several platforms for the improvement of cooperation, such as the CASC, as well as including the region in the OBOR initiative, China's attempts to stress the growing economic ties as "win-win" ties (Sun & Zoubir, 2015).

The financial relations have been erected on three main pillars: infrastructure, energy and manufactured goods. In 2014, President Xi Jinping introduced the "1+2+3" formula, which not only give priority to energy cooperation, but also stresses the significance of deepening trade and investment, as well as improving cooperation in new sectors, such as renewable and nuclear energy and aerospace technology (Ministry of Foreign Affairs , 2016).

Because soft power has become the important feature of China's foreign policy, culture has played an important aspect in the strategy of China's outwards imagine projection as a state with rich history and culture. As Nye states, an attractive culture will help to contribute to a

positive outward reputation, which improves a state to be more influential (Nye, 2004).

In this connection, China considers itself in a favorable condition as its culture is amongst the oldest, global reaching, and most recognizable cultures in the worldly states. During the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party in 2007, former President Hu Jintao stated that “The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, will definitely be accomplished by the thriving of Chinese culture” (Liu Y, 2011).

Because of China’s geo-economic initiative, its diplomatic endeavors have rapidly been influential in recent years. This has brought about increased cooperation and co-ordination in other fields, such as cultural exchanges. Though the ties between China and the Middle Eastern states have enhanced immensely in the 21st century, China’s political role has remained moderate. Unlike Western states, which strive to implement their political, e.g. democratic, values in a unilateral way, China deliberately does not meddle in other states’ internal affairs out of respect for their sovereignty, independence, traditions, and lifestyles. This policy of non-interventionist contributes to China’s pragmatic stand towards the relationship it fosters with all states in the region, encompassing regional rivals, as it perceives that good ties contribute to better economic opportunities.

Being the world’s most turbulent region, the Middle East regional matters have often affect the rest of the world. Now that China finds the Middle East as an increasingly significant market for energy and other regional exports, China aims at maintaining friendly ties with all focal regional players, such as Iran, Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Chinese lack of political baggage produces benefits for its role in the region. With the fear of losing this position, Chinese have been upset to get engaged in regional issues (Alterman & Garver, 2008).

In order for China not to get engaged in regional disputes, it deploys its soft power military missions under the banner of international missions that establish and promote peace and development and give benefits to the whole international community. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and around the Somali waters has become an international problem on maritime transport. For China, as a world economic power, the Gulf of Aden is significant for the access it provides to the Suez Canal, an important gateway to Europe. The significance of this gateway will increase further due to its role in the OBOR plan. Since 2009, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) escort fleets are active in the counter-piracy mission. This mission has raised Chinese soft military existence as the PLAN fleet visit several states in the region, like Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Peace and security in the region of Middle East are of great importance for China. Chinese soft military activities in the region have become a significant instrument to secure its own financial interest, protect Chinese labors in the region, and to produce soft power. As a contributor to international missions, China is placing itself in a favorable light internationally and domestically, thereby spreading its international influence. Its indulgence in global peacekeeping endeavors also gives China a venue to increasingly influence and shape global norms, and shows China's commitment to a peaceful rise to global power status, rather than forming a threat (Wang B. Y., 2013). Moreover, its slow involvement in the Middle East aligns with China's broader strategy for the region; the improvement of its ties with all states in the region of Middle East, which could help to contribute to more economic opportunities, as well as more influence in the region.

China is chasing its target to be the world's major powers. In last few decades, it was expected that China is facing a lot of challenges. These challenges include the poverty and

underdevelopment. It was considered that these challenges would constrain China's ability to influence global events (Arun, 2018). The success of China and its progress towards the target to become World's major power is considered as an aggressive intent toward the dominance of major powers. China itself declared that China is not seeking for the regional and international leadership rather it is focusing on its own internal development (Calabrese, 2017). However, China should approach to international affairs by securing its position, observing calmly, coping calmly with affairs, hiding its capacities, biding its time, and maintaining a low profile.

Although China has not yet achieved the position of US as global power, but its rapidly growing political, economic, and cultural influence is remarkable. In recent years, China has achieved great success in global economic growth. China's economy consists of \$1.8 trillion in foreign currency reserves and now China is planning to invest internationally via its sovereign wealth fund. China's need for the commodities, from oil copper, has raised the world prices (Admin, 2005).

China is also a major trading partner of different countries such as Brazil, India, South Korea, Japan, and Africa. Interestingly, China's trading with India is one of its South Asia's biggest trading destinations. In 2010, trade between Africa and China rose from \$2 billion to \$130 billion. In 2011, China's trade volume with South Korea increased to \$ 220 billion and it is expected that the trade volume will reach to \$300 billion by 2015. The trade volume of China-Japan also reached to \$340 billion 2011 (Admin, 2005). China's GDP is growing day by day and have become five times then the GDP in 1979-1998. The current China's GDP is about US \$8.227 trillion (Bank, 2013).

In the last decades the development and sustainable growth in China has moved the country to a special status all over the world. This development and growth in economy of China not only strengthened the country but also it enhanced its role in global governance. China was the first country who voiced the slogan of constructive engagements in the world and this idea was presented by China's president Xi Jinping. South Asia, being a neighbor, has some significance in increasing the constructive engagements agenda. This agenda is evident of the active leadership of China in South Asia. China announced different investment packages and programs to enhance trade for South Asian countries and became actively interested in Afghanistan for the development and building of peace in Afghanistan (Dettmer, 2019).

After the agreements with South Asian countries, China focused to work with Pakistan and started many projects in areas of investments in Pakistan. China has also been participated in global security issues as an active player, such as global warming, energy security, and HIV/AIDS. China's officials have been discussing about evolving perspectives of China about international issues. China has shown self-confidence in promotion of its principles and interests in defying the European Union, US, and other major powers. When China is challenged by domestic unrest, over currency valuation, and human rights, then it acts like a defiant in international affairs. Globally, Chinese power and ever-growing influence has evolved measurably (Unit, 2008). Now, without China's assistance, no major international challenge can be solved effectively.

China's globalization embrace has meant that China's interests have risen commensurately. China is the United Nations Security Council's veto-wielding member due to which it has unique authority to act on the international challenges, such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, energy security, climate change, or human rights (Marcus, 2018). China continues to explain that China is developing country and it does not want to alter the international system. However, how is it

possible that a nation of 1.3 billion people will not leave any kind of influence on international system? In Asia, very few regional initiatives or national foreign policies have been developed without considering the thinking and reactions of China. Somehow, China, itself looks at its power growth in complex ways (Admin, 2005).

Multiplication and division principle has multiplied the problems to 1.3 billion people of China and has divided the achievement with the same amount. That is why; the look inside the country is different than the outside view. China is facing per capita societal challenges related to collective measure of its political and economic (Marcus, 2018). According to Chinese scholars, in international affairs the China's development plans and its growing economic is influencing the World. China has identified the "strategic opportunity", which is in favor of "peace and development" all over the World. On the other side, the United States is more concerned with South Asia and Middle East on the concept of "war on terrorism" (Calabrese, 2017). The International revulsion has also presented China as an opportunity to enhance its attractiveness, focus inward, present international conduct models, and shape the international system.

The importance of China's Hierarchy of relations is due to its relations with major powers, neighbours states and developing nations (Sheet, 2013). Interaction of China with the developing world is of great importance, which started in 1990s and was accelerated by Chinese leader, "Hu Jintao". China recently added a new concept of multilateralism to safeguard its interests. This concept reassures China's international system commitments, and enhances the confidence of China's developing-world to breath broadly. Whenever China makes a strategic partnership regionally then the bilateral relationships of China have divided into "strategic partner" and "cooperative partner" categories (Sheet, 2013). China is making such agreements just to reflect the relative importance of its multilateral and bilateral relationship (Joseph S. Nye, 2005). Strategic

partnerships are alternative for China to the concept of alliances, which are provocative, exclusionary, and harmful to global interests of China.

China gives priority to its economic growth and threats to its territorial integrity. Due to this priority, China considers that it is most important to develop the bilateral relationship with the US. China knows that US political, economics, and military power had been influenced the Asia or even the world which can complicate China's achievement of strategic goals and economic development (Jones, 2012). US technology, domestic market and investment are affecting China's development and its economic ties. There are so many controversies between China and US related to Taiwan and Tiber trading but even than China feels bit confident about its relationship with the US. The interdependence of growing economic between China and United States is also reducing the public crises between both countries (EIA, 2018). According to Chinese scholars, however, the United States may divert its attention to China as Islamic extremism recedes. Somehow, China is also developing alternative relationships with other East Asia's major powers and promoting a multi-polar world.

Other major powers include India, Russia, Europe, and Japan. China is now trying to develop its relationships with other major powers of the world. China's Official relations are so warm with Russia. Both nations are trying to find the common solutions to constrain US power. Russia is the supplier in arms and energy sales sector in trading and China is the demander, so both take advantage of their complementary interests in their bilateral trade. Russia supplies the advanced technology and military equipment to China (Mitchell D. J., 2007). Both countries are the permanent members of United Nations Security Council. Both countries have great coordination to deal with international security issues. Both countries blocked the sanctions against Burma, Iran, and Zimbabwe. The opposition of US missile defense deployment was done by both

countries which proves their great coordination and partnership (Mitchell D. J., 2007). Both countries are trying hard for the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China's investments highlight that the priority area of strategic planning of China is the Central Asia. However, China-Russia partnership will neither oppose the United States nor the SCO interfere in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Indeed, Russian strategists wary for the China's rapid growth implication and its influence in different regions (Mitchell D. J., 2007).

Despite of their troubled history, China is now trying to stabilize its relationship with India (Bajpaee, 2007). China and India are now focusing on economic development, trade and their common interests. China is bit worried about the US-India relations and so China has alternatively tried to make good relations with long-time ally Pakistan (Bajpaee, 2007). China's military development and its political support for Pakistan have threatened India. China's is willing to stabilize relations with its neighbors for the sake of peaceful international environment but somehow, China has to face so many challenges regarding to the internal development and its regional development. China is also interested to develop its regional relations for which it started a new project of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Now, India is raising so many issues on Chinese investments in Pakistan especially in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). India has a lot of issues on Chinese investment for the development of Karakoram Highway and Chinese involvement for the construction of Liberation Army (PLA) (Marcus, 2018).

India has also protested for Chinese investment in the areas of Pakistan and also protested for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. India has a lot of issues because China did not invest anything for the development of Arunachal Pradesh, India. Even when Japanese invested their money for the development projects of Arunachal Pradesh (India) then China opposed this investment of Japan in India. The Prime Minister of India, Modi, is trying to strengthen its position

in South Asian region, for that he has arranged multiple visits in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. India is also trying to develop its relations with Japan and US (Joseph S. Nye, 2005). Modi has made many visits to China for the discussion of regional economic position of India. After China's investment in Silk Route, India is trying to strengthen itself and launched a project "Cotton Route" along with North South Corridor and trying to make a good partnership with neighbouring countries. However, China is also struggling hard to make India satisfied and China-India trading is considered as world's largest trading which also contribute in China-India relationship strength (Bajpaei, 2007).

In 2007, China has now changed its approach toward Japan because Chinese leaders understood that somewhere the public propaganda of China was creating problems in China-Japan relationship (Joseph S. Nye, 2005). For the development of its regional relations with its neighbors, China is now trying to patch up with Japan and to reduce the gap of conflicts between both countries and to maintain the positive relations.

In 2005, the European Union tried to develop its economic relations with China. However, the Europe is concerned with the restricted property rights violations, undervalued currency of China, product safety, ballooning bilateral trade, and low-tech manufacturing industry (Marcus, 2018). China's records of human rights and political system also played an important role for its bilateral relations with Europe. China's aid policy in Africa has fired up the European nations because they consider that China is affecting their efforts for human rights promotion, environmental health and good governance (Mitchell, 2007).

Pakistan-China relationship is based on the common interests and cooperation. This relationship is multidimensional and is categorized as strategic. In 1960s, Pakistan was interested

to have meaningful security, strategic, economic and political relations with China. Pakistan preferred its friendly relations with China instead of being a member of South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) (Jintao, 2007). Now both countries, Pakistan and China, are thinking to make this bilateral relationship of both countries beyond stereotypes and also to reinterpret the strategic dimensions. Rise in China's economic condition and downturn in Pakistan's economic condition, due to war on terror, provide a reason to Pakistan for development of bilateral cooperation. To revamp the economic growth of Pakistan there is a need to revisit the relationship of Pakistan and China. In addition, it will enable Islamabad's capacity to deal with governance issues (Paper, 2005).

Currently, the relations between Pakistan and China are restricted in some sectors due to security situation of Pakistan. These sectors include defense and media. Now Pakistan has opportunity to rise its economic growth because Pakistan is a gate way for China for the development of China's relations with other countries (Dawn, 2015). Historically, Pakistan-China relations could not achieve their goals for the benefits to their economics. China got benefits from the Chinese investments in different projects of Pakistan but this investment was not beneficial for export capacity of Pakistan. Pakistan and China also started a new agreement named "Free Trade Agreement" (FTA) but the outcome of this agreement was not up to the mark due to numerous issues. China-India trade is larger than both trade between India and U.S and the trade between Pakistan and China (Dawn, 2015; Bajpaei, 2007).

In the era of Cold War, China may have different strategic alignments, but today China is getting more profit from its regional relations and stability with India. India has great potential and constitutes the bigger market within the global economy. Now Pakistan and China are trying to establish economic corridor to strengthen the strategic condition and economic growth of Pakistan.

This establishment will develop the Gwadar sea port. Gwadar port has the potential to work as a catalyst for various projects such as oil storage, trans-shipment of bulk cargo, petrochemicals, refinery, industrial zones and export processing. Gwadar port has the potential to prove itself as beneficiary for neighboring counties in the region. However, in the establishment of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) there are many issues related to instability and internal violence of Pakistan (Khan, 2015).

Economic relations are growing, in a wider global and regional context, between China and Pakistan. The downturn in the economics of Pakistan is due to the War on Terror (WoT) and it has a great impact on Pakistan's effective governance and socio-economic health. This economic downturn is also affecting Pakistan's role at regional level especially amongst the Muslim world. The enhancement in the bilateral relations between both countries, Pakistan and China, can be beneficial for addressing issues such as social, political, and economic (Jawad, 2013). After all, Sino-Pak relations are called deeper than oceans, higher than the mountains, and time-tested.

For the sake of stability and peace in the region, each country should play a positive role to ensure equality of status, opportunity for progress and prosperity will all other countries. It assures that economic development is the major source to advocate the stability and peace in the regions. The goal of China is to ensure the security, peace, economic growth and development by actively cooperating with the neighbours. However, to make its position stronger globally, China needs to firstly develop its relations with its regional countries. If China's relations at regional level will be stronger, then all the countries will trust on China's investments for their development and as a result it will leave great impact on international system (Dawn, 2015).

For the stronger regional relations, China started a corridor establishment by which it can make stronger relations at regional levels and once it will become stronger regionally then it will nail its success at internal level and then no one will be able to defeat China. Somehow, for the establishment of regional relations, there are some issues. According to the researches, 74 to 79% regional projects of China which started in 1990s have been fallen to 60% which shows the either the Chinese projects were not finished timely or are still in progress (Bank, 2013).

This indicates the rate of success of Chinese investments and also the quality maintenance. Now these ineffective investments of China have become headlines of the world because these investments has cost \$10 trillion to China out of which 62% investments of China were wasteful which is equivalent to 6.8 trillion. It was considered regionally that when China invest in developed countries, such as Australia or US, then it uses the expert labour and follow the legal structure but when China invest in developing countries, such as Pakistan or Afghanistan, then it is not concerned with the quality of work rather it follows the low cost and quick approach parameters (EIA, 2018).

Similarly, now China is seeking to invest in different projects of Gulf and India to gain access to their raw material. As discussed by a senior analyst (Calabrese, 2017), the use of Chinese foreign investments contradicts to the paper work issued by China at the time of agreement of the projects. In the last decades, the bilateral investments of China in Africa have been opaque in nature. On the other hand, in different project stressing on Chinese services and China has brought labour from mainland and the salaries and sustenance are paid to their families in China directly and this is paid from the package of investments (Paper, 2005).

In this way, China is getting full benefit of the investments in other countries indirectly. When China is involved in Africa, America, Pakistan and Afghanistan then its neo-imperialist role is discussed by analysts. In 2006, China took advantage of Afghanistan's mineral deposits opened by President of Afghanistan (Unit, 2008). China also took advantage of Afghan's natural resources when Karzai opened the foreign investment projects. When the whole world was busy in world war at that time the China was working for economic imperialism. The analysts further stated that China made FATA agreement regionally just to control and facilitate the operations against the terrorism and also for the sake of the control on East Turkestan Islamic Movement (Medeiros, 2007).

China is one of the largest peace keeping contributors to UN missions (Operations, 2008). According to the records, China has been committed to 267 treaties and has joined 130 international organizations (Paper, 2005). China has now become international nonproliferation regime's constructive member (Medeiros, 2007). As China is now acting globally, so it has to follow the international system which is developed by the Western powers. With a commitment to equality of states, international law, international affairs democratization, and its peaceful rise, China views the World Trade Organization (WTO) and United Nations as helpful for the promotion of its strategic principles and goals. China is also confident that its role in UN Security Council as a veto-wielding member will provide the reassurance to China that these institutions (World Trade Organization and United Nations) will not affect its national interests and sovereignty (Medeiros, 2007).

China is not much comfortable with the current international system due to the current US alliance-based security structure in Europe and Asia. On the other hand, China is not opposing US or others in East Asia which supports the structure maintenance. Instead, China is now supporting

the Asia's development, confidence-building, regional security and cooperation. China has also joined the dialogue arrangements to enhance its economic advantages, international voice, security cooperation and international confidence-building (Medeiros, 2007). According to the observers, in East Asia, China is trying to destroy the US alliances' importance for international security. China's involvement in ASEAN and Shanghai Cooperation Organization are the examples of this intent. Also, China's substantial financial and political commitment for the development of the region's financial system is considered as a challenge to the United States' dominance in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). China is now bit confused to join the groups such as the International Energy Agency and Group of Eight (G-8) because there was a time when China thought the rules of these institutions are not helpful for the establishment of China (Medeiros, 2007).

China always tried to keep itself focusing inward, low profile, and reassuring the implications of China's rise has become hurdle to challenge the old institutions or for the development of new global institutions. Somehow, the international community has taken steps for the encouragement of its integration for the development of new global institutes or to challenge the global institutes (Mitchell, 2007). China's policy for the direct competition with IMF and its policy of unconditional foreign aid has become a most important questions about impact of China on the international system which is promoting the development and justice of good governance, environmental protection, labor and human rights (Mitchell, 2007).

However, China's principle of development is not the only universal model, it does not fit to all the nations and each nation should decide its preferred developmental path (Jintao, 2007). China's growing influence and principles does not need an impact. The development model of China has achieved currency because of its apparent success. Finally, China has demonstrated

some disinclination for the acceptance of some international standards which has become a question mark about China's consistent commitment to unspoken and spoken rules of the current system. China also took US complaints of WTO against China in political terms rather than a legal matter of economic intercourse (Jintao, 2007). In 2001, a US spy plane was targeted by Chinese fighter and was forced to land. Also China caught a US flight crew for about 2 weeks on Hainan Island. An agreement was implemented to regulate US and Chinese forces interactions in international space. In 2007, China launched an antisatellite weapon but it failed to provide acceptance at international practice because it may be a risk for other nations' assets. China also denied US permission for the development of port in Hong Kong (Jintao, 2007).

Whatever, the conflicts may be but the reality is that China is developing day by day and its development is a great challenge for the other super powers. China's economic growth and trading volume growth, regionally and internationally, is making it stronger and even strongest all over the World (Bank, 2013). That is why China's Rise has become the focus of World's analysts and reporters. Everyone is keeping an eye on China's next action. China's development model may not be a universal model but it is reality that it has influenced the world in an effective way and we can call it as the inspirational model (EIA, 2018). Now China's investments in different countries are making it stronger and the strength of China is affecting US and Russia's repute which obviously cannot be tolerated by super power or even we can call them previous super powers because China is the super power of the future.

The bilateral engagement between China and Middle East is not new; instead it has history of over 2000 years. However, this relationship has been smooth. In 1955, first kindled bilateral interaction was established through Bandung Asian-African Conference (Ghosa, 2016). Arab Spring and Chinese Cultural Revolution disrupted these relations and both parties could not resume

their interaction until 1970s. Finally, in 1990s, China and Middle East started improving their regional relations under leadership of Deng Xiaoping (Hayoun, 2016). This interaction was more established on the basis of economic interests, as China's rapidly growing economy enabled it to offer multiple products and opportunities to Middle Eastern countries. In return, Middle Eastern Countries helped China to energy resources requirements.

A report by BBC News (2011) reflected that during the Arab Spring, US and other international powers have been showing their great influence in Middle East. The basic purpose of this influence was to break power of the Middle East and get proper access to its oil resources. Such involvement led to severe conflicts, such as Syrian conflicts. However, Russia and China had been playing friendly role to support Arabs and develop better relationship with the (BBC, 2021). Russia and Syria had remained strongly allied in major areas so weakening Syria could help Russia to maintain its power at regional and international level. Initially, Russia supported the government of Assad via all type of material, technical and political support. This was because the Assad government had also helped Russia to deal with the terrorism in the region. However, later, with its political, economic, and social benefits, Russia started funding the anti-military forces and provoked them to remain involved in anti-government activities. This proved China's loyal approach towards Middle East and reflected its soft power structure. China has never tried to take control over things rather it focuses on developing bilateral relations with nations and to get benefits in return. Similarly in the Middle East, China played a significant role in supporting the government to gain its economic interests in the region and beyond (Jin, 2016).

China understood that Middle East became deeply embroiled in military conflicts by the US and thus it started supporting them with equipment and resources to remain strong. This also fueled positive relationship between China and the Middle Eastern countries, where both worked

on the economic interests (Liao, 2013). China also established a new forum, named China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASC), in 2004 with the aim to exchange views between China and Middle Eastern countries and promote cooperation in culture, politics, trading, technology, and international affairs. Another purpose of this forum was to advance peace and development. This forum worked as an important mechanism to enhance the bilateral relations between two parties, facilitating trade, and cooperation between them (Luft, 2016). The best thing about the China is that it has consistently upheld its official rhetoric of nonintervention and non-interference in the regional internal affairs. China works on the principle of giving and taking without imposing power or using weapons. This strategy of China leaves its soft image to the world.

China is having a very significant political and global position now, due to its increasing economic power and better bilateral relations at regional level (Calabrese, 2017). China is trying its best to be the next Super Power of the world, but for that it never used any war strategy. The major difference between China and the United States is the use of power, where the US has been using its military power to have control over nations but China use bilateral relations to influence the regions. Xi proposed “One Belt One Road” Project in 2013 with the aim to connect major countries in the Middle East and to expand China’s diplomatic and economic influence in the region. Through this road, the countries can easily export and import their product rapidly and safely (Olimat, 2013).

The OBOR is expected work as the driving force to tie two parties; China and the Middle East. With this project, Xi aimed to connect over 100 countries for the sake of bilateral benefits in trading, economy, and nuclear projects. However, after the complete negotiations and meetings with the countries, 40 of them signed bilateral agreement with China to jointly build One Belt One Road. For this project, China invested its \$50 billion at the beginning in 2017, and is expected to

invest more in future (Sharma & Kundu, 2016). Through this road, China will be connected to Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and many other countries. Through these projects, China has also been helping many countries, during the disasters and war scenarios. This reflects his positive approach towards International relations and its Soft influence over nations. With such positive and soft approach, China has been gaining power and control over the region, where countries are becoming more dependent on China for their economic, political, architectural, and social decisions. Now, almost everything in market belongs to Chinese manufacturers and this reflects how it has been creating its influence in global market (Mitchell, 2007).

In the beginning of twenty first century, China had understood that growing political and economic interest has increased the need of urgency to enhance its relations with the Middle Eastern countries. It not only focused on the Middle East, but also started developing its relations with the Asian countries through multiple projects, out of which CPEC is the most prominent one (Paper, 2005). This project started between China and Pakistan with the aim to connect all regional countries and gain bilateral benefits from each other. CPEC is a massive project that is very important not only for the Pakistan but also for China from different perspectives. The very first interest of both countries are regional linking for better neighboring relationship with all.

Along with this, Pakistan expects for better economy, architectural, and social development through the projects associated with CPEC (Dawn, 2015). A lot of projects are associated with CPEC, which will not only bring architectural development in Balochistan, Pakistan but also for the entire country by different means. These projects will increase chances of employments for the Pakistan's youth, as multiple road and rail projects will open opportunities of hiring Pakistani graduates and labor. CPEC aims to connect the Gwadar Port of Pakistan to the China's north-western Xinjiang province, for which China will invest huge amount for road construction, railway

construction, and improvements at Gwadar Port. In this way, it will improve infrastructure of Pakistan, through which the country can export its products to regional country without wasting too much money on the transportation. Also, it will improve awareness amongst people, as well as bring advancement in educational sectors. Additionally, rising domestic challenges due to terrorism and threat by the Taliban push China to develop better relationships with Middle East and work on the principle of cooperation to avoid any security threat to Chinese nation (Mitchell, 2007).

A report was published by US Energy Information Administration (EIA, 2018) that since 2013, China overtook the US as the largest importer of the crude oil from the Middle East. According to the estimates, Middle East's crude oil is expected to account for the 70% of energy needs of China. Not only this, but also China's economic engagement with the region goes beyond the energy field. This data reflects how important it is for China to develop bilateral relations with the Middle East, whereas in return it has been providing the region with great military equipment support, and funds to deal with US invasions (Luft, 2016).

In 2014, China also proposed 1+2+3 model of cooperation in 6th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab Forum. Through this model, China and Middle East agreed for the bilateral cooperation in investment, trade, and infrastructure. Along with this, both regions agreed to enhance their cooperation in the nuclear energy and space satellites. The targets are high and therefore China has been helping the Iraq with equipment and funds to fight against the United States and never give up against the power. After the US withdrawal, China proposed its investment projects in Iraq's oil Industry to not only strengthen the region economically but also to make it more powerful for future. With this cooperation, China expects economic, trade, and nuclear benefits in return (Irish, 2016).

In the case of the Israel–Palestine Conflict, Xi proposed a four point approach to Mahmoud Abbas in July 2017 promoting political settlement of the issue. The four points are advancing the Two-State Solution based on 1967 borders; upholding the concept of common, comprehensive, co-operative and sustainable security, immediately ending Israeli settlement building, taking immediate measures to prevent violence against civilians, and calling for an early resumption of peace talks; coordinating international efforts to put forward peace promoting measures that entail joint participation at an early date; as well as promoting peace through development and cooperation between the Palestinians and Israel. Additionally, Xi also proposed a China–Palestine–Israel trilateral dialogue mechanism shortly afterward (Xinhuanet, 2017).

Throughout the process of mediation between Palestine and Israel, China has consistently upheld the Two-State Solution and supported the establishment of a Palestinian state enjoying full sovereignty and independence on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. More widely, China has engaged in political consultations with a wide range of states and organizations like Turkey, Iran, France, Israel, the Arab League, the EU, the BRICS, as well as the UN in mediating peace in the Middle East.

China under Xi has clearly augmented its engagement with the region diplomatically at an unprecedented level. This diplomatic activism, however, should not be exaggerated as a hegemonic Chinese aspiration to replace the US in the Middle East. The very fact that China has consistently maintained its neutral position towards the Yemen Crisis, the Palestine–Israel Conflict, and the Syria and Libya Crises clearly shows China's efforts to avoid the interventionist US path in the region. On multiple occasions, Chinese officials emphasized that China had no private interests in the Middle East and the country stood ready to play a constructive role in the Middle East by upholding an unbiased and objective position on the regional affairs. In Xi's speech to the Arab

League in 2016, he reiterated this: Instead of looking for a proxy in the Middle East, we promote peace talks; instead of seeking any sphere of influence, we call on all parties to join the circle of friends for the Belt and Road Initiative; instead of attempting to fill the “vacuum”, we build a cooperative partnership network for win-win outcomes (Xinhua 2016).

In the same speech, Xi stressed that China would strive to be constructor of the Middle East peace, promoter of Middle East development, propeller of Middle East industrialization, supporter of Middle East stability, as well as a partner of Middle Eastern public diplomacy (N.D. 2017). The following year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, further reiterated Beijing's stance at a joint press conference held with the Foreign Minister of Palestine: China has no geopolitical consideration in its role in the Middle East, nor intention to make a balance with any other country. We always propose historical justice and uphold international righteousness in the Middle East issue. China welcomes any country outside the region including the US that wants to support the Middle East more, and give more attention to the Palestine-Israel issue (FMPRC 2017).

9. Research Gap

From the above-mentioned reviewed and analyzed literature, it is evident that the increasing significance of China in the Middle East has formed accelerating competition for the traditional external power in the Middle East. As per studies say the U.S. has increasingly become unpopular in the region, many states deem China an alternative strategic partner able to contain America's influence in the region. Undoubtedly, Chinese entry creates new challenges for American position in the Middle East, there are also multiple areas where data were hard to be found like the geo-strategic and geopolitical position of China in the Middle East in the coming years, and China-US combined role for possible cooperation to advance shared

interests. These were less literature available on strategic cooperation between Chinese and the American in the region, which could help the Middle East move away from crises and conflict and towards becoming a prosperous region that connects the major regions internationally.

10. Research Methodology

In this research study, an in-depth analysis has been made on China's soft power strategy in the case of the Middle East. This research study examined China's increasing influence in the Middle East and its soft power policy objectives. This work is prepared by a qualitative literature based on research design which concentrates on the key elements of China's soft power strategy, its geo-economic cooperation and geopolitical interests. Within the boundaries of this research, these sections provided a precise, and as complete as possible, in-depth analysis on China's soft power strategy.

As qualitative research gives a great deal of descriptive detail which fits within this thesis' research objective. Generally, Power, and in particular soft power, is very difficult to measure. In other words, quantifying soft power is complex. The absence of quantitative data posed weakness on the outcome of the thesis. However, as a qualitative design provides the ability for in-depth descriptions of the contemporary conditions of Chinese soft power in the Middle East, it was the right method in this research.

a) Data Collection

By employing a literature based research method, data was collected by analyzing a wide variety of sources. At the first place, the primary sources were used to identify the Chinese government's own perspective on its soft power strategy and its relation with the region. These

primary sources included governmental documents, such as the 2016 Arab policy paper, and speeches of Chinese officials, such as the speeches of the former and current Presidents. In addition, a wide selection of secondary sources were used during the collection of data; academic literature, research reports, newspapers, and publications on websites of particular institutions, such as the Confucius institute. The sources were selected based on their quality and accuracy for this thesis. Furthermore, reliable secondary sources will be used by analyzing their objectivity by focusing on the absence of personal bias and value-freedom.

As this research study is covering a rich region including seventeen Middle Eastern states in this particular case, it is essential to acknowledge some limitations of this research. Although most states share the same language and religion, the states are not homogeneous. In fact, they have different historical, political, social and economic backgrounds. It was made sure that this research did not examine each state individually, rather it tried to describe the current situation in the context of the Middle East from a regional perspective. Researching China in the Middle East was a relatively little-researched field. Therefore, this research was primarily explorative and descriptive.

b. Research Design

This research work was designed as a case study of Middle East focusing mainly on China Soft Power Policy to establish cultural contacts, political stability and economic progress without arm confrontation in the region. The research was mainly descriptive using argumentative, comparative and analytical approaches to reach solid conclusion.

c. Case Study

The research was based on a single case study which was concentrated and illustrative on studying the increasing role of China in bringing economic growth in Middle East and promoting stability and prosperity in the volatile region. As a case study, this thesis explained the ways the China's soft power impact the region and stabilizes it for the good of common people. China through his soft economic power may help promote peace between the religious rivals, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and bring them together to work on common issues and mutual interests in order to end the old approaches that caused stagnation in their relations and hindered the evolution of a dynamic economic and political relationship.

A case study is precisely a unit of analysis and an empirical analysis that explores and investigates a contemporary or any major past event or era that continues to exercise influence on the present. While explaining this phenomenon and its lasting impacts, this investigation employs realistic contexts coupled with multiple sources of evidence and their rigorous cross-examination and thorough analysis. The case studies are always concerned with how and why things happen (Aredson, 1998).

Moreover, a case study is not intended to concentrates on an entire organization. Rather, it is intended to focus on a particular issue, feature or characteristic and its comprehensive analysis. Initially, the method of case study was used to examine and understand various training processes within a given organization.

d. Data Analysis

Once the data is collected, the researcher analyzed the collected data using the theory of Soft Power to show how the Chinese intends to promote economic progress, cultural developments, and political stability in the region. The researcher also used comparative and

analytical analysis to reach any conclusions.

11. Organization of Study

This thesis is mainly organized into the following major chapters.

- a. Introduction
- b. Theoretical Framework
- c. China Rise in the Context of Soft Power Strategy
- d. Exercise of Chinese Soft Economic Power in Middle East e. Chinese Geopolitical Objectives in the Middle East
- e. Local and Global Responses to Chinese Influence in Middle East g. Major Findings and Conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

DYNAMICS OF CHINA'S GLOBAL INFLUENCE

China aims to develop friendly relations with everyone at regional and global level. Thus, in the past decade, it has become an active player in the Middle East. Though, it is a newcomer to the region but it has successfully attained a prominent position for its healthy international relations. Also, it is extremely cautious in developing international relations and to deal with political and security challenges. China had never believed on war games rather it aims to create its soft influence over the region and develop healthy relations with everyone. For this purpose, it has been helping different countries at regional level at difficult times. The greatest examples are China's economic and developmental to Middle Eastern countries, when the entire Middle East was under a fire. During that time China's help proved to be a blessing, with which the states stood against the US involvement and tried hard for their sovereignty (Aizhu, 2019).

Currently, China has been increasing its engagement with the Middle East and is struggling hard to develop friendly bilateral relations at regional levels. The basic purpose of this engagement is strong regional relations and economic benefits. In the past few decades, United State's involvement in the Middle East has remained at headlines of the newspapers. As a super power, US wanted to build its strong control over the Middle East region for being rich in resources and speedy economic growth. Initially, the United States starts implementing several restrictions over those nations, resultantly either the nations remain unable to use their own resources or have to work on the US agreements to keep the powers happy and continue earning through resources. In case the nations do not obey the US agreements and restrictions, they face war type conditions and counterinsurgencies, as happened with Iraq (Patrick's, 2012). In such scenario, China was unable to expand its regional relations with Middle East, as US dominance over the

region worked as greatest barrier. Thus, China started its Geo-economic activities to help the Middle East region develop and provided great funds and developmental schemes to stabilize the region for its further objectives. After Arab Spring, US long-standing dominance started showing a gradual decline and Chinese economic engagements in the region got significant rise. People of Middle East also started trusting China for its friendly and peaceful foreign policies and shook hands for further bilateral relations (Bingbing, 2019)

The Middle Eastern countries are aware that their resources are the greatest strength for them, but the political leaders of the countries are also aware the upcoming threats associated with their resources (Dettmer, 2019). They are aware that international powers will never be happy and satisfied with their development through oil reservoirs. Especially, the involvement of US, Russia, and Israel is very prominent after Arab Spring and Iraq War. In such scenario, Middle Eastern countries find China as the greatest support to stand strong against the European Powers. Also, these countries have changed their policies related to oil price and export to the International powers and trying to keep a balance between threat and the blessings associated with their resources. They have made several economic investment associated agreements with China to improve their regional stability and political dynamics in the medium to long term. At one end they are under the negotiation with the International powers regarding their resource strategies. On other hand, they are developing healthy relations with China to improve their economy growth and using their oil revenue for the improvement in their water, electricity, taxation, and loans sector (Lieber, 1992).

China's involvement in the Middle East has also contributed to a wave of competition at world level, where European policymakers are unable to understand China's political and regional interests for investing in the Middle East. However, the analysis of literature (Lons &

Fulton, 2019) reveals that China's relationship with the Middle East revolved around energy demand. China is currently working on multiple projects, for which it needs oil and other resources. Especially, for being most populated country, China needs electricity and oil resources to meet its public demands and enhance quality of life of its nation, and that demand is fulfilled by its healthy relations with Middle East. Also, to enhance its exports to the Middle East, logistics proved to be greatest barriers, for which it started One Belt Road and gave a smooth path to the traders and exporters. This not only reduced its travel expenses but also opened doors of exports to many new areas, which resulted as great revenue and economic benefits.

China's objectives are different, as it is more concerned on economy growth rather than power control over the regions. China wants to be the strongest country, based on its international relations, regional power, and economy growth. It is aware that future is all about economy race, where the survival will be only possible with improved research and development sectors, investment in industries, and greatest revenue in terms of exports and other economic investments.

Therefore, China works on the principle of bilateral relations and soft power influence through which it provide some benefits to the developing region and get maximum output in terms of regional influence, control over revenues, and economy strength. According to the statistics (Fahey, 2015), oil leaves deep impact on economic growth of the states, due to which the Middle Eastern countries show remarkable economic growth with rise in price of oil per barrel (McMahon, 2015). Now, oil is China's major demand to work further on its multiple projects and therefore it has no other option but to develop bilateral healthy relations with the Middle East regions and enjoy great oil supply at least payable rates internationally.

1.1. China's Power Influence

China is chasing its target to be the world's major powers. In last few decades, it was expected that China is facing a lot of challenges. These challenges include the poverty and underdevelopment. It was considered that these challenges would constrain China's ability to influence global events (Arun, 2018). The success of China and its progress towards the target to become World's major power is considered as an aggressive intent toward the dominance of major powers. China itself declared that China is not seeking for the regional and international leadership rather it is focusing on its own internal development (Calabrese, 2017). However, China should approach to international affairs by securing its position, observing calmly, coping calmly with affairs, hiding its capacities, biding its time, and maintaining a low profile.

Although China has not yet achieved the position of US as global power, but its rapidly growing political, economic, and cultural influence is remarkable. In recent years, China has achieved great success in global economic growth. China's economy consists of \$1.8 trillion in foreign currency reserves and now China is planning to invest internationally via its sovereign wealth fund. China's need for the commodities, from oil copper, has raised the world prices (Admin, 2005). China has also been participated in global security issues as an active player, such as global warming, energy security, and HIV/AIDS. China's officials have been discussing about evolving perspectives of China about international issues. China has shown self-confidence in promotion of its principles and interests in defying the European Union, US, and other major powers. When China is challenged by domestic unrest, over currency valuation, and human rights, then it acts like a defiant in international affairs.

Globally, Chinese power and ever-growing influence has evolved measurably (Unit, 2008).

Now, without China's assistance, no major international challenge can be solved effectively.

China's globalization embrace has meant that China's interests have risen commensurately. China is the United Nations Security Council's veto-wielding member due to which it has unique authority to act on the international challenges, such as terrorism, weapons proliferation, energy security, climate change, or human rights (Marcus, 2018). China continues to explain that China is developing country and it does not want to alter the international system. However, how is it possible that a nation of 1.3 billion people will not leave any kind of influence on international system? In Asia, very few regional initiatives or national foreign policies have been developed without considering the thinking and reactions of China. Somehow, China, itself looks at its power growth in complex ways (Admin, 2005). Multiplication and division principle has multiplied the problems to 1.3 billion people of China and has divided the achievement with the same amount. That is why; the look inside the country is different than the outside view. China is facing per capita societal challenges related to collective measure of its political and economic (Marcus, 2018). According to Chinese scholars, in international affairs the China's development plans and its growing economic is influencing the World. China has identified the "strategic opportunity", which is in favor of "peace and development" all over the World. On the other side, the United States is more concerned with South Asia and Middle East on the concept of "war on terrorism" (Calabrese, 2017). The International revulsion has also presented China as an opportunity to enhance its attractiveness, focus inward, present international conduct models, and shape the international system.

1.2. China's International Relations

The importance of China's Hierarchy of relations is due to its relations with major powers, neighbours states and developing nations (Sheet, 2013). Interaction of China with the developing world is of great importance, which started in 1990s and was accelerated by Chinese leader, "Hu Jintao". China recently added a new concept of multilateralism to safeguard its interests.

This concept reassures China's international system commitments, and enhances the confidence of China's developing-world to breath broadly. Whenever China makes a strategic partnership regionally then the bilateral relationships of China have divided into "strategic partner" and "cooperative partner" categories (Sheet, 2013). China is making such agreements just to reflect the relative importance of its multilateral and bilateral relationship (Nye, 2005). Strategic partnerships are alternative for China to the concept of alliances, which are provocative, exclusionary, and harmful to global interests of China.

China gives priority to its economic growth and threats to its territorial integrity. Due to this priority, China considers that it is most important to develop the bilateral relationship with the US. China knows that US political, economics, and military power had been influenced the Asia or even the world which can complicate China's achievement of strategic goals and economic development (Jones, 2012). US technology, domestic market and investment are affecting China's development and its economic ties. There are so many controversies between China and US related to Taiwan and Tiber trading but even than China feels bit confident about its relationship with the US. The interdependence of growing economic between China and United States is also reducing the public crises between both countries (EIA, 2018). According to Chinese scholars, however, the United States may divert its attention to China as Islamic extremism recedes. Somehow, China is also developing alternative relationships with other East Asia's major powers and promoting a multi-polar world.

In 2007, China has now changed its approach toward Japan because Chinese leaders understood that somewhere the public propaganda of China was creating problems in China-Japan relationship (Nye, 2005). For the development of its regional relations with its neighbors, China is now trying to patch up with Japan and to reduce the gap of conflicts between both countries and to maintain the positive relations.

In 2005, the European Union tried to develop its economic relations with China. However, the Europe is concerned with the restricted property rights violations, undervalued currency of China, product safety, ballooning bilateral trade, and low-tech manufacturing industry (Marcus, 2018). China's records of human rights and political system also played an important role for its bilateral relations with Europe. China's aid policy in Africa has fired up the European nations because they consider that China is affecting their efforts for human rights promotion, environmental health and good governance (Mitchell, 2007).

China is now trying to develop its relationships with Russia. Both nations are trying to find the common solutions to constrain US power. Russia is the supplier in arms and energy sales sector in trading and China is the demand-er, so both take advantage of their complementary interests in their bilateral trade. Russia supplies the advanced technology and military equipment to China (Mitchell D. J., 2007). Both countries are the permanent members of United Nations Security Council. Both countries have great coordination to deal with international security issues. Both countries blocked the sanctions against Burma, Iran, and Zimbabwe. The opposition of US missile defense deployment was done by both countries which proves their great coordination and partnership (Mitchell D. J., 2007). Both countries are trying hard for the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China's investments highlight that the priority area of strategic planning of China is the Central Asia.

However, China-Russia partnership will neither oppose the United States nor the SCO interfere in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Indeed, Russian strategists wary for the China's rapid growth implication and its influence in different regions (Mitchell D. J., 2007).

1.3. China's Impact on the International System

China is one of the largest peace keeping contributors to UN missions (Operations, 2008). According to the records, China has been committed to 267 treaties and has joined 130 international organizations (Paper, 2005). China has now become international nonproliferation regime's constructive member (Medeiros, 2007). As China is now acting globally, so it has to follow the international system which is developed by the Western powers. With a commitment to equality of states, international law, international affairs democratization, and its peaceful rise, China views the World Trade Organization (WTO) and United Nations as helpful for the promotion of its strategic principles and goals. China is also confident that its role in UN Security Council as a veto-wielding member will provide the reassurance to China that these institutions (World Trade Organization and United Nations) will not affect its national interests and sovereignty (Medeiros, 2007).

China is not much comfortable with the current international system due to the current US alliance-based security structure in Europe and Asia. On the other hand, China is not opposing US or others in East Asia which supports the structure maintenance. Instead, China is now supporting the Asia's development, confidence-building, regional security and cooperation. China has also joined the dialogue arrangements to enhance its economic advantages, international voice, security cooperation and international confidence-building (Medeiros, 2007). According to the observers, in East Asia, China is trying to destroy the US alliances'

importance for international security. China's involvement in ASEAN and Shanghai Cooperation Organization are the examples of this intent. Also, China's substantial financial and political commitment for the development of the region's financial system is considered as a challenge to the United States' dominance in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). China is now bit confused to join the groups such as the International Energy Agency and Group of Eight (G-8) because there was a time when China thought the rules of these institutions are not helpful for the establishment of China (Medeiros, 2007).

China always tried to keep itself focusing inward, low profile, and reassuring the implications of China's rise has become hurdle to challenge the old institutions or for the development of new global institutions. Somehow, the international community has taken steps for the encouragement of its integration for the development of new global institutes or to challenge the global institutes (Mitchell, 2007). China's policy for the direct competition with IMF and its policy of unconditional foreign aid has become a most important questions about impact of China on the international system which is promoting the development and justice of good governance, environmental protection, labor and human rights (Mitchell, 2007).

However, China's principle of development is not the only universal model, it does not fit to all the nations and each nation should decide its preferred developmental path (Jintao, 2007). China's growing influence and principles does not need an impact. The development model of China has achieved currency because of its apparent success. Finally, China has demonstrated some disinclination for the acceptance of some international standards which has become a question mark about China's consistent commitment to unspoken and spoken rules of the current system. China also took US complaints of WTO against China in political terms rather than a legal matter of economic intercourse (Jintao, 2007). In 2001, a US spy plane was

targeted by Chinese fighter and was forced to land (Davidson Christopher, 2010). Also China caught a US flight crew for about 2 weeks on Hainan Island. An agreement was implemented to regulate US and Chinese forces interactions in international space. In 2007, China launched an anti-satellite weapon but it failed to provide acceptance at international practice because it may be a risk for other nations' assets. China also denied US permission for the development of port in Hong Kong (Jintao, 2007).

Whatever, the conflicts may be but the reality is that China is developing day by day and its development is a great challenge for the other super powers. China's economic growth and trading volume growth, regionally and internationally, is making it stronger and even strongest all over the World (Bank, 2013). That is why China's Rise has become the focus of World's analysts and reporters. Everyone is keeping an eye on China's next action. China's development model may not be a universal model but it is reality that it has influenced the world in an effective way and we can call it as the inspirational model (EIA, 2018). Now China's investments in different countries are making it stronger and the strength of China is affecting US and Russia's repute which obviously cannot be tolerated by super power or even we can call them previous super powers because China is the super power of the future.

1.4. China's Power Interest towards Economy of Middle East

In today's era, every country is running the economic race, in which everyone wants to be the winner. The real player of this race is rich countries with rich resources, such as Middle Eastern Countries with their oil reservoirs (Tristam, 2019). However, the development of the region brings economic development for the region on one side, whereas bringing several frustrations and insecurities to the nation (Kehl, 2011). The very prominent example of such a

threat is Iraq, which enjoyed being a powerful State with the power of its oil reservoirs and then the rich resources became a curse for it. Thus, amongst much other development frustration, the resource curse is the top one, which is even more dangerous than facing poverty, inequality, and deprivation (Cooper, 2015, May 10). The more the country will be rich in resources, the more he will have social as well as an economic threat. Thus, rather than bringing freedom for the nation, the resources bring several challenges and insecurities for the States (Kehl, 2011).

It has also been highlighted that resources are essential for the countries' survival, however in some cases resources become the greatest threat to the nations. Excess of rich resources leave an adverse impact on the social peace and thus brings insecurity, misery, and tyranny of these nations (PATRICK, 2012). It is because the world is facing the battle of control, where super powers are the real drivers. In the current era, the United States is a Super Power and thus it wants to have control over all states. When it seems to some states with rich resources and observes their better economic growth, it finds it a great threat to the US future. Thus, it starts implementing several restrictions over those nations, resultantly either the nations remain unable to use their own resources or have to work on the US agreements to keep the powers happy and continue earning through resources. In case the nations do not obey the US agreements and restrictions, they face war type conditions and counterinsurgencies, as happened with Iraq (PATRICK, 2012).

In the same way, the rich resources of the Middle Eastern region have also proved to be a blessing and a curse for the nations. Since the last two decades, Middle Eastern Countries have been changing their economic policies. They know their resources are the greatest strength for them but the political leaders of the countries are also aware the upcoming threats associated with their resources (Dettmer, 2019) . They are aware that international powers will never be

happy and satisfied with their development through oil reservoirs. Thus they changed their policies related to oil price and export to the International powers and thus trying to keep a balance between threat and the blessings associated with their resources. At one end they are under the negotiation with the International powers regarding their resource strategies and on other hand, they are using their oil revenue for the improvement in their water, electricity, taxation, and loans sector (Lieber, 1992).

Great dependence over the resources also keeps the country under threat, as a little change in resource value leaves a deep impact on the country's political and economic condition. In such a scenario, the countries are required to restructure their policies. Saudi Arabia has been facing such issues multiple times in the past few decades. Before 2000, the oil prices were high in the market, and thus Saudi Arabia had been enjoying great revenue generation through its resources (McMahon, 2015). However, after 2014, it understood the International threat to its resources and thus started going with the flow. The oil prices fall in the international market brought a risky condition for the Saudi Arabia and also affected its annual revenue generation. In return, it started investing in its gas reservoirs to start earning through gas export. For this purpose it is making contracts with Russia and has allowed Russian companies to come and invest in Saudi Arabia. In this way it will keep the International power under confidence and thus there will be fewer chances of resolution conflicts (Kehl, 2011; PATRICK, 2012).

It has also highlighted that oil reservoirs have proved to great blessing for the Middle Eastern countries, and have made them richest amongst other countries, including European countries. Also, these countries are earning great through their oil resources due to which they remain on the target of most developed European countries, such as Russia and the United States (Tristam, 2019). The oil resources enable them to earn independently and to show their

strength as a rich and strong country at an International forum. This raises several conflicts between the resourced countries and the international powers. Thus in this way the resources become a curse for the countries and thus they came under the control of powers, otherwise face great destructions within the region (Tristam, 2019).

The prominent example of the resource curse is the oil and gas resources of Iraq, which had been enjoying its great significance in the International market and was using its revenue to strengthen its military and weapons (Jones, 2012). However, the US took this as a great threat to its sovereignty and restricted Iraq from purchasing equipment and nuclear material from other countries. However, Iraq thought it as the independent power, as it was rich in resources and had enough money to buy any sort of military equipment. Thus, it ignored the international threats and continued improving its military power. Finally, when the US observed the unstoppable success of Iraq in the purchase of nuclear equipment and strengthening military power, it established a unique strategy against Iraq (Jones, 2012). It used Iraq's nation against the leader of that time 'Saddam Hussein' and then blamed them for being involved in the 9/11 terror incident of the United States. Resultantly, the US military insurgency destroyed the entire region and now Iraq is facing the worst war time condition, and no resource can help it to come off its social security threat (Jones, 2012).

Not only Iraq but also Syria faced the same condition when it started squandering billions of dollars on arms and weapon systems. Finally, the United States also declared it as threat to the international powers and thus sent its forces in the region (Tristam, 2019). Now hundreds of people are losing their lives, many of them facing hunger and social threat, and the living standards have gone below the standards. Syria and Iraq could have never dreamt of such a scenario but this became an example for other countries with rich resources and they understand

that they cannot survive on the world's map without keeping international power in their favor. Despite several strategies, the oil is found to be a great blessing, as well as a curse for Middle Eastern Countries (BBC, 2021; Lieber, 1992).

Oil wealth has not only enriched Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, or UAE, instead it has helped the tiny countries like Qatar to establish their strong economic position in the region, as well as at international level. Lieber in his journal also highlighted that it is not only money or resources which make the country stable and powerful, instead it is critical thinking and lacking will lead to destruction in the region (Lieber, 1992). This is true in the cases of countries with rich resources, as their resources can be a great threat to their existence in the region. Though they can buy anything with their resources they cannot reduce the threat to their sovereignty. The more the country will be rich with its resources the greatest it will face the threat to its existence (Lieber, 1992).

Recently, the conflict between the United States and Iran is another evidence of the resource curse (Dettmer, 2019). The United States is well aware of Iran's military strategies and its working on strengthening the weapons and updating war strategies. That is why the United States warned Iran for getting indulged in weapon development strategies and restricted to follow its international policies. On the violation of US restrictions (Crane, 2014), Iran is now blamed to be indulged in Saudi Arabia's oil attack. With such blames, the purpose of Trump is to increase the conflict between the countries within the same region and create a war time condition where it will be able to take action against Iran. The United States has also indirectly or directly threatened Iran for stopping its all weapon improvement strategies and come under agreements with the United States (Dettmer, 2019). However, Iran, on the other side, does not agree to obey the United States and is more confident in its military power.

Also, The political engagement between China and Middle East is not new; instead it has history of over 2000 years. However, this relationship has been smooth. In 1955, first kindled bilateral interaction was established through Bandung Asian-African Conference (Ghosa, 2016). Arab Spring and Chinese Cultural Revolution disrupted these relations and both parties could not resume their interaction until 1970s. Finally, in 1990s, China and Middle East started improving their regional relations under leadership of Deng Xiaoping (Hayoun, 2016). This interaction was more established on the basis of economic interests, as China's rapidly growing economy enabled it to offer multiple products and opportunities to Middle Eastern countries. In return, Middle Eastern Countries helped China to energy resources requirements.

A report by BBC News (2011) reflected that during the Arab Spring, US and other international powers have been showing their great influence in Middle East. The bias purpose of this influence was to break power of the Middle East and get proper access to its oil resources. Such involvement led to severe conflicts, such as Syrian conflicts. However, Russia and China had been playing friendly role to support Arabs and develop better relationship with the (BBC, 2021). Russia and Syria had remained strongly allied in major areas so weakening Syria could help Russia to maintain its power at regional and international level. Initially, Russia supported the government of Assad via all type of material, technical and political support. This was because the Assad government had also helped Russia to deal with the terrorism in the region. However, later, with its political, economic, and social benefits, Russia started funding the anti-military forces and provoked them to remain involved in anti-government activities. This proved China's loyal approach towards Middle East and reflected its soft power structure. China has never tried to take control over things rather it focuses on developing bilateral relations with nations and to get benefits in return. Similarly in the Middle East,

China played a significant role in supporting the government to gain its economic interests in the region and beyond (Jin, 2016).

China understood that Middle East became deeply embroiled in military conflicts by the US and thus it started supporting them with equipment and resources to remain strong. This also fueled positive relationship between China and the Middle Eastern countries, where both worked on the economic interests (Liao, 2013). China also established a new forum, named China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), in 2004 with the aim to exchange views between China and Middle Eastern countries and promote cooperation in culture, politics, trading, technology, and international affairs. Another purpose of this forum was to advance peace and development. This forum worked as an important mechanism to enhance the bilateral relations between two parties, facilitating trade, and cooperation between them (Luft, 2016). The best thing about the China is that it has consistently upheld its official rhetoric of nonintervention and non-interference in the regional internal affairs. China works on the principle of giving and taking without imposing power or using weapons. This strategy of China leaves its soft image to the world.

1.5. Recent Dynamics in China–Middle East Relations

China is having a very significant political and global position now, due to its increasing economic power and better bilateral relations at regional level (Calabrese, 2017). China is trying its best to be the next Super Power of the world, but for that it never used any war strategy. The major difference between China and the United States is the use of power, where the US has been using its military power to have control over nations but China use bilateral relations to influence the regions. Xi proposed “Belt and Road Initiative” Project in 2013 with the aim to

connect major countries in the Middle East and to expand China's diplomatic and economic influence in the region. Through this road, the countries can easily export and import their product rapidly and safely (Olimat, 2013).

The Belt and Road Initiative is expected work as the driving force to tie two parties; China and the Middle East. With this project, Xi aimed to connect over 100 countries for the sake of bilateral benefits in trading, economy, and nuclear projects. However, after the complete negotiations and meetings with the countries, 40 of them signed bilateral agreement with China to jointly build Belt and Road Initiative. For this project, China invested its \$50 billion at the beginning in 2017, and is expected to invest more in future (Sharma & Kundu, 2016).

Through this road, China will be connected to Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and many other countries. Through these projects, China has also been helping many countries, during the disasters and war scenarios. This reflects his positive approach towards International relations and its Soft influence over nations. With such positive and soft approach, China has been gaining power and control over the region, where countries are becoming more dependent on China for their economic, political, architectural, and social decisions. Now, almost everything in market belongs to Chinese manufacturers and this reflects how it has been creating its influence in global market (Mitchell, 2007).

In the beginning of twenty first century, China had understood that growing political and economic interest has increased the need of urgency to enhance its relations with the Middle Eastern countries. It not only focused on the Middle East, but also started developing its relations with the Asian countries through multiple projects, out of which CPEC is the most prominent one (Paper, 2005). This project started between China and Pakistan with the aim to

connect all regional countries and gain bilateral benefits from each other. CPEC is a massive project that is very important not only for the Pakistan but also for China from different perspectives. The very first interest of both countries are regional linking for better neighboring relationship with all.

Along with this, Pakistan expects for better economy, architectural, and social development through the projects associated with CPEC (Dawn, 2015). A lot of projects are associated with CPEC, which will not only bring architectural development in Balochistan, Pakistan but also for the entire country by different means. These projects will increase chances of employments for the Pakistan's youth, as multiple road and rail projects will open opportunities of hiring Pakistani graduates and labor. CPEC aims to connect the Gwadar Port of Pakistan to the China's north-western Xinjiang province, for which China will invest huge amount for road construction, railway construction, and improvements at Gwadar Port. In this way, it will improve infrastructure of Pakistan, through which the country can export its products to regional country without wasting too much money on the transportation. Also, it will improve awareness amongst people, as well as bring advancement in educational sectors. Additionally, rising domestic challenges due to terrorism and threat by the Taliban push China to develop better relationships with Middle East and work on the principle of cooperation to avoid any security threat to Chinese nation (Mitchell, 2007).

A report was published by US Energy Information Administration (EIA, 2018) that since 2013, China overtook the US as the largest importer of the crude oil from the Middle East. According to the estimates, Middle East's crude oil is expected to account for the 70% of energy needs of China. Not only this, but also China's economic engagement with the region goes beyond the energy field. This data reflects how important it is for China to develop bilateral

relations with the Middle East, whereas in return it has been providing the region with great military equipment support, and funds to deal with US invasions (Luft, 2016).

In 2014, China also proposed an ambitious model of cooperation in 6th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab Forum deferring energy cooperation, infrastructure construction and nuclear energy. Through this model, China and Middle East agreed for the bilateral cooperation in investment, trade, and infrastructure. Along with this, both regions agreed to enhance their cooperation in the nuclear energy and space satellites. The targets are high and therefore China has been helping the Iraq with equipment and funds to fight against the United States and never give up against the power. After the US withdrawal, China proposed its investment projects in Iraq's oil Industry to not only strengthen the region economically but also to make it more powerful for future. With this cooperation, China expects economic, trade, and nuclear benefits in return (Irish, 2016).

1.6. China's Bilateral Relations with Middle East

China's geo-economic interests in the Middle East also became prominent when, in 2015, China official became the global biggest importer of crude oil. Before 2015, US involvement in the Middle East and its dominance over the region was the greatest barrier to China, where it had to make some strategic moves to fulfill its oil demands. Finally, China started developing healthy relations with Middle East and provided funds and weapon support to fight against the US forces and stand strong. This strength was crucial to prevent US influence over the regional resources and convince them to increase their oil supply to China without any fear from the European Powers. For this purpose, China also made several industrial investments in the region and worked on the bilateral relations, where the benefits were for both. This helped the Middle

Eastern region to enhance its economy position and stabilize its GDP, whereas China became the biggest crude oil imported and successfully getting half of its oil supply from the Middle East. Further, to avoid barriers in supply, China started One Belt Road and connected its cities to the Middle Eastern region directly, where the security and logistic supply is managed by Chinese companies.

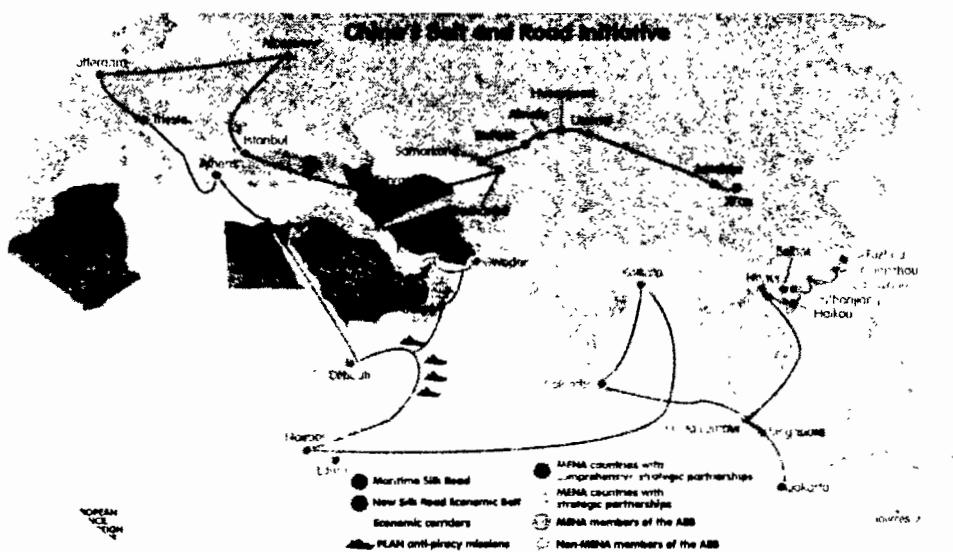


Figure 1: China's initiative to enhance bilateral relations via One Belt Road Initiative (Lons & Fulton, 2019)

China's geo-economic interest in the Middle East is not one-sided; instead it is a bilateral relation, where the benefits are for both. Oil reservoirs have proved to great blessing for the Middle Eastern countries, and have made them richest amongst other countries, including European countries. Also, these countries are earning great through their oil resources due to which they remain on the target of most developed European countries, such as Russia and the United States (Tristam, 2019). The oil resources enable them to earn independently and to show their strength as a rich and strong country at an International forum. This raises several conflicts between the resourced countries and the international powers. Thus in this way the resources become a curse for the countries and thus they came under the control of powers, otherwise

face great destructions within the region (Tristam, 2019). Thus, Middle East needs a strong support to stand strong against the European Power and strengthen its regional power. Also, the oil reservoirs will only be beneficial for the Middle East when there will be importers of crude oil. It is similar as a shop keeper has significance due to consumers who purchase his products. Thus, without exports of crude oil to the rich countries, Middle East can never gain benefits from its resources. In this way, relationship with China brings great benefits to Middle East from all sides; increasing exports, improving revenue through crude oil production, strengthening regional existence, and creating barriers for unnecessary European dominance over the region. In this way, the relationship of China and Middle East is bilateral and both parties are enjoying great benefits out of it.

Jonathan Fulton argued that China's geo-economic interests in Middle East reflect its soft approach towards the foreign policies, international relations, and bilateral agreements. The country, China, has been engaging in different agreements, which aims to bring benefits for both nations. Some of these government agreements between China and Middle East are "Arab Policy Paper" in 2016, and "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt" in 2015. The aim of these major projects is to establish cooperation between Chinese government and the Middle Eastern government, and gain great advantages in return. Furthermore, their bilateral relations are focused on energy enhancement, infrastructure development, trading, industrial investment, regional strength, enhanced security, and healthy International relations. Though security cooperation is barely mentioned in any of the agreement, but it is clear that Chinese involvement in Middle Eastern region is to weaken the European influence in the MENA region and gain its geopolitical goals in return (Khan, 2021).

Developing regional relations with China is also a preference of Middle Eastern countries.

This is crucial for them to reduce US involvement in the region, get rid of European dominance, and enjoy regional peace. Thus, the geo-economic relations with China are expected to improve security situation within the Middle Eastern region, as Arab Spring and US invasion had caused great destruction in some specific Middle Eastern countries. The prominent example of the resource curse is the oil and gas resources of Iraq, which had been enjoying its great significance in the International market and was using its revenue to strengthen its military and weapons (Jones, 2012). However, the US took this as a great threat to its sovereignty and restricted Iraq from purchasing equipment and nuclear material from other countries. Finally, when the US observed the unstoppable success of Iraq in the purchase of nuclear equipment and strengthening military power, it established a unique strategy against Iraq (Jones, 2012). It used Iraq's nation against the leader of that time 'Saddam Hussein' and then invaded to end terrorism in the region. Resultantly, the US military insurgency destroyed the entire region and now Iraq is facing the worst war time condition, and no resource can help it to come of its social security threat (Jones, 2012). Now, there is no other option left for these countries but to shake hand with the strong regional allies and get military strength against the US forces. Therefore, Iraq and other Arabian countries got involved in Chinese agreements, and demanded military support from the. In return, Chinese provided great funds and military equipment, which was used to fight against the US forces. Also, Chinese provided gorilla war training to Taliban to stand strong against the US forces and defeat them in a unique way. This all was not possible without Chinese cooperation, and in this way bilateral relations with China are also the major choice of Middle Eastern region for the sake of their regional sovereignty (Almujeem, 2021).

1.7. China's Neo-realism and Geo-Economic Interest in Middle East

With the passage of time economy is becoming the major factor of international race, where neo-realism pays more attention to the shift of economic power for the sake of balance of power over time. Previously, the offensive realism has remained the major focus of the super power, the United States, and therefore their investment on military strength was too prominent. However, now the neo-realism has overcome the offensive realism and now countries are more focused to invest in economy associated projects and thus develop bilateral relations for economic benefits. Robert Gilpin also argued (Almujeem, 2021) that economic power overweight the military or diplomatic power, and therefore the countries are now focused to improve their GDP growth. Middle East and China are also some of the regions who want to get rid of US military involvement and dominance of international powers. They work on the principle of economy associated benefits, for which China invests in Middle East's industrial region and get discounted crude import on terms.

China understands that its success is hidden in becoming economic power, and therefore it has created its soft image worldwide. It initially started improving its industrial region within China, for which it encouraged its nation to work day and night, and motivated every individual to play their part as responsible public. This helped China to become a strong industrial region, where people have struggled made it highly strong exporter of international market. Now, almost everything can be constructed in China, where the big brands are also investing in Asian region to get cheap labor and enjoy purchase of equipment for China. Not only this, but also China started investing in its neighboring countries to develop healthy relations at regional level. China understood that it has to be strong against European alliance, and for that it requires strong support and cooperation at regional level. Thus, China invested in different

industrial and economic projects not only inside the country but also at regional level, which also strengthen its relationship with the neighboring countries. It started investing in Pakistan via “Silk Road” and currently it invested huge amount in economic corridor (CPEC), with which it aims to connect China to entire Asian region till Afghanistan. In this project, China invested huge amount to build a road connection, which is being used to export its products at regional level, and import the other resources to China without extra logistic expenditure.

Along with these all project; China aims to establish strong connection with Middle East to increase its regional influence and ensure availability of oil resources. China understands the MENA region is filled with rich resources, where some of Arabic region are major attractions for the travellers, including Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and other such regions. Due to high flux of tourists, the income of these regions is very high, and so China also aims to invest in such industrial regions to enhance its consumers and gain economic advantages in return. Also, the demand of bilateral relations is one to one ratio of benefits, where China is getting crude oil and gas resources and provides great industrial investment and fund support to the Middle Eastern markets.

Previously, the offensive realism had always focused on the power influence. The United States had always been following the same pattern to show its dominance over other regions. Being super power, US have always indulged in military strength and invasion in countries to keep thing under control. The major examples of such power influence are World Wars, through which the United States aimed to create its strong influence over the region and wanted to increase the territorial limits to become the Super Power. Such strategic actions and military strength reflect US's power game. However, China had never been in favor of power game and always focused on developing healthy relationship at regional and global level. It brought a concept of soft power as neo-realism, which encouraged the nations to start economy based

relations and collaborate with each other peacefully. As each power aims to improve its economy advantages and struggle hard to become the economic power in the neoliberal era, so the power sum is zero and every powerful country is enjoying a better International state. Thus, this balanced power distribution contributed to the zero-sum game for the regional and global hegemony, and no one is now interested in War (Zehra, 2011).

Chinese ideological approach of soft power and geo-economic strength is not new; instead it started in 1970s when China established its foreign policy based on economic outcomes. Chinese foreign policy is not about creating power influence rather it aims to help the nations and establish bilateral relations to gain economic advantages. This approach contributed to expand its global economic footprint, due to higher advantages to every nation and less adverse global impacts. Also, China's craving to become the most powerful industrial zone enhanced its requirement of oil and transportation, for which it could not rely on its personal reservoirs. Initially, China used its personal resources to strengthen its industry, where every individual was encouraged to participate equally for the national development. Gradually, China started establishing regional relations through multiple projects, where it expanded its industrial investments and provided significant funds to the developing countries. This fund was used for strengthening the economy of developing neighbors, whereas in return China expected a regional cooperation with availability of resources, required for its economic growth (Yongnian & Fook, 2015).

The struggles for becoming the economic power and investments in region for the sake of geo-economic interests also reflect China's dreams to become the super power. It is expected that China will be the next super power due to its strengthened economy and soft power influence over the world. Although China has not yet achieved the position of US as global power, but its rapidly growing political, economic, and cultural influence is remarkable. In recent years,

China has achieved great success in global economic growth. China's economy consists of \$1.8 trillion in foreign currency reserves and now China is planning to invest internationally via its sovereign wealth fund. China's need for the commodities, from oil copper, has raised the world prices (Admin, 2005). China is also a major trading partner of different countries such as Brazil, India, South Korea, Japan, and Africa. Interestingly, China's trading with India is one of its South Asia's biggest trading destinations. In 2010, trade between Africa and China rose from \$2 billion to \$130 billion (Fahey, 2015; Lons & Fulton, 2019; Zehra, 2011). This reflects how China has gradually achieved a remarkable economic position at regional and global level. China is further investing in multiple regional projects to improve its economic outcomes, and create a regional giant with which it will become the strongest power in the world. Though, China has never given priority to war, but it does not mean it has left the military strength behind. It has established a great weapon industry, through which it has manufactured powerful weapons to give response to the enemies with great strength. It also provides funds and weapon aids to the regional countries to fight against the European invasions and stay strong with China and work on the principle of two sided benefits. The same strategy was used for the Afghanistan, and now for the Middle East, where China is using its neo-realism to enhance its economic power and providing great weapons and war funds to strengthen Middle East against the United States (Kehl, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK OF SOFT POWER

In the past few years, China has gained remarkable position in global market through helping the nations in crises when in need. China had remained involved in helping the nations through funds and also invested in different regions for establishing healthy bilateral relations with many states globally. Not only this, but also it had remained engaged in regional and global connectivity associated projects, such as Belt and Road Initiative, to connect different countries with each other regionally and improve its exports and trading. Though, with such investments and financial aids, China has some personal targets, but it has also left positive impact at international level. Such strategic actions reflect China's soft image and effectiveness of its foreign policy, as per which it uses subsidiary and non-military power for attracting the neighboring countries.

1.1. Definition of Soft Power

Since the end of twentieth century, the concept of soft power has remained the focus of debates; either by the scholars or the politicians. The purpose of this debate was to evaluate either hard power is the best option to attain success at global level or adaption of soft power should be the preference in International Relations (Oguzlu, 2020). Thus, the theorist, Joseph Nye, was the first who coined the concept of soft power in his literature and highlighted that how it means the success in global politics. He defined soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye Jr 2004: p. x), or to put it another way, "soft power is attractive power" (Nye Jr 2004: p. 6). This definition is extremely comparable to the one that he provides in the article "*Soft Power*," which was published in 1990

and was one of the first works in which concept of soft power was discussed in detail (Nye Jr., 1990, p.166).

According to the theorist's (Nye Jr., 1990) statement, "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants," and it is characterized by the fact that it sets the agenda of other countries without using coercive means. Soft power is also characterise by the fact that it sets the agenda of other countries (Amsden, 2001). The same is the example in the case of China, when it has helped other nations to improve their economy and get stronger, in return to which it gets what brings global benefit for Chinese nation. The greatest example of this is the CPEC contract at regional level, in which it has helped Pakistan and Afghanistan through financial and political aid. However, in return to this, China has improved its trading and gain exports advantages to grow its economy and gain remarkable power at regional and global level.

However, the concept of soft power has been the subject of much discussion, and one aspect of that discussion has been its definition (Huntington, 1993) . Several authors have different perspectives regarding how soft power is going to impact the world. Some think that it is the diplomatic form to create influence at global level, keep other countries highly dependent on other, and gain personal and political benefits in return (Wilson, 2008; Fan, 2008) . On the contrary, some authors think that soft power is the way to create positive image globally and promote peace in international affairs (Nye Jr., 1990). Now, as power is an abstract concept so it is notoriously difficult to pin down in a single definition.

1.2. Soft Power Theory of Joseph Nye

In the 1990s, Joseph S. Nye was the first person to talk about the idea of "soft power." In later years, he added to and developed his ideas about soft power. Nye says that it is possible to reach your goals without using threats or money. Zahran and Ramos (2010) say that when you use soft power, you can get other people to change their behaviour in the way you want. This is being done without any kind of force, like a threat or an exchange, which would have been needed if the people in charge had a lot of power (Oguzlu, 2020). Soft power, on the other hand, is based on being able to draw people to you. Soft power usually involves resources that are on the more cooperative end of the range of behaviour.

In his book *Soft Power*, written in 1990, Jr. says that a state's ability to use soft power depends on three main assets: the state's culture, its political ideals, and its foreign policy. When a state's culture shares the same values and interests as its people, it becomes more appealing to people from other places and easier for them to fit in. In a similar way, a country's soft power can grow when its national politics are appealing to the politics of other countries, like when it has a strong democracy (Vyas, 2010). Also, how a nation-state acts on the international stage, whether through its foreign policy or how it acts in international organisations, has a big effect on how attractive that nation-state is.

Chinese academics and government officials have become very interested in the idea of "soft power" very quickly. In 1993, Wang Huning, a member of the Chinese Communist Party, was the first person in China to write about the idea of "soft power" (CCP). Huning says that states can get people to join their cause by having cultures and ideas that people like (Amsden, 2001). This would be better than using hard power, which is expensive and often doesn't work.

On the other hand, the essay didn't have much of an effect, which may have been because traditionalists in the CCP didn't want to copy the ways that Western countries did things (Courmont, 2013). Just after the turn of the century, China started to use soft power more. From 2000 to 2004, the Chinese put out 53 articles a year on the subject of "soft power." This number grew at a faster rate than ever before. Between 2005 and 2007, it grew an estimated 314 times. (Lai, 2012).

They agree with Nye that cultural norms, values, and foreign policy are important parts of soft power. Chinese scholars, on the other hand, have a different idea of what makes institutions and values attractive. They say that the Beijing consensus, which is China's plan for economic growth, is a big part of its soft power. Academics in China point out that their country's socioeconomic successes and its experience with development can help it use its soft power. It is also suggested that a country improve its "soft power" by making diplomatic connections and acting in an honourable way in the international arena.

Soft power theory is widely accepted by Chinese academics, and high-ranking officials in the Chinese government have also come to agree with it (Huntington, 1993). On August 30, 2004, at the 10th Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad, former president HuJintao said for the first time in history that China's main goal is to advance itself by making friends with other countries and by promoting a stable and peaceful environment in which China could build soft power sources that would help its international standing (Oguzlu, 2020). This was the first time in China's history that this statement was made. The leaders of China's government knew that their country's economy was growing so quickly that it made people all over the world nervous and afraid (Wang & Lu, 2008, p. 435). Soft power was thought to be the best way to stop people from talking about China's "threatened rise" and show the rest

of the world that China was committed to a "peaceful rise" (Lai, 2012, p. 2).

In 2007, at the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, China announced that it would use "soft power" as a political strategy. In the year that followed, China made a lot of complicated influence tools as part of its plan to strengthen its global soft power strategy over time. In the past few years, China's foreign policy has become more focused on using "soft power." People no longer think that the main goal of soft power is to become a great power. Instead, China uses soft power to build a good reputation around the world, especially in the less developed parts.

China's soft power has grown over the years because the country has spent a lot of money on projects that help improve its image. China's soft power policy has been mostly focused on the developing world, especially Southeast Asia, Africa, and an increasing number of Latin American countries (Courmont, 2013, p. 351). Several studies, especially in Southeast Asia and Africa, have shed light on the tools that the Chinese government uses as part of its "soft power" strategy (Sareen, 2018). These studies were done to find out more about the tools used by the Chinese government. Soft power theories that Chinese scholars have come up with are a lot like these methods. China's foreign policy is based on non-confrontational rhetoric, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy and trade, development aid, and not getting involved in things that are already being argued about internationally.

1.3. Concept of Soft Power by Todd Hall

The theorist, Todd Hall, examined the idea of soft power by looking at it through the lens of the divide that exists between the category of practise and the category of analysis. The term "category of practices" refers to the ideas that social actors feel and understand through

their observations. This kind of analysis is only predicated on the observation of reality and the considerations of regular people regarding what it is that they see and understand to be a certain phenomena. On the other hand, "categories of analysis" are what are known as "experience-distant categories" and are utilized by social analysts. This kind of analysis is rigorous from a scientific point of view, and it does not rely just on one's intuition.

Now, a significant number of decision-makers have embraced the idea of soft power in the category of practices. It is not sufficient for a term to be designated as a category of analysis simply because it does not require scientific point of view; rather it is based on real observations (Hall 2010). Thus, Hall (2010) investigated how the states respond to the soft power, for which he studied the perspective in two ways. Firstly, the author (Hall, 2010) analyzed either the behaviour that actors exhibit toward designated soft power resources indicates attraction or not. Second, he investigated if the attraction towards soft power result in favourable outcomes for the foreign policies of the states that are able to take advantage of its benefits? The best thing about the study (Hall, 2010; Fulton, 2020) is that it did not question the existence of alternatives to hard power; rather, he focuses on the fact that the notion of attraction developed by Nye Jr. transforms soft power into a concept of practise rather than a concept of analysis. Through the findings, Hall (2010) expressed the idea of attraction in a different way, and suggested that there are many distinct kinds of soft powers. To be more specific, a state's effect on other actors doesn't come from the simple appeal of its heritage, political beliefs, or international policy, as Nye Jr. says. Instead, a state's effect on other actors comes from other ways that a state can have an effect (Parmar & Cox, 2005). In this passage, Hall tries to show that there are other possible sources of power, such as institutions, reputation, and representation. Also, he (Hall, 2010) says that organisations have the potential to be a source of influence, which shouldn't be

taken for granted. The second source of appeal is public image power, which is a country's good name in the world because of what it has done. In other words, a state's reputation power is its ability to get other states to trade with it (i.e., economic or cultural ones). Also, the third type of power that can have an effect is "representational power," which is "the ability of states to frame issues, force their interpretations, and try to shape the opinions of others." This kind of power can be thought of as "the ability of states to define issues, push their own interpretations, and try on purpose to change the way other people see things."

1.4. Joseph Nye Jr.'s Explanation of Soft Power vs. Hard Power

According to Nye Jr., if any state wishes to be successful in the international arena, it has to understand the concept of soft power otherwise it cannot be oblivious to such a dimension of power to be successful globally. He further asserts in his writings (Nye, 2010; Jr., 2004) that attraction may be generated both by soft power and hard power resources. This is a response to the critics who have accused his point of view of being overly dualistic (Nye, 2010). Nye used the words of Osama bin Laden as an illustration of his point by quoting him. Bin Laden stated in one of his movies, utilizing the analogy of horses, that people are naturally drawn to those who are the strongest (Nye Jr 2004: p. 26). When conducting research on the ideas of hard power and soft power, one must not forget to give serious consideration to the boundary that separates the two types.

To put it another way, the question that needs to be answered is where exactly does soft power end and hard power begin. At first glance, considering the definitions of hard and soft power, it would seem reasonable to label military force and economic penalties as hard power measures, while classifying university exchanges or cultural events as soft power instruments

(Huntington, 1993). However, this classification would be incorrect. Nevertheless, the truth is more convoluted, and in some cases, the use of military action serves as an instrument of soft power. This condition of affairs is possible, for instance, in a scenario involving humanitarian aid and soldiers charged with maintaining peace (Oguzlu, 2020). The same holds true for a nation-economic state's power, which, depending on the circumstances, can either be an example of a nation-hard state's power (in the form of economic penalties) or one of its soft power elements (i.e., an industrial and prosperous country that is attractive to others for its economic dynamics).

According to the author (Mingjiang, 2009), Joseph Nye Jr. does not present an explanation that is both understandable and straightforward to such a topic, and the author's description of the distinction between hard power and soft power is not clear (p. 3). The connection between hard power and soft power is another contentious issue relating to the relationship between the two types of power. Thus, the author (Mingjiang, 2009) is of the view at this point, that Nye's formulation is not clear to explain what actually soft power is; rather the concept of soft power and hard power "sometimes reinforce and sometimes interfere with each other," without providing a persuasive explanation. In response to the author (Mingjiang, 2009), the theorist Nye Jr. argued that "Soft power does not depend on hard power," (Jr., 2004: p. 9), further he provided the number of examples, such as the Vatican state, which is not endowed with hard power but does have a considerable amount of soft power, or the Soviet Union during the cold war, which after the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia lost a significant amount of its soft power but increased in terms of its hard power. Both of these examples illustrate how soft power and hard power can exist in tandem.

1.5. Zahran & Ramo's Perspective Regarding Soft Power Theory

According to Nye Jr. (2004: p. 1, power is analogous to love in that it is simple to experience but challenging to define and quantify. As said by the authors (Zahran & Ramos, 2010) about soft power that "its usage is difficult and uncertain, making it challenging to get a strict definition of the idea." However, Nye Jr. has been paying great contributions towards defining the concept of Soft Power. He also presented his theory to explain how soft power is going to change the international politics against hard power. Though, his work is of great significance to better define the concept of soft power, but a lot of authors and scholars (Zahran & Ramos, 2010; Yasushi, Watanabe, & McConnell, 2008) criticized his work for being harsh against concept of hard power. The most prominent criticism levelled against Joseph Nye Jr. is that he uses the phrase "hard power" as a synonym for "command power behaviour and military resources," but he uses the term "soft power" as a synonym for "co-optive power behaviour and friendly relationship among the states."

It has been pointed out by a number of authors (Lock, 2010; Zahran & Ramos, 2010), that Nye's definition of power developed and shifted throughout the course of his published literature. According to Zahran & Ramos (2010), the theorist 'Joseph Nye Jr.' is more concerned to define soft power just to oppose the use of strength by the United States and other powerful nations. For example, in his first two books (The Paradox of American Power in 2002 and Bound to Lead in 1990), Nye Jr. is more concerned with analysing US foreign policy than soft power itself, and intervened in the academic debate regarding the position of the United States of America in the international arena. However, this does not mean that the definition of soft power by Nye Jr. is wrong or rigorous; rather it has a tendency to be changed to the various

topics and circumstances that are brought up in argument (Vyas, 2010). Even the Nye Jr. had also understood that his elaboration to the hard power; rather than soft power, is changing people's perspectives regarding his theory and giving scholars a chance to criticize his work. Thus, in another book (Jr., *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, 2004), the author concentrated his attention on the idea of soft power (Zahran & Ramos, 2010). Further, the notion of soft power offered by Nye Jr. has been developed further and enhanced by a number of authors (Glaser & Murphy, 2009; Smith-Windsor, 2000; Hall, 2010; Osipova, 2014).

The relationship between soft power and hard power is another contentious issue that has come up in the conversation over the concept of soft power (Hall, 2010). According to Joseph Nye Jr., the power of a state is comprised of both hard and soft components. Hard components refer to a state's economic and military realms, while soft components are cultural dimensions or the values that determine a state's identity and traditions (Osipova, 2014). According to Nye Jr., in contrast to hard power, often known as the use of carrots and sticks, soft power refers to the process of bringing others to the agenda in international politics. Furthermore, according to Nye Jr. (2004: p. 109), soft power is the ability to convince other people to want the same things as oneself. However, another author (Li, 2018) defines it as "an extension and derivative of hard power." Also, Ferguson, who is slightly suspicious of the description that Nye Jr. provides of soft power, criticises him for affirming that soft power is really a veiled version of military superiority (Yasushi, Watanabe, & McConnell, 2008). In order to be more specific, Ferguson contends that in international affairs, military muscle, and not soft power, is ultimately what matters, which shows that the difference between hard power and soft power is primarily academic (Lock, 2010).

Another author, Javier Noya, is one of the many who takes issue with the way in which

Joseph Nye defined the concepts of soft and hard power. Javier Noya's work may be found here. To be more specific, he criticises what he refers to as Nye's "dualistic perspective," stating that the latter's concept of soft and hard power is overly rigid (Yasushi, Watanabe, & McConnell, 2008; Osipova, 2014). Therefore, when looking at Nye's definition of soft power in greater detail, it is clear that in response to the first argument, he asserts that soft power is not a replacement for hard power. This can be seen when looking at the definition from a more in-depth perspective. To be more specific, Nye Jr. made the assertion that "hard and soft might sometimes assist and sometimes fight with each other." (Nye Jr 2004: p. 25).

1.6. Mingjiang's Perspective Regarding Soft Power Theroy

According to Joseph Nye Jr.'s research (2004: page 11, a nation's culture, political principles, and foreign policy are the three key resources that contribute to the nation's soft power. Culture can refer to either high culture, which includes things like literature, art, and education, or popular culture, which is more focused on mass entertainment than anything else. The term "political values" refers to the cultural norms and governing principles of a nation or ideology. According to Nye Jr, the foreign policy of a country is the third source of soft power (Huntington, 1993) . This is because a country's foreign policy can generate attractiveness if it is viewed as legitimate by other countries (Li, 2018). Mingjiang Li criticises the resource-based strategy that Nye Jr. takes, stating that these sources of soft power do not always produce attraction, persuasion, appeal, and emulation. On the contrary, the author's (Mingjiang, 2009) argument is that these sources of soft power do not always produce these results. Hard power, for example, can engender attractiveness, appeal, and amity; nevertheless, not everyone is drawn to the culture of the United States or the principles it upholds (p. 4).

According to Mingjiang (2009: p. 6), social environment plays a vital part since it "either engenders or hinders the growth of soft power." This is one of the reasons why social context is so significant. Notwithstanding this, Nye Jr. asserts that one of the most important factors in determining attraction is the setting, which is where soft power is expressed. For instance, specific ideals, such as liberal values, which can generate attractiveness in one setting are perceived unfavorably in another situation. This is because different contexts place emphasis on different aspects of a person's identity.

In further remark made by Mingjiang (2009: page 7) in relation to behaviour and resources is that the behavioral approach is the one that best encapsulates the spirit of soft power. This strategy places a considerable amount of emphasis on the utilisation of available resources rather than placing importance on the acquisition of material assets. Nevertheless, J. Nye Jr. is on board with this concept as well. He affirms that merely having access to resources does not in and of itself guarantee that one will be able to achieve one's goals (Nye Jr 2004: p. 3). In order to prove his point, Nye Jr. cited the failure of the United States army to triumph in the Vietnam War, despite the fact that it was the more capable and better-equipped of the two armies.

1.7. Lee's Contribution to Theoretical Examination of Soft Power

Shin-Wha Lee's work contributes significantly to the theoretical examination of the soft power resources that are available (Lee, 2011) . According to Lee, it is essential to take into consideration three primary characteristics while conducting an analysis of a nation's soft-power resources. These dimensions are cognitive, affective, and normative (Lee 2011: p. 15) In the context of the international arena, how a nation is perceived by other states constitutes the cognitive dimension. The emotive component refers to the perceptions that other countries have

of a certain nation-state notwithstanding the political, economic, and military strengths or shortcomings that characterise such a country (Oguzlu, 2020). These perceptions can be positive or negative. The normative dimension examines whether or not other countries view the policies and roles played by a country in the international arena as legitimate and as having a basis for justification.

According to Lee, doing a full evaluation of the soft-power capabilities of a state is difficult, but it is essential to take into account the aforementioned dimensions and investigate the ways in which they are interconnected. Lee uses the following illustration to illustrate his point: a person may dislike the United States as a whole (the affective dimension), but despise the United States' foreign policy because it is perceived as being too unilateral (the normative dimension). Despite this, the person may still hope that their children will attend an American university because the United States is seen as the most powerful country in the world (cognitive dimension).

1.8. Non-State Actors, Constructivism, and Soft Power

In the process of analysing soft power, another contentious subject involves the actors engaged. To be more explicit, the questions that are most important to the conversation are centred on the following issues: Who is it that produces soft power? That exactly are the people who benefit from soft power, how do they receive those benefits, and how are they affected by it? As was indicated before, the previous few decades in the realm of international affairs have been marked by the emergence of new actors in addition to governments and states, with these new actors gaining an increasingly important role (Lee, 2011). Some authors have voiced their concern that Nye Jr. does not provide sufficient attention to the non-state participants in the conflict (Zahran & Ramos, 2010; Yasushi, Watanabe, & McConnell, 2008).

For instance, according to Alexandre Bohas, Joseph Nye's concept of soft power does not emphasise the formation of foreign societies by non-state actors and, as a result, their crucial role in American domination. This is the opinion of Bohas (Yasushi, Watanabe, & McConnell, 2008). Notwithstanding this, a more in-depth examination of Nye's work reveals that the author places a significant amount of weight on the contributions of non-state entities such as NGOs, enterprises, colleges, and religious organisations (Nye Jr 2004: p. 90–97).

The proliferation of players in the international arena has added another layer of complication to the process of identifying the nature of the relationship between those players who generate soft power and those who are affected by it (Lock, 2010). For example, the authors (Zahran & Ramos, 2010) assert that "Nye's approach does not explain the linkage between civil society sources of soft power and various nations." When stated another way, "when Nye specifies three forms of soft power, it is impossible to claim the level of state control exerted on them" (Zahran & Ramos, 2010).

Another scholar (Vyas, 2010) believes constructivism is the most appropriate theory of international relations because it explains the concept of soft power in the best possible way. He (Vyas, 2010) agrees with the vision of increasing complexity in the international area and the increasing number of actors. He (Vyas, 2010) also believes that the number of actors will continue to increase. According to U. Vyas, other theories of international relations are overly focused on certain aspects of international relations (i.e., realist and neorealist on the role of the states; neo-liberal theories are overly focused on trade, economics, and institutionalism); however, constructivism is able to grasp the social complexities and the participation not only of states in the international arena the best (Vyas 2010: p. 36).

In the context of actors and soft power, one of the criticisms that might be levelled at Nye Jr. is that he has a propensity to think that "nation-state" and "culture" have a general connection. The way in which Nye discusses "the state" can sometimes give the impression that governments are singular entities rather than complex sites of competing interest groups and that determining "the national interest" is a relatively straightforward activity. This can also lead one to believe that determining "the national interest" is an easy task (Watanabe McConnell 2008: p. xxi). Fan (2008) and Brooke Smith-Windsor (2000) hold views that are very similar to one another. He (Fan, 2008) further criticises Nye Jr. for having a vision that is too American-oriented in formulating his idea of soft power, and Smith-Windsor (2000) believes that the concept of soft power is specific only to the context of the United States and is not applicable to the contexts of any other countries. Another topic that has been the subject of much discussion in respect to actors and soft power is that of the relationships between them, and more specifically, who exercises soft power and who is affected by it (Osipova, 2014). For example, Shin-Wha Lee criticises Nye Jr.'s "agent-focused" model of power because it places too much emphasis on the side that is exercising power and neglects to take into account the "interactive character of persuasion" (Lee 2011: p. 17).

However, Nye Jr. asserts that it is a fallacy to analyse power simply in terms of "power over" another, and that instead, it is more suitable to think of "power with" somebody (Nye Jr 2008: p. 143). In addition to this, Nye Jr. emphasized the point that "power is a relational notion, and it makes little sense to define a relationship without identifying both participants and the context of the interaction" (Nye Jr 2010: p. 220).

1.9. Growing Interests in the Concept of Soft Power

In Nye's book "*Bound to Lead*" (1990), the author was the first person to use the term "soft power." However, various authors (Laskai, 2013; Hunter, 2009) have emphasized that when looking back at history, several behaviors precede the coining of this word 'Soft Power'. In the book by David McConnell, and Yasushi Watanabe, "*Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*," the authors highlighted that despite the fact that the concept of soft power is relatively new, the behaviour it denotes is as old as human history (Laskai, 2013). For example, the author (Hunter, 2009; Huntington, 1993) emphasizes that the idea of soft power has been an essential component of military thinking in China for over two thousand years. Furthermore, he argues that the Chinese concept of soft power is characterise by two components: stratagems, and moral leadership (Glaser & Murphy, 2009). The component 'stratagems' are predominantly used in the context of the military and are associated with Sun Zi and his work "*Art of War*" (2007), whereas the root of other component 'moral leadership' is found in Confucianism and the moral norms that promotes soft image.

Many authors (Hunter, 2009; Laskai, 2013; Li, 2018) have emphasized that the idea of soft power has gained substantial popularity both in academic and non-academic circles. Especially, with the Chinese contributions in several projects, at regional and global level, have raised a lot of questions regarding its objectives and foreign policy. With the investments in different regions, China aims to create a soft image of it throughout the world, and maintain its positive and healthy bilateral relations with other nations (Lee, 2011). In this way, it can not only gain its objectives, but also earn sufficient economy associated profit through trades and exports. Its several projects have helped it to enter into other states without any barriers and

create a powerful control over things without even using its military force, which proves that soft power can create more influence over other states rather than the hard power (Laskai, 2013). Also, through such effective foreign policy, China proved that using power is not only solution to enter into other states or get control over things globally; rather strategies work the best (Oguzlu, 2020).

Conceptually, soft power refers to the ability of a nation or group of nations to influence the behaviour of other nations (Mingjiang, 2009). As a result of their research into these topics, authors like Joseph Nye Jr. and others (Fan, 2008; Fulton, 2020) have found patterns and shifts that characterise the contemporary political, social, and economic dynamics. These findings provide an explanation for the expanding popularity of soft power. Thus, the dramatic shift in the nature of international relations and, more specifically, the myriad of different patterns, that characterise the interaction among international actors, is the first change that must be taken into account when attempting to explain why the concept of soft power is still relevant today (Osipova, 2014). According to what Joseph Nye Jr. argued in his book "*Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*," the traditional method of viewing the relations between states, as only a balance of power based on their military strength, is insufficient to adequately describe the state of international politics in today's world (Nye, 2010). The things have been changing in past few years, and the role of China in international politics have raised the significance of soft power in the global dealings. Now, the states have understood that it is not the war to be fought through military strength; rather there is need to make some strategies and improve economy, as the future war is based on GDP growth and earning through exports (Fan, 2008). Thus, the dynamics are changing from strength to strategic war, where people are now facing an economy associated race, which is either making some states stronger or other states

as weaker and dependent over others (Lock, 2010).

1.10. Concept of Soft Power in Political Dynamics

The world as it exists today is more complicated than the world as it existed in the past because there are more actors involved and they all play an active role in the dynamics of international relations. The author (Amsden, 2001) was the first person to coin the phrase "rise of the rest" to describe the emergence of new participants in the international arena. She was referring to countries that had not previously played a significant role in international relations following the Second World War (Glaser & Murphy, 2009). Nye Jr. (2010) and other academics (Lords, 2014; Amsden, 2001; Fan, 2008; Fulton, 2020) have elaborated upon this term 'soft power', which refers to the increasing importance of non-state players in global governance (Lords, 2014).

In the conventional view of international relations, the sole participants in the international arena were thought to be nations and international organisations. However, in recent decades, additional players have emerged and are playing an important role in the field of international relations. Multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), terrorist groups, and even individuals are among the new global players. In some cases, however, just people are involved. The development of science and technology, which Nye Jr. (2004: p. 22) refers to as "democratising technology," has paved the way for the emergence of new actors by lowering the costs of communication and transportation and making technologies (including military instruments) more accessible and affordable for regular people (Sareen, 2018). These factors have made it possible for individuals outside of states to make use of technologies that were previously only available to states.

The current threat from terrorists, which is one of the most important things on the political agendas of both individual countries and international groups, is probably the best example of this kind of thing. Another trend that is strongly linked to the rise in the number of players in the international arena is the increasing complexity of how these players interact with each other and how power is shared. The author (Nye, 2010) compared the situation to a "three-dimensional chess game" to show how complicated it was. This three-dimensional model can also be expanded to include economic, military, and international issues. Lee (2011) says that there is only one military power on the planet at the moment. This is because the United States is the only real superpower, and it has used its power to gain control over a wide range of places. On the other hand, power is spread out in different ways when it comes to economic issues. This is because exporters and countries with a lot of money have a better standing in the world than other countries. In the same way, power is spread out without any organisation when it comes to global problems like climate change, international crime, terrorist attacks, and the spread of infectious diseases (Fulton, 2020). To be more specific, if one party (the United States) is more important than other nations in military conflicts, but in other areas (economics and transnational issues), the power is generally spread across countries, and no one can win over the others.

Literature (Hunter, 2009; Lords, 2014; Nye, 2010) also shows that the growing importance of "soft power" in modern international relations shows that military power alone is not enough to manage international relations (Nye, 2010). This is clear from what has been written. The investigation shows that using hard force to get control over certain things, like politics, can work, but it can't guarantee that all problems will be solved. The United States' invasion of multiple countries in the name of fighting terrorism is the best example of this phenomenon

(Lock, 2010). Even though the United States' invasion of several countries helped it gain control over some of the people there, the question of whether or not it actually reached its goals still stands (Li, 2018). For example, the United States' hard force superiority only worked to get rid of Saddam Hussein. It didn't work to build a democracy that can work or to stop international terrorism (Mingjiang, 2009). In other words, the only thing the US was able to do was get rid of Saddam Hussein (Hunter, 2009). On the other hand, the risk of terrorist attacks has grown a lot in the past few years, and U.S. policy, which is mostly based on the use of "hard power," has had a lot of unintended effects, as shown by the results of several polls (Yasushi, Watanabe, and McConnell, 2008; Zahran and Ramos, 2010, and Oguzlu, 2020), which show that anti-American feelings are growing in the Middle East. Also, terrorism is still seen by many countries as one of the biggest threats they face in their own countries.

The author (Wilson, 2008) says that China's "Peaceful Rise" strategy, which means not using hard power tools, is becoming more and more appealing to countries all over the world. This is because China's "Peaceful Rise" concept means that it won't use hard power tools. This is the exact opposite of what the United States is doing with its "hard power" programme (Laskai, 2013). Another scholar (Ramo, 2014; Huntington, 1993), who agreed with the same premise, called the growing role of China in the way international relations work the "Beijing consensus." This agreement goes against the "Washington Consensus," which is the one-sided, aggressive, and neoliberal policy that the United States follows (Ramo, 2014). Nye Jr. (2004) says that the high costs of using military means in the modern world are a big reason why coercion isn't as useful as persuasion. In the world we live in now, using military power comes with these costs. This is a big part of the whole picture. This is how things are in post-industrial democratic countries, which, according to Nye Jr., care more about the well-being of

their citizens than they do about military glory.

On the other hand, soft power is also a way to get economic benefits from it. When non-democratic countries start military campaigns, they may face setbacks like investors leaving their countries. In this case, these countries can get ahead of democratic countries by using soft power (Nye Jr 2004: p. 20). Osipova (2014) says that this is one of the reasons why decision-makers in both democratic and non-democratic countries are interested in expanding their public diplomacy tools and "soft power" in order to strengthen their position on the international stage. The increased importance of public opinion in the modern world is another reason why soft power will always be important (Glaser & Murphy, 2009). Wilson (2008) says that the spread of democracy and the revolution caused by advances in information technology are two of the most important things that have made the role of public opinion stronger on both the national and international levels. When talking about waves of democratisation, the American political scientist Samuel Huntington pointed out in 1993 that the number of democratic countries has grown over the last few decades. This was one of the things he talked about in his talk.

1.11. Democracy, Technology, and Soft Power

With the concept of globalization, the countries are now interconnected with each other and facing an economy-based race at international level. Thus, now to win this race, every country aims to establish effective foreign policy, maintain international relations, focus on exports, generate revenue through trading, and aims to attract investors. In this way, the country, which has strong economy, is considered to be the winner of this race. Moreover, this race has also promoted the concept of democracy and soft power because it is the best way to develop better relations internationally, and attract the investors in the region (Mingjiang, 2009). Not

only this, but also the countries and big organization now give value to public opinions rather than creating influence through ruling and power. Moreover, the technology has also played its contributions to support the soft power image, as with the technical advancements information can now be communicated in the modern world at a faster rate and at a lower cost than in the past (Hunter, 2009). This is made possible mainly to the fact that communication costs have been decreased. In a situation like this, states pay a growing amount of attention to public opinion, not just in their own country but also in other countries. Rising democracies like Mexico and Chile now important in international relations, as highlighted by the author (Nye, 2010). This is because emerging democracies like these have some influence voting in the United Nations Security Council (Nye Jr 2004: p. 16). When making decisions, the governments of such nations ought to take into account the viewpoints of their own inhabitants; failing to do so can have negative consequences for the nations in question.

Thus, the authors (Wilson, 2008; Nye, 2010) are of the idea that soft power is an essential component in the modern political context in order to attain one's objectives in a more strategic manner. In this regard, Wilson (2008) asserts that the world has become "smarter," which means that objectives can be accomplished in a more strategic manner. This phenomena can be observed in a variety of domains, including the fields of technology and education, for example. In terms of technological advances, high-tech tools may prove to be more efficient than their more conventional counterparts (Lords, 2014). For instance, when high technology is utilized in the framework of the military, innovation and weapons are able to achieve specific goals in a manner that is more efficient and successful than the traditional ones (Laskai, 2013). The transition from industrial economies to post-industrial economies suggested that the ability of a nation to produce and control knowledge and information is becoming an increasingly

important factor in determining its level of power (Wilson 2008). Furthermore, creativity and innovation are necessary components for the growth of all other industries, including the military industry.

One further reason why people are looking for smart power in today's world is that the populations that are being targeted have themselves grown "smarter." Education is now more available to everyone, including those who live in undeveloped countries. These newly educated populace have a demand for treatment that is distinct from that of generations past. The proliferation of democratic procedures has resulted in the reduction of the amount of leeway that is available to foreign leaders to operate as surrogates for the United States. This is due to the fact that the concept of soft power emphasizes cultural and national assets rather than military might (Yasushi, Watanabe, & McConnell, 2008; Li, 2018).

Over the course of the past few years, a number of academics have expressed scepticism over the applicability and efficiency of soft power in the context of the present dynamics of international politics (Sareen, 2018; Parmar & Cox, 2005; Lee, 2011). There is a substantial body of evidence that supports this tendency, and it is of the utmost importance. The Western liberal democracies used hard power means in some areas of the world (such as Iraq and Libya) in an effort to promote soft power values such as democracy and human rights (Parmar & Cox, 2005); however, these efforts were negatively perceived by the public opinion, which resulted in a decline in the liberal democracies' soft power. The European Union has reaped the benefits of its capacity for soft power for a significant amount of time, but it is now up against significant obstacles.

For instance, the European Union (EU) is experiencing difficulties as a result of

the growing number of political groups that are casting doubt on the procedure of European integration. In addition, if we consider its enlargement policy and the number of countries interested in joining it, the soft power potential of the European Union was enormous up until a few years ago (Osipova, 2014). However, in 2020, the EU faced for the first time in its history the possibility of the withdrawal of one of its member states (Hunter, 2009)

Additionally, the migration issue is putting a burden on the European Union's ability to manage international crises, as well as its capability to provide humanitarian relief and curb the growing worries of citizens regarding the invasion of migrants (Fan, 2008). There is an ongoing discussion on whether or not the corona virus will transform the global order, as well as whether or not we can still speak about soft power after thirty years have passed since the concept's inception (Oguzlu, 2020)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the techniques that nation-states have employed to combat the virus have been varied, and these efforts have been scrutinized by the public opinion of people all around the world. Because we live in a large and increasingly interconnected world, the spread of corona virus was accelerated in every region of the earth. Additionally, news spread extremely rapidly, and the actions made by international actors had an immediate impact not just on the general populace but also, in certain instances, on the financial markets. After receiving harsh criticism in the early stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, China strengthened its soft power by providing medical assistance to other countries that were deeply affected by the virus. One example of this is the aid that was provided to other countries by China. Furthermore, the position of the European Central Bank, particularly at the beginning of the crisis in Europe, and afterwards the debate among EU partners on the measures to be adopted to contain the economic crisis in the European countries most affected by the virus had a significant impact

on both the financial markets and European public opinion. This was especially true at the beginning of the crisis in Europe. Even if there has probably been a shift in the way that soft power is seen in the last 30 years, the utilisation of good public diplomacy is still very important in the context of international relations.

CHAPTER THREE

CHINA'S ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST AS SOFT POWER

China's oil goals have made it more involved in the Middle East. China didn't have to buy any oil until 1992 or 1993. Now, almost half of its oil comes from the Middle East. Since the British left the Persian Gulf more than 30 years ago, the U.S. has been the only major power in the Middle East (AEI, 2022). As China's influence in the region grows, it could come into conflict with the U.S. The Chinese government knows that helping the U.S. in regional issues is a good thing because it doesn't have much of a military role in the Middle East right now, so it depends on the US to protect its energy supply. China has been building business, diplomatic, and cultural ties with the region in a slow and quiet way. Also, many countries in the Middle East use China to supplement their relationships with the U.S.

Also, when comparing the influence of China and Soviet Union in the Middle East, there exists great difference (Aftab News, 2014). The China uses economics and flattery to win people over, while the Soviet Union used force and therefore Middle Eastern countries want to work with Chinese more. On the other hand, if analyzing the role of the United States in the Middle Eastern region, the same is the case here. US has always been believing to show its force power over the people to get control over resources and here it lacks behind the China, which has always focused on creating soft image at regional and global level.

3.1. Trade in Energy

At the start of the 21st century, the China understood that without creating healthy and friendly relationship with the Middle East, it cannot fulfil its oil demand. According to the

report of The International Energy Administration (Alterman, 2009), China made 54% of its oil in 2004.

Half of the rest comes from the Middle East. According to the report (Alterman, 2009), China will be getting 75% of its energy from outside the country by 2030. Not only this report, but also the economic analysts in China are of the view that countries that industrialised earlier had few limits because they had access to energy. Now, if the China will have limited access to the energy, then it will be harder for the country to grow in the same speed, and thus its production will be highly affected due to lack of energy. This may also affect the GDP growth of the China. Thus, the country has decided to develop healthy bilateral relations with the Middle Eastern countries and therefore exports of Chinese goods and services to oil-based economies in the MENA have grown quickly. Currently, China sells light manufactured goods, machinery and equipment, cars, groceries, engineering services, and labour services to the oil-producing countries in the Middle East, with which a better relations are expected in return.

The studies (Alterman, 2009; Teslik, 2008) also reveal that Chinese trade with the Middle Eastern region is not new. Since 2000, both Chinese exports and imports to the Middle East have grown by seven times. In 2006, trade between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and China was worth more than \$40 billion, most of which was oil exports. Most specifically, China's trade with the Middle East was worth more than \$76 billion. Moreover, the statistical report (Teslik, 2008) shows that in 2005, China made biggest trade with Saudi Arabia, the biggest oil supplier, 7.6% of its trade with the U.S., 8.7% of its trade with Japan, and 1.1% of all of its exports and imports. In detail, if analyzing its two-way trade with Middle Eastern and North African countries, it made up 4.2% of China's total trade in 2005. Now, the trade percentage between China and Middle East is continuously on rise and both countries are establishing

bilateral relations for the sake of regional and global benefits to each other. Now, according to the estimates of 2019 (Lons & Fulton, China's great game in the Middle East, 2019), the percentage of China's trade with Middle Eastern region has raised to 40%, in which the highest ratio is of oil imports, whereas MENA is also the major supplier of natural gas. In absolute terms, trade and investment between China and the Middle East are growing, which will help commerce in the future. China has a booming energy market and is a good place to invest in infrastructure. China's second-largest oil company, SINOPEC, worked with Saudi Aramco and Exxon Mobil to build a \$3.5 billion (Yearbook, 2005) refinery complex in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, in 2004. Now, the revenue of the SINOPEC has raised to \$401.3 billion and profits of \$8.3 billion (Fortune, 2020) which shows that how these two-way trading worked beneficially for both countries where China got a steady supply of oil for a long time, and Saudi Arabia found a market for its troubled crude.

China's relation with Middle Eastern countries is not one sided; rather both are enjoying benefits through trading and investments. Middle Eastern producers have tried to take advantage of China's building boom and need for raw materials. Moreover, it is expected that with the increasing demand, China would buy more aluminium from Middle Eastern countries. Since local production of the metal has grown a lot, the Persian Gulf is a good place to meet this need.

Not only this, but also the production of chemicals and petrochemicals in the GCC has grown. Every year, SABIC sells China \$2 billion worth of fertilizers, synthetic textiles, iron, steel, and plastics. In April 2006, SINOPEC and SABIC, which is Saudi Arabia's biggest chemical company, signed an agreement to work together to build an ethylene derivative production plant in Tianjin, which is in northern China. This agreement brought great opportunities for the Chinese company, and later SINOPEC put \$1.7 billion into the initiative for

autumn in 2009.

The best thing about China is the production to every market. The way China uses cheap labour to make cheap things, like ready-to-wear clothes and cars, is also reflected in trade between China and the Middle East. Early in 2004, most of the consumer goods on the Libyan market were made in China, which was in line with the rest of the region. This encouraged the Libyan industry to buy more stuff from China and sell it at reasonable rates to their audience, which not only brought profit to them but also increase economic advantages to Chinese. Officially, Chinese exports to Libya went \$33.3M in 1995 to \$1.88B in 2020 (OEC, 2020). With such great progress, Egypt thinks that China will replace the U.S. as its main economic partner in future.

China is interested to create its soft power influence in Middle East because the region is involved in both the process of providing and receiving capital. As a supplier, it looks for markets that provide the maximum potential return. Moreover, the recent increase in the price of oil has made the governments that make up the GCC the largest capital holders in the Middle Eastern region. During the period 2002–2006, investors from GCC countries sent around \$540 billion offshore, with 11% of that amount going to Asia (Bank, 2019), which is now raised to around \$3.5 trillion in 2020 (Institute, 2020). This also brought benefits to the China because many investors are looking at other markets because they want to make more money and are angry at the United States. They are also afraid that the fight against terrorism will make it harder for money to get into and out of the United States.

If turning the pages of history, in the 1970s, the United States was the primary destination for most of the money coming from the Gulf. However, this has changed with time and now people are angry at the United States for its invasion in different regions of the MENA for the sake

of ending terrorism. Since it is possible to make a lot of money in China, investors from the GCC see it as a particularly good place to put their money. Moreover, the Middle Eastern investors also started investing in different well-known institutions of China by purchasing their shares to build roots in Asian region and get benefits out of it. The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), which is the largest bank in China, was recently purchased by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) for a total of \$720 million in shares in 2006. This transaction received a great deal of media attention (IHT, 2006). Not only this, but also ICBC received an additional investment of \$206 million from the Qatar Investment Authority, after which the bank has announced plans to open a branch in Doha and is also considering opening an office in Dubai (Reuters, 2008).

3.2. China's use of Soft Power in Middle East

The two-way contact that takes place between China and the Middle East is not a recent phenomenon; rather, it has a history that spans more than two thousand years. Nevertheless, there haven't been any bumps in this relationship. The Bandung Asian-African Conference, which took place in 1955, was responsible for initiating the first ever bilateral cooperation (Ghosa, 2016). Both the Arab Spring and the Chinese Cultural Revolution caused a disruption in these interactions, and it was not until the 1970s that both parties were able to resume their involvement with one another. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China and the Middle East finally began to make strides toward improving their regional relations in the 1990s (Hayoun, 2016). This relationship was more established on the basis of economic interests, as China's fast rising economy enabled it to offer different products and possibilities to Middle Eastern countries. As a result of these economic interests, China and Middle Eastern countries

interacted more frequently. In exchange, Middle Eastern countries assisted China in fulfilling its requirements for energy resources. According to a study that was published by BBC News (2011), the United States and other foreign powers have been demonstrating their tremendous influence in the Middle East throughout the Arab Spring. The primary objective of this influence was to destabilise the power structure in the Middle East in order to gain appropriate access to that region's oil resources. This involvement contributed to the escalation of already serious conflicts, such as those in Syria. On the other hand, Russia and China have been playing a friendlier role to help Arabs and create stronger relationships with the (BBC, 2021). Since Russia and Syria have continued to maintain a strong alliance in major domains, the weakening of Syria might assist Russia in maintaining its power on a regional and worldwide level.

In the beginning, Russia provided any and all types of material, technical, and political support to the government of Bashar al-Assad. This was due to the fact that the government of Assad had assisted Russia in its efforts to combat terrorism in the region. However, later on, Russia started sponsoring anti-military elements and pushed them to continue involved in operations against the government. This was made possible by the benefits Russia gained politically, economically, and socially. This demonstrated China's loyal orientation toward the Middle East and mirrored the soft power structure of the Chinese government. Instead of attempting to seize control of things, China has always focused on creating bilateral relations with other nations in order to receive benefits in return. In a similar manner, China played a vital role in helping the government in the Middle East in order for China to achieve its economic goals in the area and beyond (Jin, 2016). China realised that the Middle East became firmly involved in military conflicts caused by the US, and as a result, China began providing Middle Eastern countries with the weapons and resources necessary to maintain their strength. This also

contributed to the development of cordial relationships between China and the countries of the Middle East, as both sides cooperated to further their own economic interests (Liao, 2013).

In 2004, China also formed a new forum known as the China-Arab States Collaboration Forum (CASF). The purpose of this forum was to encourage cooperation between China and. The very best thing about China is that it has always adhered to the official rhetoric that it promotes, which is that it does not intervene or interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries in the neighbourhood. The Chinese government operates based on the idea of giving and taking, without resorting to the use of force or weaponry. The world gets an impression of China as a weak nation as a result of this policy.

China thinks that growing its influence in the Middle East through trade is a pretty straightforward way to reach this goal. When it comes to the military, Beijing is much more careful. Because the US has worked so hard to keep peace and security in the Middle East, China has gotten a lot out of it. Even though Chinese leaders aren't always happy with how the U.S. government handles regional security issues and have sometimes made policies and had trade relationships that hurt U.S. efforts, they haven't done much to challenge U.S. dominance or major policy initiatives. As a direct result of pressure from the US, Beijing has cut back on some of the arms it sells to Iran and has helped the UN Security Council try to get Iran to stop its uranium enrichment programme.

China's military involvement in the Middle East has mostly been limited to the sale of weapons and the transfer of technologies that can be used for both military and civilian purposes. China has also been part of the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). By the end of the 1980s, China was the third largest exporter of arms in the world, and

by 1989, it had 8% of the world's arms trade. China sent a lot of cheap small guns and low-end military equipment to the Middle East, which was one of its most important markets. In early 2000s, countries with a lot of money, like most Middle Eastern buyers, have been able to buy more technologically advanced weapons from the US, Russia, and Europe. China is now a small supplier to the region. By 2007, China's share of the world's total shipments of weapons had dropped to less than 1.5 percent.

However, again China started designing more economical and advantageous weapons at cheap rates which again increased its exports to Middle East and other global regions. Though with time, China applied some limits on its arm exports, but still it is fourth largest arm exporter in 2020, whereas the United States is ranked as first largest exporter and Russia is at second number in the list (Jennings, 2021).

China has always tried its best to create soft power influence over the regions, for which it expands its economic investments and help other countries to deal with their security and finance associated challenges. Though, China does not believe in creating arm influence by using its military forces, but it has been involved in export of arm weapons to strengthen other regions against the United States, with which not only it gets support at regional and global level but also become even stronger against the United States. During the Iran-Iraq War, Beijing sold weapons to both the Iranian and Iraqi governments, as well as to other countries like Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, and Egypt (Grimmett, 2007).

Along with the export of weapons, China has tried to improve its reputation as a responsible stakeholder by joining the UN Interim Force in Lebanon. At the same time, it has tried to gain some influence in the ongoing peace talks in the Middle East (UNIFIL). At the start of 2006,

China sent 182 engineers to UNIFIL to help rebuild the infrastructure in Lebanon that had been destroyed by the civil war. After the war between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, Beijing offered to increase its contributions to UNIFIL to 240. This was in response to a request from the UN for help in expanding the mission. This was true even though an Israeli shelling of a UN observer post killed a Chinese observer. Premier Wen Jiabao promised to send 1,000 more Chinese troops to UNIFIL and to give \$5 million in humanitarian aid to Lebanon while he was in France and Italy, two other important countries that send troops to UNIFIL (Knight, 2016). This promise from China to send more troops has not been kept. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) had about 343 troops stationed in southern Lebanon in 2007 and 2008. Most of these soldiers were field engineers who worked on things like removing mines and fixing infrastructure. Also, 60 people worked in a field hospital that was part of UNIFIL. Along with this, there have been a lot fewer contacts between the Chinese military and their counterparts in other parts of the world, like Africa and Latin America, as well as in the Middle East. Also, high-ranking PLA officers have travelled to Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, among other places, to meet with their counterparts there. Moreover, senior military officers from Iran, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, and Qatar have been to China which shows that these countries aim to establish better military, economic, and bilateral international relations with each other and promote peace at regional and global level.

3.3. Recent Dynamics in China–Middle East Relations

As a result of China's growing economic might and improved relations with its neighbours on the regional and bilateral levels, the country currently occupies a very significant political and global position (Calabrese, 2017). China is making every effort to become the next

global superpower, but in order to achieve this goal, it has never employed a military strategy. The United States has been using its military strength to have control over nations, but China has been using bilateral relations to influence the territories it borders. This is the primary difference between China and the United States when it comes to the use of power. The "One Belt One Road" Project was first proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, with the intention of expanding China's political and economic influence in the Middle East region, as well as connecting significant countries in the region. Because of this road, the countries are able to quickly and safely export and import their products with relative ease (Olimat, 2013). It is anticipated that the OBOR will serve as the primary motivating factor in bridging the gap between China and the Middle East. Xi's goal in launching this initiative was to establish connections between over 100 countries for the purpose of fostering bilateral benefits in the areas of trade, the economy, and nuclear programmes. Despite this, after concluding discussions and holding meetings with the participating countries, forty of them signed bilateral agreements with China to collaborate on the construction of One Belt One Road. China put its initial \$50 billion into this project at the beginning of 2017, and it is anticipated that China would put additional money into it in the future (Sharma & Kundu, 2016). The construction of this road will allow China to establish connections with numerous other nations, including Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. By means of these programmes, China has also been providing assistance to a great number of countries in times of conflict and natural catastrophes. This demonstrates his optimistic outlook on international relations and the role it plays in exerting a gentle influence on states.

Because China takes such a constructive and conciliatory attitude, it has been gaining power and control over the region. As a result, the countries in the region are becoming

increasingly reliant on China for the economic, political, architectural, and social choices they make. At this point, practically everything on the market is produced by Chinese manufacturers, which is a reflection of how China has been expanding its influence in markets around the world (Mitchell, 2007).

At the beginning of the twenty first century, China came to the realization that the growing political and economic interest in China's connections with the countries of the Middle East had raised the necessity and sense of urgency to strengthen those relations. Not only did it concentrate on the Middle East, but it also began cultivating its relations with the countries of Asia through a variety of initiatives, the most notable of which is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Paper, 2005). This project was initiated by China and Pakistan with the purpose of connecting all of the countries in the region in order to achieve mutually beneficial relationships between them. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a big project that is incredibly essential not only for Pakistan but also for China in a variety of different ways. The very first thing that is in both countries' best interests is to strengthen their regional ties in order to have better relationships with their other neighbours.

According to a report that was issued by the United States Energy Information Administration (EIA, 2018), China has surpassed the United States as the largest importer of crude oil from the Middle East since 2013. This change occurred in 2013. The consumption of crude oil from the Middle East is anticipated to satisfy seventy percent of China's need for energy, according to the estimations. Not only this, but the economic involvement that China has with the region extends beyond the realm of energy as well. The data shown here demonstrates how crucial it is for China to strengthen bilateral relations with the Middle East. In exchange, China has been giving the region with significant financial support and military weaponry to help it

defend itself against invasions by the United States (Luft, 2016).

In addition, the 1+2+3 model of cooperation was presented by China during the 6th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab Forum in the year 2014. China and the Middle East reached an agreement to collaborate bilaterally in the areas of investment, trade, and infrastructure through the use of this approach. In addition to this, both areas have reached an agreement to step up their collaboration in the fields of nuclear energy and space satellites. The stakes are enormous, which is why China has been providing Iraq with military hardware and financial support in order to fight against the United States and to demonstrate that it will never submit to the strength it wields. Following the United States' exit, China made a proposal to invest in the oil industry in Iraq, with the goal of not only bolstering the region's economy but also making it stronger in the years to come. China anticipates economic growth, increased trade, and advancements in nuclear technology as a result of this partnership (Irish, 2016).

3.4. Decline of US Prestige through Soft power

Public opinion polls show that the United States has lost a lot of respect in the Middle East. Even though the reasons for this change are still up for discussion, it is clear that the Palestinian conflict and the two wars waged by the United States (in Iraq and Afghanistan) have substantially paralleled the economic downturn. It is striking that public opinion in even countries that are friends of the United States, such as Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco, has become increasingly negative towards the role that the United States plays in the Middle East and the quality of its relationships with local regimes. It is unknown whether this will alter with the advent of a new administration or new policies, but the tendency that has been evident in recent times cannot be denied. In a poll of Arab public opinion that was carried out in 2006 by Shibley

Telhami and Zogby International, it was found that 78 percent of respondents had opinions of the United States that were either somewhat or very unfavourable (Sadat, 2007). Even though they are U.S. allies in the region, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco had the greatest percentages of people who held opinions of the United States that were very unfavourable. In a similar vein, confidence levels in Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco were among the lowest in the United States. Additionally, visiting the United States has become more frustrating as a result of stringent new visa requirements and increased screening of Arab travellers. As a result, an increasing number of Arabs are considering attending universities in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand due to the ease with which visas can be obtained in those countries (IWC, 2007).

Similar to how congressional resistance to the Dubai Ports World transaction in early 2006 and recent anxieties about Arab sovereign wealth fund investments have created apprehensions in the Middle East, this opposition and these fears have contributed to a rise in tensions. Overall, less personal ties are being made between Arabs because many Arabs have doubts about their chances of travelling to or attending school in the United States. On the other hand, perceptions of China in the Middle East have substantially improved over the past few years. Respondents to the same Telhami-Zogby International survey placed China in second place, behind only France, as the nation they would most like to see become a superpower in a world with just one superpower. France came in first place (News, 2006). The Pew Global Attitudes Project found that in 2007, Egyptians were twice as likely to have a good view of China as they were to have a negative view, and Kuwaitis were three times as likely to have a favourable view of China. According to research conducted by Gallup in 2008, a far higher percentage of people living in Middle Eastern countries approved of China's performance as a world leader than approved of the United States' performance.

The Chinese presence in the Middle East is relatively recent, and the country serves as an instructive example of how an ancient civilisation may continue to thrive in the modern world. Arab intellectuals in particular have pounced on this idea, and a number of papers and speeches have recognised China's road to modernization as something that Arabs may learn from. Naguib Mahfouz suggested that Arab cultures should broaden their scope of what they take from other countries to include what they may learn from China because the historical and social traditions of China are most comparable to those of the Middle East. In a piece that was published not too long ago in a publication in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), an author made the argument that the "China model" demonstrates "there is another pathway for governments of the globe to follow in order to successfully seek economic growth" (Hwidan, 2008) Abdel-Moneim Said, a researcher at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, drew the conclusion that the Arab world could learn something from China's path to development after observing the disparities in the manner in which Arab and Chinese societies reacted to grave social challenges. Charity is to blame, at least in part, for the improvement in China's image. In exchange for limited but ever-increasingly significant market access and energy supplies, China has provided enormous health aid and medical support to poorer Middle Eastern countries like Yemen. One example of this help is Yemen. Over the previous 40 years, more than 2,000 Chinese medical personnel have been dispatched to Yemen, and currently 163 Chinese nationals are stationed there. In keeping with China's previous vows to enhance health cooperation with all Arab League states, Yemen and China signed a memorandum of agreement on health care in July of 2007, which formally established China's assistance to Yemen's healthcare system. The fact that Yemen has only two physicians for every 10,000 people means that the help provided by China has a significant

impact on the lives of a great number of Yemenis and has done so for decades (FMPRC, 2011).

China's involvement in Yemen is not entirely motivated by humanitarian concerns. Yemen has a large supply of natural gas, a trade partnership with China worth \$3 billion annually, and a strategic location astride the Bab el Mandeb and opposite the Horn of Africa. All of these factors contribute to Yemen's economic success. China's investment in Yemen may come as a surprise given that Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world (Armin, 2015). Yemen has only limited natural resources and a relatively low purchasing power parity (\$2,750 compared with the UAE's \$37,000). Despite this, China has been able to profit from the investments it has made. It has found that Yemen is an excellent market for its exports, with trade between the two nations reaching a total of \$3 billion in the year 2005 (Xinhua, 2006), which is now touching trillion of dollars for the sake of bilateral benefits.

One of the ways China courts Yemen through humanitarian means is by providing medical help. In doing so, China is extending its connection with a country that is becoming an increasingly significant player in the area. The growing interest in China among both the general public and the elite has been reflected in a rise in educational and tourist links. The number of academic institutions devoted to the study of China in the Middle East is growing. Each year, there are approximately 1,500 Egyptian college students who enrol in Chinese language classes. Additionally, the Chinese Cultural Center and the Egypt-China Friendship Association each offer classes to up to 1,000 Egyptians who are not enrolled in colleges.

While Al-Azhar University has approximately 200 students studying Chinese, Ain Shams University has the largest Chinese department in Africa, with 500 undergraduate students majoring in Chinese. In 2004, Cairo University also began its own China programme. China's

vice minister of education was present for the inaugural ceremony, and the Chinese government gave a donation of 1,000 books and magazines written in Chinese to promote the department (Daily, 2004). In 2005, Egyptian and Chinese education officials reached an agreement to create the "Egyptian Chinese.

Institution" in Cairo. This establishment would be the first Chinese university located in the Middle East (Network, 2015) . The signing of an agreement between China and Egypt to establish a Chinese school on the outskirts of Cairo took place in September of 2008. An Egyptian publication reports that parents of 1,500 children submitted applications for 87 kindergarten places during the program's first year of operation. The construction of the school came to a total cost of \$3.75 million, and the convention requires China to construct an identical school in each of Egypt's 29 governorates (Al-Ahram, 2008). In addition, every year in China, some 300 professionals receive training in technical disciplines. This is mostly done as part of a Chinese plan to teach 10,000 Africans as part of the Forum for Chinese-African Cooperation.

With time the relationship between China and Middle East is even getting stronger, which is bringing more educational advantages for both sides. Currently, students from Saudi Arabia are given scholarships to study in China by Chinese businesses with operations in Saudi Arabia. These scholarships allow students to attend schools in China. Also, the Chinese government gives college scholarships directly to both students and professionals who want to go to college.

However, not every Middle Eastern country is as interested in building cultural ties with China as the others. In Algeria, for example, bilateral trade has grown from \$4 billion in 2008 to \$1.2 trillion in 2018, but there aren't many chances to learn Chinese, even though there is

a growing need for people who speak both Chinese and Arabic. The Chinese embassy says that a proposal to open a Confucius Institute was sent to the Ministry of Education. However, the Ministry of Education did not respond to the proposal, and the Chinese language classes at the National Library are not enough to meet the demand. A lot of Chinese businesses have started to teach their Algerian workers on the job in a casual way.

Tourism is becoming a more important way for people from different cultures to meet and learn from each other. By 2025, it is expected that millions of Chinese people will travel all over the world. This will create a profitable market that Arab businesses want to take advantage of (Daily, 2004). The Egyptian Tourism Authority has decided to try to get more tourists from China as part of its future tourism strategy. China and Egypt signed an agreement in October 2001 that made Egypt open to Chinese tourists. Since then, the number of Chinese tourists has steadily grown. China wants to send more tourists to places like Egypt to help make up for the big trade gap between the two countries. Arabs are told to learn Chinese so that they can do business with China and get ready for the expected arrival of Chinese tourists.

To promote tourism between Middle East and China, Chinese government also invested huge amount to start flights between China and Middle Eastern region. The evidence of this is the flights between China and Dubai, which started in 2004 and still are helping millions of customers to fly between these two regions. China has also made it easier for people in Arab countries to get involved by making an Arabic version of China Today. The regional office for the monthly magazine is in Cairo, and about two-thirds of the 15,000 copies that are sent out to readers in the area are sent to Egypt. It's called Al-Sin al-Yawm, and it's a magazine with more than 80 pages of content that is clearly meant for Arabs. The magazine was put together by professionals. Every issue has a section called "We're All East," which is about activities that

Arabs and Chinese people do together. A section called "A Changing Society" talks about how people live in China. There are also sections about money and the economy. Recent issues ended with an article called "In a Coffeehouse on a Chinese Street." It was written by an Arab who was living in China and told about things he saw and did.

Al-Sin al-Yawm is a great journal in many ways, but it also shows how much more effort the West has put into building relationships in the Middle East than China does right now. Even with all of its goals, al-Sin al-Yawm is a much less ambitious project than Hi magazine, which was made in the United States but has since been shut down. Hi magazine was even glossier and could hold its own against the best lifestyle magazines in the United States. China's efforts to teach foreign languages are laughable when compared to those of organisations like the British Council, which directly teaches more than 25,000 Egyptians English every year, and the United States Agency for International Development. Together with other Western embassies, the United States and the United Kingdom, China fund a wide range of cultural programmes. These programmes cover everything from the arts to practical life skills. Each year, the US government pays to bring more than 500 Egyptians, from smart young people to rising government officials, to the US.

Chinese diplomats in the Middle East don't understand why the West is so worried about their relatively small efforts to build cultural bridges, which are similar to what the US and other Western powers have been doing for more than 50 years. These efforts are a lot like what the US and other Western countries have done in the past. People are often confused by the fact that the United States' interest in the Middle East seems to be mostly about national security, while China's current policy is to follow the United States' lead on the issue. One Chinese official in Algeria said something that stood out: "How about you take care of security and we take

care of business?" (Algiers, 2008).

China is becoming more and more interesting to governments and people in the Middle East because it is rich and growing, and it says it doesn't care about power politics. Iran is a good example of this. Up until now, it has been very careful not to make too much trouble and has worked hard to put itself in a place where it can benefit from U.S. security without directly supporting it. China's cultural diplomacy is still in its early stages. To get regional governments to like China, Chinese diplomats skillfully point out how fundamentally similar China and those countries are. China is also following a well-trodden path, which is clear from the fact that it is building the same kinds of language programmes and exchanges that have been the backbone of cultural projects in the West for decades. People in the region think that China is a country with a lot of potential and that it doesn't want to use the people or resources of the region in a neocolonial way. That is, people in the Middle East think that the Chinese government's policy in their area is mostly an example of soft power, not hard power.

3.5. China's Growing Influence in Middle East

China's relationship with the Middle East has gotten better because of Beijing's foreign policy. This policy aims to find a balance between China's competing powers and to make the world more open to working with other countries. Throughout China's involvement in the area, the country has focused on South-South cooperation and shared interests, most of which are economic in nature. Beijing has kept a position that keeps it away from the immediate dangers of long-lasting conflicts. However, new problems are likely to arise because the current security arrangement and the balance of power in the region are likely to change depending on a number of factors, most notably the outcome of future nuclear talks with Iran.

In the past few years, China's cooperation with Iran has grown, and a 25-year cooperation agreement has helped China diversify its connections with Iran. Iran's foreign policy has mostly been about growing the "axis of resistance," which needs China's help, even though the nuclear talks are still at a standstill. Iran sells most of its oil to China because it doesn't have many other ways to get into the international energy market. This is because the US is putting more and more sanctions on Iran. China's diplomatic support for Iran's nuclear talks has been very important, and China has pushed for Iran to join regional groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (SCO). In the last few years, China has also taken part in naval drills with Iran and Russia in the Gulf of Oman. This was done as a show of strength against the West as tensions in the area have been rising. The Gulf of Oman was the site of these drills.

China has made its ties with Iran stronger, but it has also grown its economic ties with Iran's rivals in the Middle East. This fits with Beijing's strategy of keeping a careful balance between its different interests in the area. China has strengthened its economic ties with other Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. This is especially true in the building of infrastructure, telecommunications, technology, and energy, which are all important parts of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2016, Saudi Arabia and China made a strategic alliance that covered everything. This alliance has been looked at and made better over time. In the past few years, China and Saudi Arabia have worked together more on building infrastructure, and China is now helping to fix up the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia.

Beijing has also been involved in a lot of important projects in Egypt. For example, China's state-owned companies are building the Central Business District in Egypt's new administrative capital. Egypt really needs to finish these projects. Over the past 20 years, China has changed

its focus and grown its economic ties with Egypt. China is especially interested in Egypt because of its good location and the possibility that it will become an important manufacturing and transportation hub for the region in the future. After the economic zone around the Suez Canal was opened up, China was able to make big gains in the Egyptian market. The Suez Canal Area Development Project is still the most important way for Beijing to get to Europe by sea, and China is still the project's main investor.

China has also put a lot of money into countries like Iraq and Syria, especially for projects related to rebuilding. China's reliance on Iraq's oil and its location in a key region have become more important, while the United States' sanctions against Syria have caused Damascus to strengthen its relationship with China in defiance of the Caesar Act.

In the big picture, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has brought the region's and China's interests closer together. It is also getting better at working together with other important initiatives that help with economic and social reforms in the region. Some of these plans are Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia, Vision 2040 in Oman, Vision 2030 in Qatar, Vision 2035 in Kuwait, and Vision 2030 in Egypt. The plan to build and expand the Maritime Silk Road is an important part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It would connect China to the Mediterranean through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Suez Canal. This plan is being made right now. Along these trade routes, there are important choke points on the water that make it hard for ships to pass. This gives Beijing another reason to put more money into investments and projects that will improve infrastructure in the Middle East.

China gets most of its crude oil from Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, so Beijing has a big financial and strategic interest in the area. In the past few years,

China has bought more oil from Iran, which is also cheaper for them. As tensions in the region continue to rise and outside powers focus more on quickly adjusting to the changing geopolitical landscape of the region, it is likely that China will strengthen its military connections to protect its strategic interests.

Beijing has taken advantage of the desperation of countries in the Middle East, like Iran and Syria, that are under U.S. sanctions. However, Washington is trying to stop China from working with Iran by imposing new sanctions to discourage Chinese involvement. In this context, the fact that China sells military equipment to countries in the Middle East will be a big deal and a key factor. When trying to figure out how the region's politics are changing, it is important to pay attention to how China is building military ties with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Due to the United States' current focus on procedures, alliances, and security arrangements to stop Chinese ambitions in the region, Washington's partners in the Middle East may limit military cooperation with China in some way. In the meantime, China will keep getting more involved in joint maritime exercises and will keep working with regional partners on security operations that aren't the norm.

Diplomats and strategic experts in China have shed some light on the basis for China's proactive involvement in the region. The Western-led "traditional security perception" is focused on achieving security by defeating the enemy and keeping exclusive military alliances. Beijing, on the other hand, thinks that "shared security perceptions" can help bring about peace through development. This is not what Beijing thinks about "traditional security," which is the opposite of what we just said. But China's plans to encourage political dialogue between competing countries and set up multilateral arrangements to reduce mistrust and broaden common interests (which were also in China's Arab Policy Paper) are still not clear on how to reach these

goals, especially in the midst of ongoing conflicts. When responding to changes in politics in the region, Chinese ambassadors have been careful, focusing on shared interests and not saying much about political struggles that aren't going well. They have also often called for a multi polar alternative to US-led security initiatives in the region. China is facing a big problem when it comes to protecting its maritime interests and keeping peace and stability along key choke points and crossroads. This is because the security situation in the region is getting worse and more conflicts and attacks are likely to happen. It's not clear yet what role China will play in the new security system, but it's unlikely that China will replace the US as the main source of security. So far, Beijing hasn't shown much excitement about taking on that task. Within this system, regional authorities may be able to increase their power by being more forceful and outspoken.

It is possible that regional powers will take on new responsibilities to protect their own interests in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, where there are political stalemates and threats to national security. For example, Iranian forces are currently filling the void in Syria. Other proxy militias and groups that want to increase their power in the wake of the United States' withdrawal may follow a similar pattern. Part of how the new security situation in the region will play out will depend on how China responds to changes like these in the area. Beijing's balancing act is based on the economy, trade, and investment. However, to keep this momentum going, it is important to keep the area safe and stable. This is harder to do when there isn't a strong collective security system that everyone can use. Once China gets into a tough spot in the delicate balancing act, it may decide to be more assertive and use its economic and political tools directly as well as indirectly by putting pressure on the powerful and ruling elites in the region. This could help China protect its strategic goals better. Even though China hasn't gotten

involved in any of the regional crises that have happened so far, Beijing's strategy of hedging and limits of non-interference will eventually be put to the test (Moonakal, 2022).

CHAPTER FOUR

CHINA'S GEO-ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN MIDDLE EAST

Since the beginning of the century, Chinese companies have substantially increased the amount of money they invest in the Middle East (also known as West Asia), particularly in projects related to the region's energy and natural resource industries as well as infrastructure that can be put to a variety of different uses. China is contributing financially, administratively, and physically to the development of vital infrastructure in a variety of regions, including the Middle East, as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. (BRI). It has requested that the nations of the Middle East become founding members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and it has pledged to provide assistance to those nations in the construction of their respective infrastructures (AIIB). As a consequence of this, ten countries in the region (Iran, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia) have joined, and the prospect of receiving funding for infrastructure and development is now a consideration for some of these countries when they collaborate with China to find a solution to the conflict.

The Chinese government's conventional approach to matters of international and national security in the Mideast is predicated on the principle of remaining neutral. This is among the most significant guiding principles that should be followed. The People's Republic of China's (PRC) policy in the area and all over the world has always been founded on the principle of not interfering in the internal affairs of other sovereign states. This is true both in the area and elsewhere in the globe (Shichor 2013). Beijing has painstakingly and practically established a case-by-case strategy throughout time, which demonstrates how conditional its stances and actions on non-interference, national sovereignty, and democracy are. This strategy was developed as a response to the growing number of international issues in which China was becoming

involved.

There has historically been certain amount of leeway in Beijing's actual approach to the management of its foreign and security policy, despite the fact that the policy of non-interference serves as an essential guiding principle for China's strategic work and is a major tool for the country's rhetorical efforts. Despite the fact that adherence to the non-intervention principle is one of the most important tools in rhetoric, this is the situation (Chen 2016). To be more specific, China does not get involved in the domestic affairs of other sovereign countries unless it believes that its own national or economic interests are being threatened or jeopardized by the situation (for example, the security of its increasing overseas interests, Chinese residents, and energy supply) (Chaziza and Goldman 2016). Additionally, China has been placing a greater priority on maintaining a positive image in the eyes of the rest of the world. Its goal is to demonstrate that it is either a major power that may be relied on or an important role in the region. This not only boosts China's position in the area, but also in the USA and the rest of the world as a whole (Potter 2013; Wang 2011). In the past, China was not pleased with the manner in which the United Nations maintained peace. But beginning in the 1980s, the nation's perspective began to shift, and in 1990, it dispatched its first party of monitors to the Middle East in order to participate in the activities of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. Ever since, China has dispatched military experts to Syria and personnel to Lebanon in order to assist the United Nations in maintaining peace in both countries. China also maintains a presence in the Middle Eastern country of Lebanon (Oosterveld 2017).

As further evidence that it is committed to the overall effort to combat piracy in the Arabian Seas, China has maintained a flotilla in the Gulf of Aden. More over half of China's peacekeeping personnel are stationed in the Middle East, where they primarily conduct pro government patrols

off the Somali coast. This region also serves as China's primary export market. This is a component of a United Nations effort (Aronson 2016). In the same year, Beijing established its first foreign navy facility in the country of Djibouti. The People's Liberation Army Navy relies on this location for its operational and logistical support needs (PLAN). According to the Chinese government, the primary objective of the base that will be established in Djibouti will be to provide a place of rest and recreation for the more than 2,400 Chinese troops who are currently engaged in combating pirates, maintaining peace on behalf of the United Nations, and assisting people who are in need in the surrounding area (Fei 2017). On the other hand, the expertise that China gains from constructing the facility in Djibouti will allow it to construct additional military outposts overseas. The result of this will be an increase in China's influence in the region. Additionally, the site will serve as a permanent launchpad for deep operations in Africa as well as the region surround the Indian Ocean, both from the sea and the air (Singh 2015). The concept of mediation diplomacy has emerged as one of the most significant aspects of China's overall goals and operations related to its foreign policy. The Chinese capital of Beijing has intentionally positioned itself as a mediator in the wars and crises afflicting the Middle East. There have been suggestions made by Chinese diplomats and politicians that China may play a role as a peacemaker in a few of these crises (Sun and Zoubir 2018). Beijing also wants to play a more constructive role in the resolution of conflicts there, such as the Iranian nuclear crisis and the Syrian civil war, by strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other major powers and regional organisations. Examples of these conflicts include the Iranian nuclear crisis and the Syrian civil war (Chaziza 2018).

4.1. China's Economic Diplomacy

Beijing used to think that economics and politics were two separate fields that didn't have anything to do with each other. But since the 2000s, economic diplomacy has become an increasingly important part of China's foreign policy as a whole (Medeiros 2009). In China, the term "economic diplomacy" means using trade, capital, and finance policies to help China reach its political and strategic goals. To help China's economy grow, this strategy gives top priority to protecting resources, building up export industries, and boosting China's "soft power." This phrase was made up by the government (Wang 2004). China's national fiscal diplomacy includes trade, investments, and many other types of economic cooperation. This strategy takes advantage of every economic and financial tool that is available. It also uses direct and military mediation, as well as any other strategy that helps the economy, so that China can get resources that will help its economy, like markets, investments, technologies, or skilled workers. So that China can reach its goal of becoming an economically stronger country, this is done. This is done to increase the amount of money that businesses can make (Heath 2016).

In a larger sense, China's economic diplomacy is part of the country's long-held goal and Chinese President Xi Jinping's plan to bring back Beijing's supposed lost national grandeur. This fits with the "Chinese dream" and gives it a sense of direction and purpose. This fits with the idea of the "Chinese dream," which gives the idea a sense of meaning and direction (China Daily 2017). This strategy is based on the idea that commercial tools and actions, as well as diplomatic ones, can help achieve diplomatic goals and objectives, and vice versa. Along with the promise that help will be given for the "national rejuvenation" process, the goals and methods of economic cooperation will continue to be flexible so that they can be changed to meet China's needs at any time (Heath 2016).

Several different ethnic, religious, and political groups, as well as major powers

from outside the region, have been involved in a number of different conflicts and crises in the Middle East over the course of a number of years. Because of these links, the wars and crises that are happening in the area right now have become the biggest threat to its stability and security. Because Beijing's financial power in the area is growing, the Chinese capital has been keeping a close eye on the area around it, paying special attention to the growth of trouble spots and the security risks they pose. On the other hand, China has been trying to avoid taking a proactive stance and not giving clear answers on controversial topics so that it can stick to its hard policy of not getting involved in other countries' affairs. China has a policy that says it won't get involved in the politics of other countries. The Middle East's oil resources continue to have a big effect on the Chinese economy. Since China has free access to these resources, it is very affected by the unstable political situation in the region. Taking this step is the most important thing China can do to further its interests in the area. It is thought that about one third of the country's natural gas imports and about half of its oil imports come from the Middle East. Most of these come from countries in the Gulf region (Workman 2018). China and the Middle Eastern countries are working together on many energy projects, such as chemical and natural gas projects in the Middle East and refinery projects in China. Second, Beijing's economic activities and goals in the region are not limited to the energy sector. There are a lot of different business areas that help make these plans and goals happen. The Middle East has become the most important place to buy things in the area very quickly. It also acts as a market for Chinese goods and a place where Chinese businesses can find new ways to invest. China is also the largest source of investment opportunities and infrastructure contracts in the region. In 2016, trade between China and the other countries in the area was worth a total of \$228.39 billion. (Gong 2017).

Due to its strategic location on land and sea routes leading to Europe and Africa, the Middle East has become an important economic link between the East and the West. Also, the Middle East is an important part of the international connections that China has made through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Gonen, 2019). Beijing has given money to help build a network of ports and rail lines in the area. The goal is to make a connection between China and Europe through Asia and the Middle East, so that Chinese ships can travel to Europe more safely. The goal of this connection is to link China and Europe. (Qian 2016). Third, China has diplomatic ties with every country in the Middle East and works well with all of them. Because of this, Beijing has been able to gain power in places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and Egypt that are not in its immediate Asia-Pacific neighbourhood. This is important because exports to this part of the world make up a big part of China's economy. In the end, China wants to be seen as a credible and trustworthy big power in other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East. This is something that China hopes will happen in the area (Calabrese 2017). China has a lot of interests in the Middle East, so it is important for the country to show that it cares more about keeping the political and military arrangements there stable.

Some people in the Chinese government are worried about the spread of extremist ideas and the rise of terrorism.. Both of these things have to do with the turmoil in the Middle East. However, they have nothing to do with Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and it has nothing to do with terrorism and extremist. The Chinese and Western governments has mistakenly associated Islam with terrorism. It is important to remember that terrorism is not a religious phenomenon. It is a political and social phenomenon that can be found in all religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism (Islamic Society of North America, 2023).

China has been especially worried about the link between Uyghur terrorism in

Xinjiang and the rise of terrorism, as well as how these things affect China's national security. China is also worried about how these things will affect the Uyghur. People have thought that this relationship could be a threat to China's national security (Gulmohamad 2014). It is also worried that contracts that are good for business could end or not be renewed. These people and groups live in places where violence is likely to happen a lot (Parello-Plesner and Duchatel 2015). Even though China's policy is to stay out of other countries' problems and follow the non-intervention principle, it sometimes has to get involved in local affairs when it has a lot of assets, investments, firms, or people in a conflict zone. This happens even though China tries not to get involved in the problems of other countries. Even though China hasn't played much of a role in Middle Eastern security or diplomacy in the past, the country's policy of not getting involved in this region and other parts of the world has been more flexible, practical, and risky than most people think.

Beijing has become more active in international relations. This is mostly because multilateral groups like the China-Gulf Forum and the Arab League are trying to join the AIIB. These international groups have been the main way that Beijing has stepped up its diplomatic activity (Calabrese 2017).

China keeps asking that disagreements be solved through talks and negotiations (political settlement), and it puts in a lot of work through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to promote peace, collaboration, and wealth creation (Gong 2017). China has done things like contribute to UN peacekeeping forces (for example, in Lebanon), pass resolutions at the UN Security Council (for example, during the Iran nuclear crisis), act as a mediator between fighting parties, name special ambassadors, and host high-level dialogues (Djallil, 2011). This article talks about four different diplomatic methods that China uses as part of its economic diplomacy to help it

reach the goals it has set for its foreign policy. As part of these diplomatic efforts, people and investments are protected, economic growth and development are supported, harsh economic measures and financial forces are used, and infrastructure that can be used for more than one thing is built or run.

4.2. Protection through Financial Investment

As a direct result of the conflicts and crises in the Middle East, Beijing realised that it had to get involved in local fights to protect its people and property abroad. Because of the Yemeni sectarian conflict, Beijing's economic investments in Yemen and the safety of Chinese people living there are in danger. This is clear in how China's non-interference policy tries to find a balance between these three interests. The Ministry of Commerce of China says that Beijing has 14 companies with 460 workers in Yemen. These businesses work on trade projects in oil extraction, telecommunications, construction, building roads and bridges, and fishing (Lee 2015). Also, Yemen sends about 1.4–1.5 million barrels of Masila crude oil to China every month. China bought 315 percent more oil from Yemen in the first two months of 2015 than it did in the same time period in 2014 (Godehardt, 2020). This is despite the fact that China only buys a small amount of crude oil from Yemen (Reuters 2015). Also, if the sectarian fighting in Yemen gets worse, it could eventually threaten China's most important oil sources in the Middle East (Iran and Saudi Arabia). The BRI has added a second economic and strategic dimension because it goes through the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which is under the control of Yemen, on its way to the Red Sea. Yemen's civil war could lead to a blockade of the Bab al-Mandab Strait or make it hard for ships to move through the Gulf of Aden. Yemen has a key role to play in both the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's efforts to make sure energy security because of

its location. This is because Yemen is close to the Horn of Africa, an area where Beijing has a big economic presence, and because it is on the Gulf of Aden, which makes it a key location for the Suez Canal. Yemen's location on the Gulf of Aden also makes it a strategic location for the Gulf of Oman (Taylor 2015).

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) says that the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is the fourth busiest choke point in the world because 3.8 million barrels of oil and refined petroleum products pass through it every day on their way to Europe, Asia, and the US. This makes it one of the five most congested spots in the world (Rosen 2015). Because of the civil war in Yemen, the Chinese navy had to move 225 foreigners and more than 600 Chinese from the port of Aden, which is in southern Yemen. This was the first time that the Chinese navy was sent to save people from another country. This was only the second time that the Chinese government used warships to get its own citizens out of a dangerous situation (BBC 2015).

Since the 1990s, China has done a number of missions to get civilians out of dangerous situations. The most recent one was in 2011 in Libya, and it was the biggest mission China has done to date (Zerba 2014). The successful evacuation of Chinese citizens from Yemen shows that the Chinese government can use economic diplomacy to protect Chinese commercial investments and people. Since the Middle East is the most troubled area, with wars, crises, conflicts, and extreme Jihadi groups, this is a direct threat to the safety of Chinese energy investments and the safety of Chinese people. When there is political or social unrest in the countries where Chinese people live, they often find themselves in dangerous situations. Because of this, the Chinese government is getting more involved in running evacuation operations for civilians all over the Middle East. China saved 1,800 of its own citizens from Egypt during the Arab Spring revolutions, and it saved 2,000 of its own citizens from Syria

(Duchatel, Brauner and Zhou 2014). Also, to protect its people and property in troubled areas, China has actively mediated talks between government and opposition representatives (for example, in Syria and Yemen) (Lee 2015; Xinhua 2017c). The goal of China's economic diplomacy is to keep and grow its diplomatic and economic ties with the governments of the host countries while also negotiating with opposition and rebel groups. This strategy could make it easier for China to create a stable political environment for its people and assets. It could also help China protect itself against the uncertainty that comes with changes in regimes and figure out when certain parts of a country are actually controlled by opposition groups like the Kurd or the Taliban (Ramani 2017).

Aside from that, China was a key player in all of the Iranian nuclear talks, working with Russia to use diplomacy to weaken the sanctions put in place by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It was also an important lifeline for the Iranian economy and the stability of the Iranian regime. For example, Beijing didn't agree to UN Security Council Resolution 1929 until it was changed to protect China's economic interests and lessen the effect of the resolution on Iran's economy as a whole. The Wall Street Journal says that Chinese companies were able to use US sanctions to get Iran to lower the price of fuel oil. Then, these companies built refineries to turn the fuel oil into fuels with more value (Ma and Tracy). 2013). In the next ten years, China will also continue to play an important role in putting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) into action and making sure it stays in place (Almond 2016). After US President Donald Trump's initial decision to keep the nuclear deal with Iran the same, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry said that China would "keep in touch with all parties and continue to fully protect and carry out the agreement." Geng Shuang said the following (Lo 2018).

Most importantly, the failure of the JCPOA deal would hurt China's large economic ties with Iran and its energy trade with Iran, both of which were made easier by the easing of nuclear sanctions (South China Morning Post 2017). China's top priority is to create a stable environment that makes it easy for China to invest in infrastructure in the area. In this way, keeping the JCPOA in place is inextricably linked to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

4.3. China's Economic Development and Aid

China is in the unfortunate position of being able to offer large packages of economic development and economic/humanitarian aid to the warring parties in the Middle East as a way to get them to stop their bloody fighting. Because of its location, China is in this enviable position. China is getting better at using economic tools to support its diplomatic efforts to solve conflicts. This gives it access to all of the major players in the international and regional arenas. China is getting better at using its economic resources, commercial banks, and state-owned companies as economic tools to help its diplomatic efforts to solve conflicts. (Yang 2017). As a result of these economic incentives, the political, economic, and social landscape of the Middle East could change in a big way in the future. In a speech he gave to the Arab League in Cairo in January 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping explained how the Middle East and China could work together to build the BRI. He also said that Beijing should be a "builder of regional peace, promoter of development, booster of industrialization, supporter of stability, and partner in people-to-people exchanges in the Middle East." President Xi says that the unrest in the Middle East is caused by slow economic growth. He thinks that the final solution may depend on continued economic growth (China Daily 2016). In fact, Beijing has already put a lot of money into the economies of a number of Middle Eastern countries. Because of this, Beijing

has become the most important trade partner in a number of these countries, overtaking the EU, Russia, and the US (Oosterveld 2017). For example, China passed the U.S. as Saudi Arabia's biggest trading partner in 2016 (with a total value of \$42.3 billion), and Saudi Arabia has been China's biggest source of crude oil and its biggest business partner in western Asia (Xia and Wang 2017). In 2017, when the President of China went to Saudi Arabia, he signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on production capacity and investment cooperation. The MoU covered 35 projects with a total investment of \$65 billion (An 2017).

Also, Chinese state-owned oil companies Petrochemical and Sinopec have already said they are interested in buying five percent of Saudi Aramco directly, a deal that could bring in \$100 billion (El Gamal and Lawler 2017). It is expected that expanding China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will make investments and economic ties between China and the Middle East much stronger. The Middle East is a key part of making the BRI work and being successful. During his trip to the area in January 2017, President Xi made a number of important financial promises. There were investments and loans totaling \$55 billion, and the United Arab Emirates and Qatar set up a joint investment fund worth \$20 billion. Also, he signed \$15 billion worth of deals with Egypt (The National 2016).

Also, when the President of China went to Tehran in January 2016, he made a deal with his Iranian counterpart on a 10-year plan to increase trade between the two countries to \$600 billion (Chu and Shen 2018). China is also planning to build industrial cities as part of the BRI framework. For example, China wants to spend \$10.7 billion to turn the fishing village of Duqm in Oman into an industrial centre. Duqm is between the Gulf of Oman and the Gulf of Aden (Jabarkhyl 2017). China thinks of Egypt as a "pivot" or "hub" and is trying to find ways for Egypt's national development policy and the new Maritime Silk Road Initiative to work

together. Egypt is one of the five most interested parties in the BRI (MSRI). So, China is one of the biggest foreign investors in the new Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone), where 86 Chinese companies have put more than \$1.1 billion into projects (Arab Finance 2017). China has long believed that slow economic growth is one of the main reasons for war in the Middle East. Because of this, the main goal of China's diplomatic efforts is to work for peace and stability in the region (China Daily 2016). China and Syria, for example, have started talking about large-scale infrastructure projects to help rebuild Syria after the war and connect the country to the BRI (Escobar 2017). Ahmed Tahseen Berwari, the Iraqi ambassador to China, says that China has been a big part of rebuilding Iraq after the war and helping to fix up the country's infrastructure. This includes giving the Iraqi government a lot of money to help rebuild the parts of Iraq that were taken back from ISIS (Iraqi News 2017).

China has also given money to countries like Palestine, Syria, Yemen, and others that are in the middle of a war or a humanitarian crisis (Xinhua 2015, 2017a). At the eighth ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, which was held in Beijing, President Xi promised to lend Arab states \$20 billion to help them rebuild their economies. He also promised that China would give the Palestinian people more than \$15 million in aid as part of a plan to give Arab countries more than \$23 billion in credit lines, loans, and humanitarian aid to help their economies grow. Also, 91 million dollars worth of humanitarian aid would be sent to Syria, Yemen, Jordan, and Lebanon (Zhou 2018). The goal of China's economic diplomacy is to protect and grow its commercial investments and economic assets while also giving the impression that China is a responsible power that wants to work with other countries to improve their social and economic development. This is done through economic development and giving help to people in need. This new part of Beijing's diplomatic work in the region has a style

and set of features that are very Chinese.

4.4. Punitive Measures and Economic Incentives

Incentives to deal with regional crises and try to end conflicts in the Middle East, especially those that China is involved in. This is especially clear in countries that are cut off from the rest of the world and rely heavily on China as an important market for their goods and a possible source of investment. Beijing is annoyed that these countries won't work with international organisations. This is because Beijing has been criticized by the rest of the world for supporting these regimes (Yang 2017). The current nuclear standoff between China and Iran is a great example of the Chinese strategy, which combines force with economic incentives. China has always been against

Iran's nuclear programme, but it has also made sure to protect its commercial and energy interests in Iran. China's efforts to calm growing tensions over Iran's nuclear programme and start talks while avoiding sanctions on Iran's oil and gas production were successful, and the country should be praised for them. Beijing worked hard to ease sanctions overall, but it avoided a fight with Washington, which wanted to put tough sanctions on Tehran and even thought about sending in the military. Washington wanted to punish Tehran with tough sanctions and even thought about getting involved militarily (Sahakyan 2017).

In order to find a way out of the nuclear crisis, the countries of the West put sanctions on Iran. Because of these sanctions, Chinese oil companies were able to win bids to develop huge oil fields in Iran, protecting China's own national interests (Chunshan 2013). After the US put its own sanctions on Iran at the end of 2010, two of China's biggest energy companies, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China National Offshore Oil Corporation

Limited (CNOOC Ltd), worked to get more access to the US energy sector. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China National Offshore Oil Corporation Limited (CNOOC Ltd) are the names of these two companies (Chen 2010). To make it less likely that the U.S. would put sanctions on Chinese oil companies and to make things easier with the Obama administration, China decided at the end of 2010 to put more pressure on Tehran and slow down its energy investments until the end of 2013. (Chen and Buckley 2011). Because the US and other Western countries put sanctions on Iran in 2012 because of its nuclear programme, Iran's share of China's total crude oil imports dropped by 20% in 2012 compared to 2011.

In 2011, 11% of all the crude oil China bought came from Iran. In 2012 and 2013, only 8% of all the crude oil Beijing bought came from Iran. This was a big drop from the years before (Thirarath 2016). But as the talks about Iran's nuclear programme went on in late 2013, China decided to give Iran a reward. As a result, China put more money into an Iranian infrastructure project and went back to buying the same amount of crude oil as it did before the sanctions (BBC 2014). In 2014, this type of imports grew by 28% from the year before, but the amounts have been pretty stable since then (Thirarath 2016). China used economic incentives to get Tehran to stay in the nuclear talks and help find a solution to the disagreement over its nuclear programme (Daily Mail 2015). Also, after Iran signed the JCPOA, which lifted the sanctions, and after it became a key stop in the BRI project, both countries agreed to increase trade to \$600 billion over the next 10 years. This happened after Iran signed the JCPOA, which got rid of the rules (Shichor 2016). At the same time, China wants Iran to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and has asked Iran to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as one of its founding members (Reuters 2015b, 2017).

4.5. Geo-Economic Interests through Infrastructural Development

To start creating a corridor to safeguard its financial interests along the coastline all the way to European markets and African markets, China must safeguard the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure as well as key sea lines of communication (SLOCs), in addition to increasing its military presence in the Middle East. This will allow China to create a corridor. This is due to the fact that the Middle Eastern oil market continues to exert a significant influence over China's economy. As a result, the economic diplomacy practised by the Chinese government in the Middle East promotes a significant amount of money to be invested in the construction and maintenance of infrastructure that may be put to either military or civilian use. This category of infrastructures, which includes docks, railroads, and other establishments of a similar nature, is adaptable to both civilian and military applications. Contracts for engineering, building, and infrastructure investment projects in the region are increasingly being awarded to businesses based in China. These projects include the Saudi-China Industrial Cluster (Jizan), the China-UAE Production Capacity Demonstration Zone, and the China-Oman Industrial Park (Duqm). All these projects are located in China (Xinhua 2017).

China hopes that by taking part in these economic projects, it will be able to advance its economic interests while also meeting its strategic and security goals. To protect China's energy interests, the capital city of Beijing is building and running infrastructure like roads, tunnels, ports, and railways that can be used for more than one thing. The South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and Africa will all be connected to this infrastructure at key points along the sea lanes. China's Belt and Road Initiative (MSRI), which sees the Middle East as an important economic link between Europe and Asia, is the most recent example of this. It is now common for China to buy strategic trading ports for commercial use first, then turn them into military or dual-use ports later.

This is what it did with Gwadar in Pakistan, Piraeus in Greece, Colombo in Sri Lanka, and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. This is a strategy that China is using more and more as it tries to grow its influence around the world (Izzadeen 2017). Chinese companies helped pay for and build roads, bridges, and tunnels all over the region. Chinese businesses are helping to build highways, tunnels, ports, and trains in Israel as part of a number of important projects to improve the country's infrastructure. This is done to raise awareness of the MSRI in Israel.

In the years to come, Chinese enterprises will be in charge of constructing and operating transportation projects with a combined value of tens of billions of dollars. China's Harbor Pan Mediterranean Engineering Company (PMEC) is going to build a personal naval base next to the established one in the town of Ashdod on Mediterranean coast of Israel, and SIPG Shinghai has won a 25-year licence to operate a planned deep-sea private port in the city of Haifa. Both of these developments are being overseen by Chinese companies. These two private ports can be found in the country of Israel (Theofanis and Boile 2015). In addition, China has indicated that it is interested in making an investment in the proposed railroad that would link the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. This "Red-Med railway" might serve either as an alternative to the Suez Canal or as an extension to it. This railroad would be known as the "Red-Med railway" if it were ever built (Hindy 2017).

In February of 2016, the first Chinese freight train came in Tehran as part of a project to bringing back to life the historic Silk Road. The Silk Road was a trade route that formerly connected Europe and East Asia and was used by merchants to transport goods. (Xinhua 2016). Because it is helpful to China's enormous merchant fleet, this system of infrastructure in Israel, which includes roads, bridges, ports, and trains, has a significant financial aspect to it. China's capital city of Beijing has the ambitious goal of creating a

network of commercial linkages with Central Asia, the Middle East, and European region.

Moreover, the strategic location of Egypt, which connects Africa and Asia and serves as a gateway to Asia for African and Arab countries as well as an African gateway to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea, is another important reason why the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is so important. From the Gulf of Suez to Port Said, Chinese shipping companies that are owned by the government have put a lot of money into the ports along the Suez Canal Corridor. In 2005,

Hutchison Port Holdings and the Alexandria Port Authority started a business together. Hutchison Port Holdings bought a 50% stake in the business. The goal of the project was to build, run, and take care of two container terminals in the Egyptian ports of Alexandria and El Dekheila, which are on the northern Mediterranean coast (Eran 2016). As part of a 49-year concession, the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) owns 20% of the container terminal in Port Said that is run by Maersk.

These Chinese infrastructure projects in Egypt that can be used for more than one thing could be used to help the Egyptian military with logistics if there is no military conflict. China will be able to use the network of military and dual-use facilities it is building in the area to support an increased military presence in Africa and change the security situation in the Mediterranean Sea in ways that hurt the interests of the United States and its allies. These buildings will be able to be used by both the military and the general public.

Beijing's main goals include the fast growth of China's commercial investments, economic assets, and energy supply from overseas resources. Because they are related to the ongoing need to modernise the country, these interests are becoming more pressing and

real. When these commercial, political, and diplomatic interests are threatened, China's foreign policy uses its diplomatic resources and economic diplomacy to protect and further these interests. This was made clear over the past 10 years, when China helped get civilians out of Lebanon in 2006, Egypt in 2011, Syria in 2011 and 2013, and Yemen in 2015. The Middle East has slowly but surely become the centre of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and an important part of it. This is because Beijing's economic interests continue to grow and its overseas investments keep going up.

Even so, the conflicts in the Middle East are major regional problems that affect the whole world. So, China has started to help solve these problems, albeit cautiously, to protect its growing overseas interests, its own citizens, and its energy supply while secretly increasing its political influence in the region. Beijing's role in the conflicts in the Middle East is fair and impartial. It doesn't get too involved in substantive engagement and mediation, and it doesn't make big changes to its long-standing policy of not getting involved (Alterman and Garver 2008: 19). In fact, China's top leaders have come out and said that their country can't put a lot of resources into dealing with the complex problems in the Middle East (Niu 2013: 52). China's strategy of economic diplomacy in the Middle East is made up of four steps. These are protecting citizens and investments, developing and helping the economy, using punishments and economic incentives, and building or running infrastructure that can be used for more than one thing. This strategy is unique in that it is both very flexible and very practical. It is controlled by two variables. First, because of disagreements and instability in the area, Beijing has to use diplomatic means to help solve local conflicts. This is done to protect the business interests, people, and energy supplies of Beijing.

Second, China uses commercial and economic tools in conflict zones in the Middle East

to further its foreign policy goals and make it easier for it to settle disputes. In both of these ways, this helps China. This strategy makes the country look more like a trustworthy great power that helps settle conflicts and build peace. It could also make the country look better to the rest of the world, which would increase the country's soft power. Even so, China's involvement in the Middle East is still fairly new and has only recently become part of China's overall diplomatic goals. This puts it a long way behind China's connections with the world's most powerful nations and even behind other sectors (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America). So, the amount of money and diplomatic power that Beijing has put into its Middle East diplomacy is still pretty small. Beijing has put these resources into it.

4.6. China as Great Trading Partner

China was the Arab world's second-largest trading partner as of the end of 2014. In 2013, China took over the U.S. as the main place where oil from the Persian Gulf was sold. From 2003 to 2013, the amount of crude oil China bought from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) grew at a rate of 12% per year, and trade between China and Arab countries grew by 25%. China's policy in the Middle East has been largely driven by its need for energy. Even though China's business ties with the Middle East have grown in the past few years, China's larger strategic goals in the area, and especially the chances of a stronger political and security engagement, are still unknown. This is because China hasn't said anything about its plans in public yet. Unlike the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), China does not have a traditional policy toward the Middle East. Its policy toward the region fits into the larger goals of its foreign policy, which include respecting the sovereignty of other countries, not getting involved in their internal affairs, and supporting a more multi-polar world order as an alternative to Western hegemony.

These are the main guidelines for how it deals with the area. The Chinese State Council, which is China's highest executive body, has put out White Papers on a number of issues related to China's foreign policy.

However, no White Papers have been put out about China's relationship with the Middle East. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing doesn't have a specific department for the Middle East. Instead, the Department of West Asian and North African Affairs and the Department of European and Central Asian Affairs are in charge of Middle East issues. The different ways that China works with its different partners in the Middle East show how complicated the region's politics are. The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, which is also called the CASCF, was set up in 2004. At the moment, China's relationships with the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are low-key and not ready for a more forward-looking engagement. Not until 2010 did a strategic discussion about how to set up the relationship with the GCC begin. This was a long time after similar discussions had begun with the EU and the US. Even though Beijing has recently shown signs of wanting to build these kinds of high-profile relationships, China had never before talked about a "strategic partnership" with any Middle Eastern country or group of countries. Even though China had been in the area for a long time, this was still the case. Up until now, almost all of the talk has been about how to work together on the economy, especially when it comes to energy.

Even though China has put more attention and resources on some major MENA countries in recent years (as will be shown in a later section of this policy brief), the country has not put its neck on the line like Russia did with Syria at the United Nations (UN) in 2012 by taking policy positions on regional issues that could cause tensions with other countries, including Western countries. One of the most important things about China's foreign policy toward the Middle East

is how closely its energy policy at home is tied to its relations with that region. This is the main link to China's internal problems, but there are also growing links to Islamic terrorist campaigns in Xinjiang, which are starting to worry Beijing a lot more than they did before. Even so, its foreign policy in the region is mostly shaped by the need to protect its access to the energy resources in the region. If China can't find other energy sources, either inside or outside its borders, it might need to take on a bigger political and security role in the area. But China is not interested in becoming an even bigger player in the Middle East right now. China's foreign policy should take into account the relationship between China and the

Middle East. China's foreign policy has traditionally been organized in the shape of concentric circles, with the United States of America at the centre. The European Union and China's regional neighbours, such as India, Japan, and Russia, make up the second level of concerns. The third level includes a number of other circles that reach from the Asia-Pacific region to Latin America and Africa. This model says that a place's importance to China depends on things like geopolitics, investment and economic ties, and the availability of natural resource sources. China doesn't rely on legally binding treaty alliances like the U.S. does. Instead, it relies on tangible interests that are tied to its own internal goals, such as economic growth and building a rich and powerful country.

Another thing to think about is proximity. China gives the most weight to countries that are in its regional strategic domain, which includes the US. The Middle East stands out as an outlier in this bigger picture, which makes it one of the regions with less weight than many others. So that China can keep getting oil, it needs to be a careful and even reluctant player in the political and security problems of the Middle East. There is a good reason why this is happening. The Middle East is a dangerous and unstable place. It is a part of the world that

Beijing mostly sees as the United States' or, in some cases, Russia's sphere of influence. This makes it a big problem for China's internal politics. The GCC and the CASC are the main ways that China keeps its pragmatic and realistic relationships with the region going. China and the GCC have talked about making a deal for free trade. But this is nothing like how Beijing thinks about its relationship with the European Union, which it calls a "civilization partner," or with the United States, with which it wants to create a "new paradigm for relations between great powers." The growing importance of China's energy interests in the Middle East, on the other hand, is changing this pattern of small amounts of cooperation between China and the Middle East. This helps to explain why China's policy toward the Middle East is so schizophrenic. China tries to protect important geo-economic interests while staying out of politics as much as possible. In other words, when it comes to the Middle East, it tries to have its cake and eat it too.

Even though coal is still China's main source of energy, oil now provides 20% of the country's power. Since 1993, China has had to get more of its oil from other countries than it can make on its own. The charts below show that more than half of this comes from the Middle East right now, and it is expected that this will grow in the future. China's total imports from the Middle East went from \$3.8 billion in 1999 to \$160 billion in 2012. Most of these imports were crude oil and natural gas. Since 2003, China's trade with Saudi Arabia alone has grown by a factor of 10.

According to official estimates, Saudi Arabia has now become China's most important trading partner, overtaking the United States. In 2012, the International Energy Agency made a prediction that oil exports from the Middle East to China could more than double by the year 2035. This is the most important thing that gives China a direct interest in the Middle East. This is clear from the big oil deals that have been made with countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and

others. It's possible that when Chinese President Xi Jinping talks about a "New Silk Road," he's trying to give people a better way to work together. This would mean bringing back old transportation and trade routes between China and Europe that go through Central Asia and the Middle East. This is based on history, but it also has a practical goal, which is to link China more strategically to energy sources that are more diverse and secure than they are now. The Chinese government has recently shown a lot of support for this idea. It's possible that Middle Eastern allies will support it as a way to get more Chinese investment and economic cooperation, but it's not clear if they will also get the message that the world should be more focused on China.

In the last ten years, both China's exports and its foreign direct investment in the region have grown by a lot. Between 1999 and 2012, China's exports to the MENA region went from \$6.47 billion to \$121.1 billion. In 2012, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (\$30 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$18 billion), Iran (\$11 billion), and Egypt (\$8 billion) were China's top export markets in the Middle East. Textiles, clothing, machinery, and cars were the main things that were exported. There were also exports of products from the light industry.

4.7. The Limits of Neutrality in China-Middle East Geo-Economic Relations

China's diplomatic position in almost all Middle Eastern countries hasn't changed much over the years. For example, when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, China has usually kept good relations with both sides. In the 1980s, it was a strong supporter of Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization. At the same time, it had good relations with Israel, which has been one of Beijing's main sources of arms over the past few decades. As a result of the protests in Arab countries in 2011, China's policy of not taking sides was put to its toughest test yet. In China, it was made illegal to talk about the revolutions on the internet, and local political activists who

tried to compare the situation in China to that in Egypt and Libya were punished harshly. Some Chinese officials just said that the Arab protests were against bad government, but that the same could not be said about China. This is what China did in response to the protests going on in other countries. Even so, the overthrow of Mubarak in Egypt, the fall of Gaddafi's regime in Libya, and the upheavals in Syria have left China feeling very uneasy. As it tried to get used to its new surroundings, it often found itself in an awkward spot. In 2012, it came out in support of the Morsi dictatorship, and in the same year, Morsi made his first trip outside of Egypt and signed a number of agreements in Beijing. But after they got rid of him in the summer of 2013, they had to figure out how to deal with a new government that seemed to be much closer to the United States than the one they just got rid of. Trying to work with the new leadership in this way took a few months. This shows how China and other outside forces can sometimes get the political situation in the region wrong. When the UN Security Council (UNSC) voted in 2011 on whether or not to allow military involvement in Libya, Beijing chose not to vote. But after the NATO air campaign and Gaddafi's removal from power, Beijing felt like it had been cheated by being forced to support a change in the government.

At first, Beijing thought that the UN Security Council resolution only let the military get involved to help people. But after the NATO air campaign and Gaddafi's removal from power, Beijing felt like it had been cheated by being forced to support a change in the government. It also had to bring back almost 36,000 of its own people from the area. This is the most people the company has ever brought back. This shows how big the company's energy and business interests in the area had become. Since then, China has tried to make peace with Tripoli in order to get back some of the development and infrastructure projects that were worth about \$20 billion before the 2011 crisis. This is the main reason why China is trying so hard. What

happened in Libya had a big effect on how China later responded to the crisis in Syria. Even though the US and UK put a lot of pressure on China, China stood with Russia and voted against any type of military intervention. It's likely that Beijing now feels that the U.S. and its allies were wrong to think that political reform along the lines originally envisioned would really be able to solve problems quickly and in a way that lasts. This is especially true because Egypt is still in a bad place, but it is especially true because Libya is in a bad place. Since 2011, the terrible war in Syria and the rise of jihadist Islamist extremism have shown the Chinese position for what it is and what it is not. The Syrian conflict has been going on since 2011.

On the one hand, Beijing thinks that its doubts about the effectiveness of toppling old regimes and replacing them with new, often weaker ones have been proven right. The world's second-largest economy hasn't shown much geopolitical imagination when it comes to trying to solve problems in a region with which it has more and more business ties. On the other hand, the fact that the world's second-largest economy did nothing while Syria destroyed itself shows that it has little geopolitical imagination. As of the beginning of 2014, China could only give a maximum of \$3.3 million in humanitarian aid. There is a link between the threat of jihadists and the actions of extreme Islamist in the home country. Since 2012, there have been more and more terrorist attacks in China, which has only made people more aware of this. As a result, China, whether it likes it or not, may have to take more outspoken political positions in the future to protect its own interests. This is because local problems (like relying on energy) are linked to global problems, and China may have to do this whether it likes it or not (such as trans-national jihadism).

China prefers to stay out of the spotlight, but its growing economic and political power and its continued need for oil from the MENA region will make that hard to do. China's

political commitments right now only involve defending what it thinks are its core interests. This will change, though, as China's economic and political power grows. China's preferred policy of neutrality is being tested by what's going on in the Middle East and North Africa right now.

Even though the US will still have a lot of important interests in the region and play a big role there, the US is also well aware of how much China is increasing its interests in the region. It is possible that Washington is angry with China for what it sees as free-riding, but it is also possible that the US does not want China to play a bigger role in areas where Washington and Beijing may have different ideas. To avoid misunderstandings with both regional and outside powers, there needs to be a way for China to participate in the MENA region that is both open and cooperative. It is not realistic to think that China can keep talking about the region in a way that is mostly about business without having a plan for dealing with more difficult security issues. At this point, its interests are getting too complicated and wide-ranging. Already, China has made hints about something bigger than what they have been doing, like with Iran. In May 2014, Chang Wanquan, the Chinese Minister of Defense, said that he wanted to "deepen defence relations." According to the Xinhua news agency, Chang told Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan that the two countries' relations have continued to grow in a positive and steady way, with regular high-level meetings and more political trust. Even though Beijing and Tehran haven't said much about the details of their possible defence partnership, the fact that they've even brought it up is a braver move than anything China has done up until now. It's possible that things will turn out like this in the future. Even so, Beijing sends very different messages about how much it wants to get more involved in politics in the MENA region. In talks with the governments of the Gulf states, for example, high-level Chinese officials have

said things like, "China is looking to form a strategic partnership, using the possibility of a free trade agreement with the GCC countries as a push to increase pragmatic cooperation in all fields" (Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in January 2014).

In theory, such a move might seem like it could work, but in practise, it seems like a simple way to do things, and it shows how underdeveloped the political frameworks for communication between China and the Middle East are compared to those in other places and countries. For example, the press release that came after the China-GCC conference in January gave a long list of possible ways to work together and stressed the "strategic importance of the Middle East and Gulf region." This statement was made in a way that left a lot of room for interpretation. When compared to how important the region's economy is becoming to China, this kind of lax approach to politics is a clear example of a mismatch, as seen from the outside. No one in the region has done much to try to build a new, more comprehensive relationship with China. This may be because Beijing has been sending cautious mixed signals.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHINA'S GEO-POLITICAL INTERESTS IN MIDDLE EAST

Even though China's foreign policy continues to put more emphasis on other parts of the world, its role in the Middle East is becoming more important. China's main interest in the Middle East is to make sure it has a steady supply of energy. Because of this, the Middle East was not a top priority for China's foreign policy for a long time. Because of this, the Chinese government did not see the area as a strategic location in the past. China was sometimes called a "free rider" because geostrategic control of the Middle East was left to the United States. This happened in Afghanistan, for example. Beijing is still relying on the current security framework to protect its oil imports from possible threats in the Persian Gulf. The governments that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the United States have worked together for a long time on this structure.

China's economic and political interest in the area has been growing steadily over the past few years. The Chinese government's foreign policy toward the Middle East is getting more and more strategic, with things like involvement in security policy. This is shown not only by the fact that Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit the area more than once, but also by the fact that one of those trips will happen in 2021.¹ In addition to advancing Chinese economic interests in the region, these visits fit almost perfectly into China's changing foreign policy, or more accurately, into the foreign policy vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping, who wants to show China as a confident international power.² The Chinese government's role in the Middle East must also be looked at in this light.

The Middle East will be even more important for China than it is for the U.S. Sun Degang,

a professor at Shanghai's Fudan University and one of China's top Middle East experts, says that the region is "the core from which China can cooperate and/or compete strategically with other great powers." Sun is one of the best people in China to talk to about the Middle East. The people in charge in Beijing are aware that the Middle East could help China reach more of its strategic goals. The Middle East is Critical to China's Long-Term Interests

During his keynote speech at the China-Arab Cooperation Forum (CASC) in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a "1+2+3" cooperation framework that summed up China's main goals in the Middle East (hezuo geju). This framework can be seen as a plan for China to work more closely with Middle Eastern countries in three key areas ("1+2+3").

In it, the provision of energy is named as the top priority for international cooperation (1). This is followed by the development of infrastructure, commerce, and finance (2), as well as new high-tech sectors, nuclear technology, space exploration, and renewable energy (3). (3). (3). China's Arab Policy Paper from 2016 restates these three goals of cooperation. It is the most important official Chinese document to date that lays out the principles of China's policy in the area.

Because of this, China's main goal in the region is to make sure it has a steady supply of energy. China needs a lot of oil, and up to half of the crude oil it imports comes from the Middle East. In 2019, 43 different countries sent crude oil to the People's Republic of China. Nine of these countries were in the Middle East, and they sent 44.8 percent of China's crude oil imports. 6 Export markets outside of China are the second most important part of the Chinese economy. Because of this, China's trade with the Middle East has grown a lot, and it has become a major economic partner and investor. According to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF)

Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), China's biggest import and export partners in the Middle East in 2020 were Saudi Arabia with over US\$67 billion, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with nearly US\$49.3 billion, and Iraq with over US\$30 billion (0.6 per cent). The trade surplus or deficit with Iran was just under \$15 billion US dollars (see Chart 1, p. 9).

China's growing economic presence in the region is based on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The main goals of the BRI are to give Chinese businesses access to local markets and to make sure that oil supplies are spread out.

China has signed memorandums of understanding with 17 Middle Eastern countries to work together on the BRI. Since the Belt and Road Initiative started in 2013, Beijing has given at least 123 billion US dollars to projects in the Middle East that are part of the BRI. This is a lot compared to the 500 billion dollars that Beijing is expected to have invested in 50 other states by the end of 2018.⁸ To reach its third main goal, the country is also investing more and more in new industries, such as the Digital Silk Road (DSR), which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁹ China's information and communication technology companies, like Huawei Technologies, are also getting more involved in the renewable energy business. China has already made deals with the six countries that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council about setting up 5G networks.

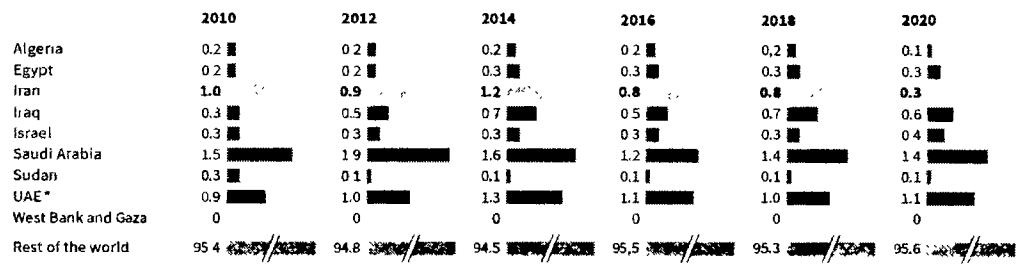
As a result of all of these operations, it is becoming more and more important for China's leaders to keep the region safe and stable in order to protect the country's core interests in the years to come. China had always tried to maintain peace but also through establishing safety measures before. Therefore, Chinese not only strengthened their military within the territory but also the first military post of Chinese was set up in the port of Djibouti. This made it clear

that Chinese are concerned to keep the area safe for everyone. The main purpose of establishing this post was to give Chinese military ability to protect the people of that region and take actions, if necessary. Moreover, they were responsible to evacuate Chinese people from the area in case of any natural or social crisis.

Even though, the Chinese military involvement outside of the country are small than the military invasions of the United States and Russia, but they are growing with time. With such expansion, Chinese do not want to strengthen the hard power, rather they are more focused towards the safety of their people. They are peace lover and creating their influence throughout the world via soft image, but it does not mean that they are not capable of responding to hard powers. China had always helped different countries in strengthening their military power, such as its efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear weapon problem is evidence that they aim to promote peace and safety for which they may also opt for the hard responses. However, they prefer to negotiate, such as in Iranian case, they made Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015, through which they invited countries like UK, France, Germany, US, and Russia to negotiate and backed UNSC Sanctions.

China wants to be seen as a self-assured world power, or more specifically, as a world power that is (at least) on par with the US and has a policy that is seen as "better." This kind of security policy commitment fits with China's goal of becoming a world power that is sure of itself. Beijing has said this through its idea of "Chinese-style great power diplomacy" (zhongguo tese daguo waijiao), which was introduced in 2014 and aims to make "relations among the great powers" better for China.

China's economic relationship with Iran and other countries in the Middle East
Trade (imports and exports), shares in percentages



* United Arab Emirates

Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Commodity Trade Statistics (CTS)*

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Figure 2: *China's Trade Statistics (IMF, 2021)*

Even though China's foreign policy continues to put a higher priority on other regions, the Middle East is becoming a more important place for China. China's foreign policy did not pay much attention to the Middle East for a long time. This is because China's main goal in the Middle East is to make sure it has a steady supply of energy. Since this is the case, China's main goal in the region is to make sure it has a steady supply of energy. Because of this, when making decisions, the Chinese leaders of the past did not see the area as a strategic priority. China was often called a "free rider" because the US was still the most powerful country in the Middle East from a strategic point of view. This is because China wasn't involved in running the Middle East. This happened, for example, in the country of Afghanistan. Beijing is still relying on the security system that is already in place to protect its oil imports from any possible threats in the Persian Gulf. The United States of America and the governments that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have worked together on this framework for a long time, and it is based on that partnership.

China's economic and political interest in the region has been growing at a steady rate

over the past few years. In the meantime, the Chinese government's foreign policy toward the Middle East is starting to include more strategic elements, such as a greater role in national security policy matters. This is shown not only by the fact that Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit the area more than once, with one of those trips happening in 2021, but also by the fact that one of those trips will happen in 2021.¹ In addition to advancing Chinese economic interests in the region, these visits fit almost perfectly into China's changing foreign policy, or more accurately, into the foreign policy vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping, who wants to show China as a confident international power. The goal of Xi Jinping's foreign policy is to show China as a confident world power.² In this framework, it is also important to think about how much the Chinese government is involved in the Middle East.

Sun Degang, a professor at Shanghai's Fudan University and one of China's top experts on the Middle East, says that the area will be even more important for Beijing than it is for Washington because it is "the core from which China can cooperate and/or compete with other great powers." The Middle East will be even more important for China than it is for the U.S. because it is "the core from which China can cooperate and/or compete strategically with other great powers." In China, Sun is seen as one of the people who knows the most about the Middle East. The leaders in Beijing are well aware that the Middle East could help China reach its strategic goals, and they are making plans accordingly. China needs to have a strong presence in the Middle East for its own long-term interests.

During his keynote speech at the China-Arab Cooperation Forum (CASC) in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a "1+2+3" cooperation framework that summed up China's main goals in the Middle East. China took part in the CASC for the first time this year (hezuo geju). This framework could be seen as a strategy to increase China's cooperation

with Middle Eastern countries in three important areas ("1+2+3").⁴ In it, the provision of energy is named as the top priority for international cooperation. This is followed by the development of infrastructure, commerce, and finance, as well as new high-tech sectors, nuclear technology, space exploration, and renewable energy. It also includes new high-tech industries like nuclear technology, space exploration, and clean energy. In China's Arab Policy Paper from 2016, which was the most recent and important official Chinese publication to date that laid out the basics of China's policy in the area, these three cooperation goals were stated again.

As a direct result of this, China's main goal in the area is to make sure it will always have a steady supply of energy. China imports a lot of oil from the Middle East. In fact, up to half of the crude oil that China imports comes from that area. In 2019, crude oil was brought into the People's Republic of China from 43 different countries. Nine of these 43 countries were in the Middle East, which was where 44.8 percent of all the crude oil China bought in 2019 came from.
6 The second most important thing for the Chinese economy is to grow China's presence in export markets outside of China. As a result, China has become a major economic partner and investor in the Middle East. It has also greatly increased the amount of trade it does with the area. According to the Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China's biggest trading partners in the Middle East in 2020 were Saudi Arabia with over US\$67 billion (1.4%), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with nearly US\$49.3 billion (1.1%), and Iraq with over US\$30 billion. These numbers are based on how much China buys and sells from and to these countries (0.6 per cent). Both the trade surplus and the trade deficit between Iran and the US were just under \$15 billion (see Chart 1).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is led by China, is at the centre of China's growing economic presence in the area. The main goals of the Belt and Road Initiative are to

make sure there is a more diverse supply of oil and to let Chinese businesses into local markets.⁷ China has signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with 17 Middle Eastern countries so that they can work together on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Since the Belt and Road Initiative was first announced in 2013, Beijing has promised at least 123 billion US dollars to help pay for projects in the Middle East that are part of the initiative. Compared to the 500 billion US dollars that Beijing is expected to have spent in the other 50 states by the end of 2018, this number is a big drop.⁸ Also, the country is steadily putting money into new industries to reach its third main goal. The Digital Silk Road (DSR), which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative, is an example of this (BRI).⁹ Also, Chinese companies like Huawei Technologies that focus on information and communication technology are getting more involved in the market for renewable energy sources. The six countries that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council have already signed 5G network agreements with China.

Because of all of these things, China's leaders know that keeping the region safe and stable will become an even more important goal in the years to come if they want to protect the country's fundamental interests.¹⁰ The installation of the first Chinese military base outside of China in the port of Djibouti is the clearest sign that China is helping to keep the peace in the area. Its main goal is to give the Chinese military the ability to protect and, if necessary, evacuate Chinese people who live in the area if there is a crisis. If its main goal isn't met, the second goal is to make sure that the first goal is met.¹¹ Even though China's political and security activities in the Middle East are still small compared to those of countries like the U.S. and Russia, they are growing quickly, and it is clear that China wants to do more in this area. China's political and security activities in the Middle East are still pretty small, even though they are growing so quickly.

China's efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear weapons problem, which led to the signing of

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, should also be seen in this light: on the one hand, it took part in negotiations as part of the E3+3 (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, plus the United States, Russia, and China), and on the other, it backed UNSC sanctions. The Iran Nuclear Agreement (JCPOA) was signed in 2015 because of these efforts. This In 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed by Iran and the United States as a result of these efforts. This China's goal with its foreign policy is to become a self-confident world power, especially one that is (at least) on par with the U.S. and has a strategy that is seen as "better" than the U.S. This kind of commitment to China's security strategy fits with the country's main goal of becoming an international power that is sure of itself. Beijing made this claim through its idea of "Chinese-style great power diplomacy" (zhongguo tese daguo waijiao), which was introduced in 2014 and aims to make "relations among the great powers" better for China. Beijing said this through its idea of "great power diplomacy in the Chinese style" (zhongguo tese daguo waijiao).

5.1. Balance-of-Power Politics in China's Discourse and Foreign Policy

Mao Zedong's ideas were the primary source of inspiration for the field of international relations theory in Chinese political science for a significant portion of the 1980s. This lasted until well into the decade. 14 Concepts from Western political science were not taken seriously in China until the middle of the 1980s, when the country began to open up economically and, eventually, also intellectually. Chinese political scientists have primarily based their work on the theories developed in the United States as a result of China's quick climb to political prominence.

As long as China was unsure of its new position in the world, classical balancing politics

exerted the greatest attraction on Chinese theorists. This was because realist thought and theory is rooted in the idea that power should be distributed fairly. This assumes that the formation of hegemony is impossible in a multi-state system because other states view hegemony as a threat, which leads them to attempt to balance the power of a potential hegemony. As a result, the formation of hegemony is assumed to be impossible. Raymond Aron believes that maintaining a delicate political equilibrium is consistent with "the caution necessary for those governments which seek to preserve their independence and not be subjugated to the arbitrariness of another state with irresistible means at its disposal." This concept was also in line with the goals of the People's Republic, which was steadily rebuilding its presence on the international stage.

5.2. China's Political Interests in Turkey

After the China-U.S. Summit in Alaska, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi went to Turkey for the second time. After the Summit, this trip took place right away. He plans to go to Iran after his trip to Turkey, and then to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Bahrain.

Mevlüt Cavuşoglu, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, posted on Twitter about his Chinese counterpart's trip to Ankara and the relationship between Turkey and China. China Global Television Network (CGTN), which is owned by the Chinese government, says that during the meeting, Cavuşoglu reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to the "One China" policy and said that Turkey would not let any violent or terrorist acts against China happen on its land. Wu Sike, a senior diplomat in China and a former envoy to the Middle East, responded to Wang's trips to the area by saying that they show China's continued interest in the area. Wu also said that China and Turkey are getting closer because they understand and respect each other's

concerns about race and religion.

Also, it is important for the two countries to improve their lines of communication and work together more closely to fight national separatism and terror, which may also be the focus of Wang's visit. Some Chinese news outlets have also said that Wang's trip to the Middle East could help the Renminbi, or RMB, become more accepted around the world and create a safe place for the US Dollar to go down in value.

On the other hand, Turkey thought it would be able to stick to its plan of keeping a balance and stay out of the "war" between the two big powers. Even though Turkey is a member of NATO, the alliance does not want to get involved in the violence that is happening right now. It is important to remember that Cavuşoglu recently met Antony Blinken, the Secretary of State for the United States, for the first time in person at the NATO summit. Both sides said things that showed their support for the other.

Turkey's foreign policy has many different parts, which encourages the country to get closer to other countries around the world. After Turkey's "Asia Anew Initiative," it's likely that their relationship will continue to grow in this area. The United States and China are still having a trade war, and the European Union is involved on both sides. The United States and some countries in the European Union continue to put pressure on China in the name of "human rights" and "democracy." Because of this position, third-party countries are put under pressure to choose a side between China and the US. At that time, the two big powers try to increase the number of countries in their "friend zone" so they can keep getting along with the countries they work with.

China uses a wide range of tactics to fight back against the power the US has over

other countries. For example, after Wang's trip to the Middle East, the Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe will go to Hungary, Serbia, Greece, and North Macedonia before the end of March. The goal of Wei's trips is to make it easier and more productive for the armed forces of these countries to work together. There are already some countries that are part of NATO. Greece is also known as an important Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) country in the Mediterranean and Aegean sea regions, and it has been known in recent years to house a number of American military personnel. Both countries use the diplomatic tools they have to fight the widespread negative influence around the world.

Even though China sees any outside talk about Xinjiang as meddling in China's internal affairs, the Chinese media and some government officials are always having to talk about good things happening in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Even though China takes a hard line when other countries say things about Xinjiang, this is still the case. In this way, the Muslim powers in the Middle East are the first ones to reach out. So, it is hoped that these trips will stop people in the area from developing a "U.S.-oriented opinion." As a Muslim and Turkic country, Turkey has a stronger relationship to the area than most other countries (IIK, 2021).

5.3. China's Political Strategy and Interests in Qatar

China has historically served as a source of "soft power" for all regions, and the same is true with regard to Qatar. Despite the fact that the GCC and Qatar are currently experiencing a number of difficulties, it is abundantly evident that China and Qatar have other plans in mind. The Gulf state has delivered a devastating blow as a direct response to the requests made by its surrounding countries. Both the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International

Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) recently welcomed Qatar as a new member (ICAO). As a direct consequence of this, the nation has come to an agreement with Italy to purchase battleships for the sum of \$6 billion.

Concerning the current events, the Chinese government has not made a lot of statements that have been made public. The attitude taken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not shifted; they continue to assert that the dispute and the question of how to resolve it are GCC concerns. Despite this, there have been whispers that Qatari and Emirati diplomats are meeting behind closed doors in Beijing. As a result, it is now more likely than ever before that China will play a significant role in resolving this conflict by acting as a mediator. In point of fact, Foreign Minister Wang Yi has been keeping himself busy outside of regional security talks and bilateral visits by giving advice to his Emirati, Qatari, and Iranian counterparts to discuss ways to end conflicts within the GCC. It is still the case even if Foreign Minister Wang Yi has stated in public that he will remain "above the fight."

It has been China's policy for a very long time not to interfere in what it refers to as "internal problems" in the governments of other countries. As a consequence of this fact, it is highly unlikely that either Wang or Chinese President Xi Jinping will participate in discussions for a multilateral solution to the problem. This is because China has maintained a neutral stance regarding these issues for a considerable amount of time. At least not any time in the near future.

When it comes to importing oil, the Gulf is Beijing's most important source, and when it comes to importing natural gas, the Gulf is Beijing's second most important source. In addition, the Gulf serves as a transit point for 46% of all Chinese exports that are destined for the Middle

East. It should go without saying that China cannot afford to be in a state of stagnation for an extended period of time given the magnitude of the economic challenges it is facing. The actions that Qatar takes in the next several minutes will likely have a significant impact on whether or not the Middle Eastern nation becomes more embroiled in this conflict. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are the four Arab nations that accuse Qatar of backing Islamist organisations and interfering in the affairs of their regions. Qatar is also accused of meddling in the area. They have moderated and refocused their initial demands, and as a result, the Qatars are now facing increased pressure to yield. Doha and the other GCC countries are quite interested in learning Beijing's position about the ongoing disagreement. This is due to the fact that the power dynamic is shifting, and there are a great deal of investment opportunities available at the moment.

It's possible that Qatar is pinning its hopes on its strategic alliance and exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG), but this is undoubtedly a risky play that won't pay off for them in the end. If Doha continues to refuse to negotiate, it will be only a matter of time until China begins to support the group that is led by Saudi Arabia. Qatar is a country with whom China maintains diplomatic ties; nonetheless, China views the GCC in its entirety as a more strategically significant partner. It only makes sense that as China's influence in the region expands, both economically and militarily, with a new military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and increased trade, maintaining positive relations with the entire group will become more important than cultivating a close relationship with any one of its members in particular. This is due to the fact that China has established a new military post in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti.

There is no doubt that some of the GCC's worries about their demands are shared by Beijing. One of these is that Qatar, which has ties to a number of radical Islamist groups and

terrorist groups, must immediately stop giving money and other resources to support Islamist extremism and militancy. Beijing is worried about how much power Islamist extremists will have in the troubled province of Xinjiang, but it doesn't mind at all if the Arab bloc takes a stand on the issue of stopping terrorists from getting money.

There is no proof that Qatar radicalized the Uighurs in Xinjiang, but a lot of Uighurs have flown to Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan and fought with the same militant groups there. Qatar is thought to be giving money to help. Since many of those Uighurs may be going back to Xinjiang, China is likely to support any move that makes transnational terrorism less of a threat inside the country. The recent events in Xinjiang make this even more true.

Because of how the network covered China, there was a diplomatic incident between China and Qatar in 2012. This led to Al-reporters Jazeera's being kicked out of the country. It's likely that Beijing agrees with the GCC's complaints about Al-Jazeera, which is owned by Qatar's government (Edens, 2017).

5.4. Chinese Geo-Political Interests in Israel

At first, Chinese messages in Israel showed many of the most obvious signs of China's tightly controlled and state-led information landscape. In 2008, the Chinese Embassy made a section of its website called "Embassy News." This was done so that all of the embassy's media activities that were covered by Israeli news outlets could be found in one place. In its early stages, it mostly consisted of recycling old talking points from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which don't always work well outside of China.

When it comes to some controversial issues, Chinese officials have continued to closely

follow the party line. One example is how the Chinese government treats Uyghur and other non-Han ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. They did this in propaganda pieces like "The Facts of Urumqi Riot" and "Ethnic Unity—the Source of Happiness in Xinjiang" from the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Still, the public diplomacy and media placements of the Chinese embassy in Israel have gotten a little bit more sophisticated or localized over time, both in terms of what they talk about and where they put it. At least some of the content made by the Chinese embassy started to change a lot in tone and how it fit into the local area around 2010. This message started to include more content that was specifically for the Israeli people, instead of just repeating and recycling the same old CCP message. The embassy started to pay more attention to what its employees were doing. There was community involvement in Israel, there were successful diplomatic and business meetings, and there was outreach to the Israeli media.

In September 2015, Ambassador Zhan Yongxin, who was in charge at the time, started writing articles for the Jerusalem Post, which is Israel's most widely read English-language newspaper. This was the most important change in how the Chinese embassy communicated. These articles were written specifically for the people of Israel. Part of the reason why these editorials were written was to stop people from looking more closely at what the Chinese government was doing, which was making relations between China and Israel worse and putting Israel in an awkward position with the United States. Concerns and criticisms from both the US and Israel about China's economic interests in Israel seem to be part of a larger Cold War-style competition between the two superpowers for spheres of influence or global hegemony.¹⁷ Also, the leaders of the United States probably worry that sensitive information about cutting-edge technologies could get out.

Since a long time ago, technology has been a big part of Israel's relationships with both China and the United States. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the United States and Israel had some of the most important disagreements in history over the sale of weapons to China. During this time, Israel was close to making deals with China to sell the Phalcon, a specialized early-warning radar system, and the Harpy drones. However, the United States put a lot of pressure on Israel to back out of these deals, and they were eventually canceled.¹⁸ In the context of the relationship between Israel and China, these cancellations came to represent the line between what is acceptable and what is not. In March 2015, the Shanghai International Port Group won a bid to run the new Israeli port in Haifa for 25 years. This is the best example of recent tensions between China and the United States in Israel. The offer was for the Israeli government to run the port. The ports of the country are very important strategic assets, especially since almost all of Israel's imports are brought in by water.

About a year after the contract was given to the Chinese company, people in the United States and Israel started to speak out against the deal. Because of this, there have been a lot of talks about the strategic effects of these kinds of deals. One of these talks took place at an event that Haifa University and the Hudson Institute put on together. Some of the people on the panel were worried about how much China affects Israel. It's important to note that some of the people at the event were experts on the national security of the U.S. and Israel. However, there were no Chinese speakers at this conversation.

For their part, Chinese officials have been trying to convince Israel that the Haifa port project is a good idea while also trying to calm worries that the deal could hurt relations between the US and Israel. The Chinese embassy in Israel helped place a number of articles written by the

Chinese ambassador to Israel at the time that were positive about the Haifa port. They also worked with the Jerusalem Post to print a special edition of a magazine with Chinese messages about the port. At the time, Zhan and Reuven Rivlin, who was president of Israel, both wrote for the journal. Even though there was a lot of criticism about the project, it went ahead in the end. Even though there were worries that the corona virus pandemic could cause delays and there was a lot of talk about what the transaction would mean, the port opened on time in September 2021.

The Chinese government and its embassy staff went to great lengths to stop opposition to the port project, and they were helped by other people. From 2009 to 2014, Israel Katz was the country's Minister of Transportation. During that time, he worked hard to get Chinese companies to invest in the Israeli economy. In 2018, the minister was quoted as saying that "since taking office eight years ago, he has actively promoted infrastructure projects between the two countries" and that he took steps to get Chinese companies to bid on projects in Israel. One reporter who talked to the minister said that this was the case.

All of these things, but especially the articles written by the Chinese ambassador, were done to reassure the Israeli public (and, by extension, Israeli leaders) and ease any worries about the Chinese government's reliability, behaviour, and strategic moves. He talked a lot about how Israel is a centre for technology and how the economies of the two countries work well together. He then talked about Israel's well-known reputation as "the Start-Up Nation, strong in creativity and innovation," while also praising China's qualities, especially "its great manufacturing capability and vast market."

The fact that these messages are meant for people in Israel, the United States, and English-

speaking diplomats from many countries who live in Israel could be one reason why Chinese officials have chosen to talk in English-language publications. Another reason might be that these messages are meant for people in Israel. Also, people who work at the Chinese embassy in Israel have to report back to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs about what they do. This is much easier to do with newspapers written in English than with newspapers written in Hebrew.

In 2018, a lot more Israeli news outlets than just the Jerusalem Post started to talk about Zhan. This news coverage included video interviews that were posted on YNet News and other Hebrew news sites. Zhan took advantage of these chances to improve Beijing's position by reducing the chance of a fight with Washington, which was worried about Israel's ties to China at this point. Zhan did this to make it less likely that there would be a war. His main point was that China doesn't want to hurt Israel's special relationships with other countries, and he made this point over and over again. He also said that China and Israel have a unique relationship because they are two of the "oldest nations in the world" and have been friends for a very long time. He also said that "all of the Chinese infrastructure projects in Israel are a very good example of a win-win situation." In his speech, Zhan talked about technological progress when he said, "China is a country with a huge market and a strong manufacturing sector." Since Israel is known as "the Start-Up Nation," it stands to reason that if we can work together, not only will our companies and people have better chances, but so will the rest of the world. Ambassador Du Wei, who took over for Zhan, kept using this strategy throughout his term,

which began in February 2020 and ended in May 2020, when Zhan died too soon. Du took part in Hebrew-language media, but what's more important is that he talked to many different places in order to reach a wider range of important religious and secular audiences from

all over Israel. The most important point is this. For example, he wrote for Hebrew magazines like Makor Rishon, which is linked to right-wing religious Zionism, and Yated Ne'eman, which is linked to Israel's Orthodox Haredi community. Both of these newspapers are published in Israel. Israelis who watched these interviews got the idea that Chinese officials were moving away from a more traditional and limited approach to the media. They also gave the impression that the Chinese embassy was getting to know Israeli society better and reaching out to more people from different backgrounds.

A common theme in Du's messages was the way he talked about how Israel and China are both very important historical civilizations. During one of his interviews, he said, "Both the Jews and the Chinese have built great civilizations." 30 By doing this, Du seemed to be trying to make an implied comparison between long-lasting civilizations like China and Israel and countries with shorter histories like the United States. Officials in Beijing have tried to reassure the Israeli public that their relationship with China is mutually beneficial. They have done this through mass-market Hebrew dailies, such as the newspaper Haaretz. This is part of a larger effort by Chinese officials to work with mass-market Hebrew dailies. One of these articles, "China Does Not Aspire to World Hegemony," was written by Zha Peixin, a long-time Chinese official who has held positions like

Chinese ambassador to the UK and deputy director of the CCP Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Office. Zha Peixin was also the ambassador of China to the UK. In it, he said again that both Israel and China are the descendants of ancient civilizations that have made important contributions to human progress. 31 He also said that China is a responsible country that works hard to stop climate change. By doing this, he probably wanted to show the people of Israel that China is a responsible and trustworthy country, unlike the United States, which

pulled out of the Paris Agreement when Donald Trump was president. As with the vast majority of Chinese diplomatic messages sent to Israelis, he said that he hoped the two countries would keep a general sense of working together, especially when it came to technology.

5.5. China's Discourse on the Balance of Power in the Middle East

It's not hard to see that Chinese experts on the region put China's economic interests first and suggest that China and the U.S. avoid competing with each other. The main point of this argument is that China should take a more active role in the Middle East, including in Iran. However, there is no mention of a possible policy of balancing relations with the U.S.

If China's ties with Iran get much closer and it moves toward a stronger balance with the US at the same time, China will have to get closer to Iran's neighbours in the Middle East in order to keep its ties with the other countries in the region balanced. If China's relationship with Iran grows a lot and it moves toward a stronger balance with the US at the same time, the Middle East will force China to strengthen its relationship with Iran. ' The traditional stories that Chinese foreign policy is based on give us some clues about how to solve this problem. When talking about how hard it is to get along with Middle Eastern countries, some of which hate each other very much, Chinese officials and regional experts often talk about the principle of non-interference. They also want all the countries in the region to work together in a friendly, multifaceted way.

One of China's "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" is that it should not get in the way of other countries' business. The other four are territorial integrity, mutual renunciation of aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, and equality and mutual benefit in peaceful coexistence. The United Nations Charter is where the idea of not getting in the way first

came from. China has been putting out a lot of information about the five principles for a while now. They are the basic rules for how states should treat each other. Its foreign policy strategy is based on them, which means that China keeps a certain level of neutrality and fairness in conflicts between Middle Eastern states and doesn't try to solve or get involved in these conflicts.

From China's point of view, this problem is most important in the Middle East because most of the countries there are influenced by the biases of their former colonial masters or the United States. This strategy of China, which aims for balanced relationships with all of its partners in the region that are at odds with Iran as well as with Iran itself, is also called a regional balancing policy (pingheng) and is an important part of Chinese foreign policy. China wants to have a policy of balancing (pingheng) in the region. So, academics are also looking into how China could balance a more active policy toward Iran with its current policy of balancing things out in many different ways.

There isn't yet a consensus among Chinese academics and opinion leaders about how important Iran is (or could be) for China from a strategic point of view. On the other hand, the way China talks about Iran shows that there are voices calling for both a soft balance and a hard balance. These people want China to take more forceful steps to use its relationship with Iran to counterbalance the power of the United States. On one side, people say that China's best way to protect its interests in the region is not through political assertiveness. On the other side, people say that geopolitical assertiveness is a better way to protect China's interests in the region. Even though China's official language doesn't mention the balancing policy that is already in place in the Middle East, it is similar to the way Xi Jinping, who is both the head of state and the leader of the party, talks. For example, it says that "working with countries in the Middle East is at the heart of China's diplomatic philosophy." This approach to diplomacy is called

"a new type of international relations based on win-win cooperation instead of a zero-sum geopolitical game." Most Chinese regional experts agree with this official position, which says that China's foreign policy is better than the US's but doesn't talk about an actual front being set up.

Representatives of this official line say that it is unlikely that the competition between China and the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific area will have a big impact on either country's policy toward the Middle East or on the region as a whole.²⁸ One knowledgeable source says that the United States has been and will continue to be the most important power in the Middle East when it comes to regional security. Another knowledgeable source says that China won't be able to threaten the United States' position as the most powerful country in the Middle East in the next 15 to 20 years because it doesn't have the ability or the will to do so. But the United States can't solve all of the problems in the region on their own; China's help is needed. In this way, the PRC was ready to work toward a positive solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, the Syrian peace process, non-traditional security, and the growth of the Middle East.

Sun Degang also makes it clear that China has no plans to compete with other big Middle Eastern countries on an ideological or geopolitical level. He says that China is not doing "partnership diplomacy" (huoban waijiao) with the goal of "finding enemies," but rather "alliance diplomacy" (lianmeng waijiao) with the goal of "finding allies" (zhao diren). To put it another way, he said that the way Chinese partnership diplomacy promotes peace and security is the main way in which it is different from Western alliance diplomacy.

Regional experts and government officials agree that China should do more, not just in the area but also in Iran. In an interview with the Shanghai Observer, Wu Sike, a former

Chinese ambassador to Riyadh, said that Wang Yi's trip to the Middle East in March 2021 was meant to find ways for China to get more involved in regional issues, such as mediating between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Many Chinese scholars believe that the best thing for China to do to help solve problems in the region is to act as a mediator.

Sun Degang and Yahia Zoubir, for example, want more active mediation and diplomacy so that there can be more stable strategic cooperation in the region. Up until now, Chinese arbitration has been limited to a kind of middle ground between mediation and diplomacy. China hasn't spent much money on diplomatic efforts and has only taken part in mediations that were run by other countries. This was done to show that China is there. The authors say that China should play a bigger role in mediating conflicts, like those between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, and Israel and Palestine. They see this as a chance to give Chinese diplomacy more weight, especially since powers in the U.S. and Europe are becoming more and more interested in the internal affairs of each of their countries. They say that if China wants to protect its national interests and increase its political power at the same time, it shouldn't just do "quasi-mediation" diplomacy. Instead, it should get involved in security and conflict issues in the region.

The first time China did something like this for security was in October 2020. During a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi suggested a place where people from the Gulf region could talk to each other. The forum would be used to talk about and solve problems with security in the region. He said that at first, this dialogue should focus on less sensitive issues like energy or trade, with the option to add the more sensitive topic of regional security to the agenda if it seems right in the future. Even though the official language tries not to give the impression that China's policy decisions are influenced by its

efforts to strike a balance with the US, China's increased involvement in the Middle East could, in the long run, make it harder for the US to have influence there or at least make it harder to enforce. This is true even though official language tries to avoid giving the impression that China's policy decisions are affected by its efforts to strike a balance with the US.

5.6. Great Power Diplomacy

There is a question that needs to be answered about whether or not a stronger role for China in foreign and security policy goes against China's goal of keeping the Middle East in balance. The People's Republic of China wants Iran to be a part of the Middle East's security system, no matter how it is put together. However, the PRC's approach to Iran is different from what countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates want to do with Iran. Any decision that China's leaders make about their relationship with Iran must also take into account how other Middle Eastern countries will react. This makes it hard for China's diplomats to stick to their policy of keeping a balance between different interests.

Even though China's foreign policy in the Middle East and Iran is still cautious and doesn't put the regional balance at risk, Beijing seems to think it is less and less bound by the traditional policy of caution in the area. Even though China's foreign policy in the Middle East and Iran continues to pose no real risks to the balance of power in the area, this is still the case. For example, Fan Hongda, who is known as one of the most well-known Chinese experts on Iran, says that China's moderation in the Middle East doesn't help the country's own interests. China has been able to keep a stable and more and more active foreign policy in the Middle East up to this point. China has done this by slowly building economic and, more and more, security ties with Iran and its neighbours (with both Iran and Saudi Arabia). Some recent news stories, for

example, explained how China helped build nuclear facilities for Saudi Arabia, which is Tehran's biggest enemy. This is a change from China's old policy, which was to not get involved in security issues in certain places, especially the Middle East, at least not when doing so could bring risks that were hard to predict. This is different from how the Chinese usually act.

At this point, the difference between the idea of non-interference and a strategy of balancing becomes clear: balancing is still possible even if China does get involved, as long as it keeps its relationships with all of the Middle Eastern countries in check while it does so. The term "non-interference" used to be used a lot, but now it's only used when it's in China's best interests. This shows that China is no longer committed to this ideal. Xi Jinping didn't mention the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" once in a speech he gave in 2021 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. So, he broke with a practise that had been going on for decades, which was to put a lot of weight on this foreign policy idea. In Chinese debates, it is also becoming more common to say that the United States might be the biggest threat to China's policy of keeping a delicate balance in the Middle East. After all, Sun Degang and Wu Sike say that "important territory in Chinese-style great power diplomacy in this new era" is the Middle East. In line with the official position, some academics say that China may also need to play a more active role in the Middle East because neither China nor the countries in the Middle East could depend on the United States to keep the region safe and, as a result, ensure the long-term flow of energy and goods. So, as China's influence in the area grows, it will need to take a more active role in addressing security concerns.

Other experts, who also like the idea of "hard balancing," are worried that the United States could put pressure on its allies in the region to choose a side. If this happens, the Middle East could become the scene or battlefield for a new round of the cold war between China and the

United States. If this happened, China would almost certainly decide that it had to put pressure on its regional allies to take a stronger stance.

Competition between China and the US has been going on for a very long time in areas outside of Asia that the US controls, like this area on the edge of Europe. So, it's likely that China's foreign policy in the Middle East and especially in Iran will focus less and less on regional balancing and more and more on geostrategic regional policy in relation to the United States. Iran is a good example of this.

CHAPTER SIX

LOCAL AND GLOBAL RESPONSE OF CHINESE INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

People often say that the Middle East is the world's "powder keg." A long history of conflict in the region has been caused by the many different ethnic groups, religions, and religious denominations that live there, as well as the involvement of major world powers. The safety and security of the region and the whole world have been affected by these wars in a big way. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the crisis in Iran's nuclear programme, the situation in Syria, and terrorism are just some of the complicated security problems in this area. The international community has tried different things, like peace talks, economic sanctions, and even military action, to find a solution to these problems. However, these steps have not led to the results that were hoped for. As a result of China's rise in the world economy, the rest of the world now has higher hopes that China will take a more active role in running the world economy. And China's role in the Middle East has become a big part of what it means to be a "responsible great power" (Aron, 2016).

As a result, China has taken a more active role in governing security in the Middle East over the past few years. It has gone from being a neutral observer to an active player and initiator. It has given its own answers, which have given new ideas for how security should be run in the Middle East, and it has done so.

The international community has tried over and over to find a solution to the Middle East's security problems, but most of these ideas have failed. The Middle East needs security problems to be fixed in a way that is both logical and based on facts. In light of these events, China has made some suggestions of its own. The goal of these ideas isn't just to bring peace and order

to the Middle East. They also have a direct effect on China's national interests and how safe and protected the country is. The one thing that everyone in the world keeps asking for The idea of "global governance" has changed the way the international community thinks about security issues in the Middle East. As a result, they are now looking at how to solve conflicts in the Middle East from a "global governance" point of view. Stability in the Middle East is not only what all the countries in the region want, but also what the rest of the world wants. From the point of view of the rest of the world, China did not do as much as was expected of it when it came to international issues, especially those that had nothing to do with China's own economic and political goals. Other countries, like the United States, have always criticized China for not taking on the international responsibilities that match the size of its army and economy. Several international organisations, including the United Nations, have also asked China to take a more active role in governing international security. Even though China has said that it will do more to keep security in the Middle East in check, many people still think that "its diplomatic initiatives have largely been passed through." Managing the security situation in the Middle East is an important part of managing the security situation around the world. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China has to talk about the many security issues in the Middle East and take part in activities related to these issues. As China's national power and influence around the world continue to grow, the international community is demanding that China become a "responsible stakeholder" and take on a larger share of the responsibilities that come with regulating the global economy (Bingbing, 2019).

In order to meet the urgent needs of the international community, China, as a responsible great power, must come up with its own solutions to the Middle East's security problems. 2.

How important it is to keep order and peace in the Middle East The traditional and non-traditional threats to security in the Middle East are tied together, and as a result, the security situation in the region is anything but hopeful. Even though the Iranian nuclear crisis was solved, there are still a number of security problems that make the area less safe and less peaceful. Some of these are the conflicts between Israel and Palestine, the situation in Syria, and acts of terrorism. The international community has been working hard to solve these problems for a long time. Some examples of these efforts are the "two-state solution" to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians that was proposed by the United Nations, the peace talks about the situation in Syria, and the military intervention in Iraq to fight terrorism. But each of these solutions has its own problems and hasn't won the trust of the Middle Eastern countries. Some of them have even made things worse. (Daily, 2020).

Because of this, the Middle East needs new ways of doing things more than ever. The countries in the Middle East know that China is a reliable and fair mediator. China has done a lot to keep peace in the Middle East by acting as a mediator when it was needed and when it was right. Both the countries in the Middle East and the rest of the world have praised its proactive and helpful role in resolving sensitive security issues, such as Iran's nuclear problem and the conflict in Syria. It has also decided that it needs to take on a bigger part of the responsibility for creating and keeping peace and security in the Middle East. 3. What China wants for itself In its early years, the People's Republic of China (PRC) had to deal with difficult situations both inside and outside of its borders (Degang, 2020).

As a result, it had to focus on growing its economy and looking for a better environment nearby. China is very far away from the Middle East and doesn't have "deep historical ties or long-standing strategic interests there." As a result, it has "neither deep historical ties nor long-

standing strategic interests there." Because of this, China didn't pay much attention to the security problems in the Middle East. But as globalization and China's rise continue, it becomes more and more important for China's national security and interests that the Middle East stays safe and stable. First of all, this area is dangerous for China's property and the people who live there. They could be hurt by things like the war in Libya that happen in their region. Second, keeping peace in this area is important not only for China's energy and economy, but also for the "Belt and Road" plan to work.

Also, the way globalization is going now, the internal problems of a single country may be able to hurt not only regional security, but maybe even world security. The growth of terrorist groups is a great example of this happening. Extremist views of Islam have had a big effect on separatist movements in China's Xinjiang and Xizang provinces. Some of them are actually smaller groups that are part of the terrorism in the Middle East. So, China should pay close attention to how things are going with security in the Middle East, and even for its own interests and safety, it should take a more active role in how security is handled in the Middle East. In the end, the international community's past solutions haven't worked out the way they were supposed to, and the Middle East is still full of conflicts that haven't been solved and new threats. As a result, countries in the Middle East and the rest of the world are asking rising major powers like China to come up with new solutions. China's role in governing security in the Middle East is getting bigger and better as it gets more involved and comes up with its own solutions. This is being done with China's own national interests and the security of the world as a whole in mind (Zugui, 2018).

6.1. China's Solution to Security of Middle East is International Demand

In recent years, China has not only been an active participant in the multilateral security governance mechanisms that have been put in place by the international community in the Middle East, but it has also put forward its own ideas. A significant address was given by President Xi Jinping of China on the 21st of January, 2016, at the headquarters of the League of Arab States. He detailed China's position on the control of security in the Middle East in great detail and proposed the action principles of "peace, innovation, guidance, governance, and integration." China has put out its own ideas for resolving the primary concerns of security in the Middle East, using the aforementioned action concepts as a guide (Erickson, 2016).

6.1.1. Solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The main security issue in the Middle East has always been the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a series of fights between Arabs and Jews over the Palestinian issue and has to do with land, religion, resources, and other things. This fight is about the Palestinians and has to do with land, religion, resources, and other things. In the beginning of its history, China took a stance on this issue that was friendly to Arab interests. Since it started its process of "reform and opening up," China has changed its policies and stopped taking a single position. It was the first time it talked about how important Israel's security and mutual recognition are, and it was also the first time it made its own suggestions about this issue (Gedalia, 2018).

After the Cold War ended, China started taking on more responsibilities and making more suggestions. This was because both its national power and its influence on the world stage were growing. In the modern era, China's ideas about how to solve the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict will build on the groundwork that these ideas have laid. During his meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on May 6, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping made four suggestions for how the Palestinian issue could be solved peacefully. These ideas were made to try to end the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The following are the claims: "First, create an independent Palestinian state with full sovereignty on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, while fully respecting Israel's right to exist and its legitimate security concerns. Second, negotiations should be seen as the only way to peace, and the immediate priority is to take real steps to stop settlement building, stop violence against innocent civilians, and lift the siege on Gaza. with Both the Chinese government and the rest of the international community have always taken the same stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But, unlike the other suggestions, this one was more detailed and clear about how to deal with things like figuring out the borders, making a

Palestinian state that is independent from Israel, and stopping settlement operations. Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinians, went back to China on July 18, 2017. During his talk with Abbas, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a new "Four-Point Proposal" about the conflict in the Palestinian territory. Here are a list of the propositions: "First, move forward with the political settlement based on the two-state solution. Second, uphold a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security concept. Third, continue to coordinate the efforts of the international community and strengthen the coordinated efforts for peace. Fourth, implement all measures and promote peace through development. In its most recent proposal, China emphasized how important it was to boost economic growth as a way to make the Israeli-Palestinian conflict easier to solve.

Also, it suggested setting up a way for China, Palestine, and Israel to talk to each other

at the same time. This was done by putting the "Belt and Road" program's collaborative building on the agenda. People-to-people exchanges and economic cooperation between the two sides can be helped by these kinds of steps. Both are good for the progress of peace talks and, eventually, for direct talks between the two governments. The Middle Eastern countries and the rest of the world have all enthusiastically agreed with and applauded China's ideas. From the original "Four-Point Proposal" to the updated version of that proposal, China's main ideas for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict haven't changed much. China's plans are based on the UN's "two-state" plan, which emphasizes mutual trust and a peaceful solution through negotiations within the UN's multilateral framework. It also says that each country should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other. The solutions China came up with were based on these ideas (Feng, 2020).

6.1.2. Solutions to the Syrian Issue

Since 2011, the fights between the Syrian government and the opposition have been a threat to the safety and balance of the region, the world, and the whole global community. It is not only a political problem at home, but also an international crisis, with sectarian wars, the involvement of big countries, and acts of terrorism all linked to it. Since the beginning of the conflict, China has been involved in positive ways that help find a peaceful solution by putting forward a number of ideas. China has never agreed with the idea that big countries should get involved militarily in Syria. Instead, it has always backed the idea that the conflict should be solved peacefully through political means. So, the Chinese government put out a "Six-Point Statement" that was meant to be fair and objective about how to solve the political problem with Syria. The statement says, "The Syrian Government and all parties involved should

immediately, fully, and unconditionally stop all acts of violence; the Syrian Government and various factions should immediately start an inclusive political dialogue with no preconditions or predetermined outcome; China supports the United Nations' leading role in coordinating humanitarian relief efforts; relevant members of the international community should earnestly resolve" China agrees that the United Nations should be in charge of coordinating efforts to help people in need. Other countries should respect the UN's independence. "To respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria" is thought to be the most important of them. Kofi Annan, who is the joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League to Syria, took the main ideas in this declaration to heart, and they are now an important part of his "Six-Point" peace plan. At a meeting of ministers on June 2012, in Geneva, Yang Jiechi, the former Chinese foreign minister, presented a "Four-Point Proposal" to break the stalemate over the Syrian conflict. The overwhelming response from the rest of the world was approval. On January 22, 2014, at the Geneva II Conference, the Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi, talked about "Five Principles" for a political solution to the problem in Syria (FMPRC, 2018)

At a meeting in Vienna on October 30, 2015, about Syria, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Li Baodong spoke on behalf of the Chinese government and proposed a "Four-Step Framework" for a political solution to the Syrian crisis. He said, "First, relevant parties should immediately stop fighting and violence and commit to fighting terrorism. Second, relevant parties in Syria should launch comprehensive, inclusive, and equal dialogues and consultations under the guidance of the United Nations." The peace process in Syria has moved forward directly because of the ideas and suggestions that have been put forward here (Ghosa, 2016)

To sum up, China has been trying to help end the Syrian conflict peacefully since it started.

From the "Six-Point Statement" to the "Four-Point Proposal" and the "Five Principles" to the "Four-Step Framework," China's main ideas for ending the Syrian conflict fit together. China's leadership takes a firm stance against what it sees as hypocritical double standards and proxy wars being fought in Syria by other major powers. It condemns all forms of violence and promotes the peaceful resolution of conflicts through inclusive political discussion as a way to reach its goals.

6.1.3. Solutions to the Iranian Nuclear Crisis

Iran's nuclear programme is one of the most important problems the world is facing in this new era. It is not only a problem caused by the spread of nuclear weapons, but also the result of how geopolitics, politics involving big powers, and religious and ethnic conflicts interact. China's position on this issue is that Iran has the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. However, China strongly opposes Iran's development and possession of nuclear weapons and protects the international nuclear non-proliferation system. Iran has the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, according to China. China is also against sanctions being put in place by a single country, and it backs efforts to end the conflict through multilateral peace talks led by the UN (Baijie, 2019).

Besides this, it has also come up with its own ideas and concepts. Since the start of the crisis, China has been working to set up diplomatic missions all over the world that are doing real work. After this issue was brought up to the United Nations Security Council in 2006, six countries—China, the United States of America, Russia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and France, and Germany—put forward a plan for negotiations. This framework made it possible for the Iranian nuclear crisis to be solved peacefully. China is one of the countries that

started the "P5+1" peace talks, in addition to putting out this framework. China has also come up with some of its own solutions to this problem. On February 18, 2014, the Chinese government put forward a "Five-Point Proposal" to solve the Iranian Nuclear Issue. This idea was put forward to help find a solution. The following is an explanation of the proposal: "Stick to the process of 'P5+1' dialogue with Iran; look for a comprehensive, fair, and appropriate long-term solution; follow the principle of step-by-step and reciprocal process; create an environment that is good for dialogue and negotiation; take a holistic approach and deal with both the symptoms and the root cause of the problem; and pursue a holistic approach and deal with both the symptoms and the root cause of the problem." This is the first time China has come up with a complete plan for stopping Iran's nuclear programme (BBC, 2019)

China worked hard to keep the Iran nuclear talks from falling apart at a crucial time when the parties disagreed on a number of details. China worked hard to make sure that the talks didn't fail. The night before the Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Iranian Nuclear Issue ended, Foreign Minister Wang Yi gave a "Four-Point Proposal" for negotiating with Iran about its nuclear programme. The meeting was held to talk about the situation with Iran's nuclear programme. Here is an explanation of the proposal that has been made: "Political guidance should be followed, all parties should meet in the middle, a step-by-step and mutually beneficial process should be used, and a solution that covers everything should be looked into." China's work was very important to finding a solution to the nuclear problem in Iran that worked in the end. Overall, China has been an active participant in the multilateral governance framework for the Iranian nuclear crisis, which has been led by the United Nations from the beginning. China has also suggested its own solutions. From the "Five-Point Proposal" to the "Four-Point Proposal," China has always stuck to its position and ideals. All the important countries signed

a treaty on the peaceful use of nuclear energy because of China's work (Ameen, 2018)

6.2. China's Stance towards Counter-Terrorism

The upheavals in the Middle East have given terrorists and extremists around the world a good place to grow and spread their ideas, which has made regional and global security much less safe. So, finding solutions to security problems in the Middle East should be done in a way that looks at the whole picture and tries to deal with both traditional and non-traditional security risks. The fight against terrorism is the most important thing the Middle East and the rest of the world can do right now. The Chinese government has always said that it is against all kinds of terrorism, and it has been an active part of international efforts to fight terrorism. On top of that, it has put forward a number of its own ideas. The Chinese government has made it clear that it wants the United Nations to take the lead in fighting terrorism around the world. In addition, it has stressed how important it is to create a united front against terrorism around the world and a comprehensive international framework for working together to stop terrorism. Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke at a meeting about terrorism at the United Nations Security Council on September 24, 2014. He said that international cooperation against terrorism should follow international law and the rules that govern international relations. It should also do the following: "First, make sure that the United Nations and its Security Council are coordinating well (Chorev, 2018)

Second, take a multifaceted approach that includes actions in the political, security, economic, financial, intelligence, and ideological fields. The goal is to deal with both the symptoms and the causes." Also, China is a strong supporter of Arab countries working together to fight terrorism. Some of the concrete steps include sharing information more, tightening border

control, making it harder for terrorists to get weapons of mass destruction and high precision, stopping the flow of money and people to terrorist groups, and slowly putting in place a system for sharing information, exchanging people, and building infrastructure together. China knows that sometimes it may be necessary to use force under the direction of the United Nations Security Council in order to fight terrorism. This is different from the ideas that have been put forward to fix other security problems. But force should only be used as a last resort when all other options have been tried and failed (Degang, 2018).

Also, China is looking for a long-term solution to the problem of terrorism and thinks that the only way to get rid of terrorism is for inclusive growth to grow. So, the Chinese government has been very active in promoting the "Belt and Road" programme all over the Middle East in an effort to boost economic and social growth through economic cooperation and, in the long run, get rid of the places where terrorist groups can grow. Even though China has suggested many different answers to the many different security problems in the Middle East, all of those answers are based on the same basic ideas. China's government puts a lot of weight on the idea that problems can be solved fundamentally through development, and it is willing to help the Middle Eastern countries' economic and social development through economic cooperation with those countries. It shows that China is a responsible big power, but we don't yet know how the solutions will be put into place or what effects they will have (Jennings, 2021).

6.3. Global Perspective Regarding China's Security Solution in Middle East

China has put forward its own ideas for how to fix the security problems in the Middle East based on its general diplomatic stances and principles. Some of them have been able to reach their goals, like finding a political solution to the problem with Iran's nuclear programme, but others haven't been used to their full potential yet. Even though China's solutions need to be improved and the effects of those solutions haven't been figured out yet, the country's chances are still good.

China does not want to compete for spheres of influence or take over regional or global hegemony by taking an active role in Middle East security governance and trying to find solutions to the problems in the region. On the other hand, China's proposed solutions are meant to bring and keep peace and stability in the Middle East, and by doing so, to create a safer environment that helps China's economy grow (Jones, 2018).

The main goals of China's proposed solutions to the security problems in the Middle East are to end the current security crisis in the area and bring security and stability to the region and the world as a whole. Other big powers, like the United States and Russia, get involved in the Middle East because they want to protect their own interests and gain regional or global dominance. China, on the other hand, gets involved in the Middle East because it is in the people's best interests. We can tell that China's views on how to run security in the Middle East are neutral and objective from what it says. China has always said that any threat to regional security must be solved through diplomatic means, not by using or threatening to use military force. In line with what President Xi said in his speech at the headquarters of the League of Arab States, "In its policies and measures toward the Middle East, China insists on starting from the own merits and demerits of affairs and going from the fundamental interests of the people in the Middle East." Instead of trying to find a proxy in the Middle East, China is promoting peace

talks. Instead of looking for a sphere of influence, China is asking all countries to join the "Belt and Road" initiative's circle of friends. And instead of trying to fill the "vacuum," China is building a network of cooperative partnerships so that everyone benefits and everyone wins (Kemp, 2018).

Even though the main goal of China's involvement in Middle East security is to make the region and the world safer and more stable, these efforts will also create a safe environment for China's own growth. Even though the main goal of China's participation is to improve regional and global security and stability, this is the case. China can't make a lot of progress if there isn't a good climate for international security. This is because China's overseas interests are growing, which makes it hard for the country to make progress. First of all, terrorist groups like the Islamic State pose a big threat to China's national security because they are growing quickly. The rise of terrorist acts in the Middle East has put a lot of stress on China, especially on the western part of the country. Also, China gets most of the oil it needs from countries in the Middle East. So, keeping peace in this area is a must if China wants to make sure it has enough energy. Also, the stability of this region is very important for protecting China's economic interests. In the past few years, there have been a lot of security worries about Chinese businesses, factories, and soldiers stationed in the area. Because of this, China should pay more attention to and take an active role in how security is run in the Middle East (Olimat, 2020).

6.4. The Main Principles of China's Solutions

China needs to be a part of the Middle East's security governance, but it needs to do so based on the right rules. Different from the hegemonism and "double standards" of some great powers, China has always stuck to the principles of respecting sovereignty, not meddling

in the internal affairs of other countries, objectivity and impartiality, comprehensive and fundamental governance, peaceful resolution, and multilateral participation in Middle East security governance. Respecting the sovereignty of other countries and not meddling in their business (Huagao, 2020)

The basic principles of the UN Charter are to respect the sovereignty of other countries and not get involved in their internal affairs. These have always been the cornerstones of China's involvement in the Middle East and in world affairs.

In contrast to the random interference of some big powers in the name of human rights and democracy, China has always insisted that regional conflicts should be solved by the Middle East countries themselves, and it has helped them choose their own political systems and paths to development. International intervention that is needed should also be based on respecting sovereignty and getting the UN Security Council's approval. But noninterference doesn't mean doing nothing. On the contrary, the Chinese government puts a lot of emphasis on making a difference in how security is run in the Middle East. "China would like to play the role of peacemaker, supporter of development, and defender of stability in the Middle East. And it would rather be helpful than be in charge when it comes to security in the Middle East." So, China should find a balance between staying out of other countries' business and helping in a positive way. For example, when it comes to Syria, China strongly opposes military intervention and proxy wars by some big powers that aim to change the government. At the same time, China actively mediates between all the parties to move peace talks forward (Hudson, 2017).

Being fair and impartial: China is a strong supporter of international justice. When it comes

to security issues in the Middle East, China has always stuck to the principle of objectivity and impartiality. It has never taken a side in a fight or tried to find a proxy in this area. On the contrary, it has done all kinds of diplomacy in this area and kept friendly relations with countries in the Middle East for decades. This has given China a lot of political and diplomatic tools to help manage security in the Middle East. ¶ On the Palestinian issue, which is the most important security issue in the Middle East, China has taken a fair and balanced approach to both sides. It has supported "the just cause of the Palestinian people fighting for their legitimate rights" and respected "the equal rights of different countries in the Middle East, including Israel, to live and grow." ¶ In his speech at the headquarters of the League of Arab States, President Xi also said, "For disputes to be settled, the international community should not only push for the resumption of talks and the implementation of agreements, but it should also stick to principles and uphold justice, both of which are essential." ¶ On the Syrian issue, unlike the US and Russia, which back their own proxies in the conflicts, China sticks to its independent position and acts as a neutral mediator to move the peace talks forward. This neutral and independent position gives China a lot of room to move and mediate, which means it can make a difference in how the Middle East's security is run.

Full-scale and fundamental government: China tries to find the fundamental answers to security problems in the Middle East. At first glance, the security problems in the Middle East look like territorial, political, religious, or ethnic conflicts. However, at their core, they are problems of development. Just as President Xi said, the trouble in the Middle East is caused by problems with economic development, and development is also needed to solve these hard problems. Sanctions and violence can only bring a short-term peace that is bad for everyone. Only when the economy and society of a region are doing well can social conflicts be solved

and a good environment for keeping peace and stability can be made. "Give a man a fish, and you've fed him for the day. Teach a man to fish, and you've fed him for life," goes the old saying. So, China can show countries in the Middle East how to develop in a way that has worked well and help their economies grow by making things easier for them. Also, the Chinese government puts a lot of emphasis on governing as a whole. Instead of focusing on a few big problems, it's more important to be aware of the big picture and understand the macro-situation. So, China combines the "Belt and Road" initiative with the Middle East Security Governance in an effort to help the economies of the countries involved grow and create a more peaceful and stable environment (Moonakal, 2020).

Peaceful Resolution: China has always pushed for peaceful solutions to security problems in the Middle East and been very against the use of force. Peaceful resolution is also in line with the UN Charter's ideas. Article 33 of Chapter VI of the UN Charter says, "The parties to any dispute whose continuation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security shall, in the first instance, seek a solution by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resorting to regional agencies or arrangements, or any other peaceful means of their own choosing." The use of force will only make things worse between everyone and is not good for long-term peace. China has asked both sides of the Palestinian conflict many times to start peace talks again, and in 2013 it even held an international peace conference in Beijing on the subject. When it came to the Iranian nuclear crisis, China did a lot to help find a peaceful solution by actively promoting peace talks. In the case of Syria, China does not want to use force. It has blocked many US proposals in the UN Security Council, making it impossible for the US to get permission to use force. China has also asked everyone involved to stick to the peaceful resolutions that have been made. Also, it has come

up with its own ideas for making peace (Oguzlu, 2020).

Multilateral Participation: China has always favoured a multilateral approach to governing security in the Middle East and opposed the intervention of a single great power. It shows that the UN, especially the Security Council, is in charge of security in the Middle East. So, it has taken an active role in the UN-led multilateral framework for security governance. For example, it has supported UN-led peace talks on the Israeli-Palestinian, Iranian, and Syrian issues, voted in the Security Council, and worked with other countries to fight terrorism. At the same time, China wants other international and regional groups like the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Arab League to be active. Also, there can't be any security governance in the Middle East without coordination between the big powers. Even though China and the US have many different ideas about how to handle security in the Middle East, it still tries to work out their differences and calls for more cooperation to solve these security problems. But China isn't doing as well as other countries when it comes to keeping the Middle East safe. So, to make a bigger difference, China should take a more active role in the multilateral frameworks that are already in place and suggest new and better ways to govern security in the Middle East. In the end, China's solutions to security problems in the Middle East should be based on these principles. They should be fair, reasonable, multilateral, comprehensive, and fundamental. All of the previous attempts to fix security problems in the Middle East failed because they did not follow certain rules. In this situation, China's ideas for how to run security in the Middle East could be helpful (Osipova, 2018).

6.5. Controversies regarding China's involvement in Middle East

Even though China has come up with its own solutions based on the principles we've already talked about, there are still a lot of disagreements in the international community about those solutions. Both how well they will work and what will happen as a result have not been looked at yet. The content of the solutions China has to offer needs to be improved. Because China is new to global governance, most of the solutions it suggests come in the form of statements, propositions, or proposals. These kinds of answers are often called "diplomatic rhetoric," and if they are used in real life, they could cause a lot of trouble. For example, China has good intentions, but its ideas for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not clear enough or good enough to solve the problems. "Operational methods, a clear time frame, and incentives" are missing from these plans. If China's answers are going to be used effectively, they need to be more specific. They have to say when, who, and how to do something in order to reach a certain goal. One good way to deal with the problem of terrorism would be to answer the questions below "Who are the people who are part of the global front against terrorism? Who should be in charge of what's going on? How can we get along? Who is being searched for? When to strike? What kinds of things should be done? What does the anti-terrorist cooperation mechanism try to do most of all?" If China's proposed solutions are to be better understood and accepted, and if they are to be finally put into action, a full and detailed plan must first be made (Yongxin, 2017).

But, unlike the debates about the content itself, the international community is more worried about why China wants to use these proposed solutions. Some people aren't sure that China's goal in getting involved in the security problems in the Middle East and pushing the

"Belt and Road" plan is to get economic benefits, especially because the area has a lot of energy resources. Some people think that China helps extremist groups in the Middle East to spread the country's communist ideology and grow its area of influence. Some people even think that China's involvement in Middle East security governance goes against the idea of non-interference and that the country is trying to gain regional and global hegemony through its actions. In general, the Middle Eastern countries and the rest of the world have given China a lot of respect for the answers it has given to their problems. But there are still ways in which they go against the interests of the rest of the world (Yellinek, 2019).

Because of this, they are often the subject of suspicion and criticism. The US has criticized China for a number of things, such as letting Iran know it has the same right as them to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes and selling weapons to Iran. The rest of the world has also criticises

China for not wanting to get involved militarily and for taking actions that seem to support Assad. So, China should try to make up for these differences and find a middle ground between its solutions and those of other countries and the international community so that they can all work together to find a good solution.

Even though China's answers aren't perfect yet and big countries like the United States are criticising them, the country's future looks good. First of all, the countries in the Middle East and the rest of the world have always known that China is neutral when it comes to Middle East issues. As a result, China has a larger number of diplomatic tools to use to solve the problems. Second, China's ideas for peaceful solutions are in line with international law and the basic rules that govern how countries treat each other. Because of this, they are more likely to be accepted and supported by the rest of the world. Also, China's ideas for how to handle security issues in

the Middle East argue for approaches that include everyone and take time. The solutions proposed by China are more likely to work because they take into account the needs of everyone involved and make small steps toward solving the problems (Medeiros, 2019).

Lastly, the solutions that China has proposed are not only meant to solve the current security problems, but also to get rid of the root cause of conflicts, which is that economic and social conditions need to improve. Due to China's many years of diplomatic work in the Middle East, the country now has a lot of political and diplomatic power in the area and can make a difference. China's role as a leader in the world will continue to get stronger as the country works to move forward with the "Belt and Road" programme. Arab countries said they agreed with the ways China wanted to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and China was able to reach a certain level of agreement with Israel and other countries. China's ideas for a peaceful solution to the nuclear situation in Iran have also helped, and China is still playing an important role in ending the conflict in Syria. Still, we should be aware that the solutions China has proposed are likely to face a lot of pressure and problems. The Middle East peace process is moving slowly because the security problems in the area are complicated and hard to solve. Peace talks about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict haven't moved forward, the crisis in Syria is likely to get worse, the Iran nuclear treaty hasn't been put into place, terrorism is getting worse, and there are always new security issues in the region. It is hard for China to solve these problems on its own, especially since the rest of the world has been working on them for a long time without success. So, China should combine its own solutions with the ideas and appeals of other countries. This will help the rest of the world understand these solutions and make it more likely that they will be used.

In the future, China may use its economic power to resolve the long-existing conflict of Israel-Palestine. China could offer to increase its trade with Israel if Israel agrees to withdraw from the West Bank and East Jerusalem. China could also offer to invest in the Palestinian economy if the Palestinians agree to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. China can use its diplomatic influence to bring the Israelis and Palestinians together. China could host a summit between the two sides, or it could send a delegation to the Middle East to mediate between them. China can work with other countries to build international pressure on the Israelis and Palestinians to reach a peace agreement. For example, China could work with the United States, the European Union, and the Arab League to create a united front in support of a two-state solution (S.C paper, 2021).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complex and difficult issue, but China has the potential to play a constructive role in resolving it. By using its economic power, diplomatic influence, and international standing, China can help the Israelis and Palestinians reach a peace agreement that will bring an end to the conflict and bring peace to the region.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Major Findings

China seeks regional and global friendships. In the past decade, it's become a Middle East player. Despite being a newcomer to the region, it has built strong international links. Also, it's careful while developing foreign ties and addressing political and security issues. China has never believed in war games; instead, it tries to cultivate healthy relationships with everyone. It's helped regional countries through tough times. The Arab Spring and China's involvement in the Middle East are prime examples. With China's aid, the states stood against US engagement and fought for their sovereignty.

China is working to cultivate positive bilateral relations with the Middle East. Strong regional cooperation and economic gains are the main goals. US involvement in the Middle East has made headlines for decades. As a superpower, the US intended to control the resource-rich, fast-growing MENA area. The US imposes limits on these nations, so they can't use their own resources or must sign US accords to keep the powers pleased and continue gaining through resources. If nations don't follow US agreements and prohibitions, they fear counterinsurgencies like Iraq (PATRICK, 2012). US domination over the region prevented China from expanding its regional contacts with the Middle East. Thus, China began its strategic activities to help the Middle East via concealed purposes and contributed cash and military weapons to resist US Power. US supremacy declined and Chinese involvement grew. Middle Easterners trusted China's benign and peaceful foreign policy and shook hands for continued bilateral cooperation.

Middle Eastern countries know their resources are their greatest strength, but their political leaders know the threats associated with them (Dettmer, 2019). They know international powers won't be thrilled with their oil development. After Arab Spring and Iraq War, US, Russia, and Israel are especially involved. In this scenario, Middle Eastern countries look to China for support against European powers. Also, these countries have changed their oil price and export policies to international powers, trying to balance threat and blessings from their resources. They've negotiated economic investment deals with China to boost regional stability and political dynamics. They are negotiating resource plans with international powers. On the other hand, they are developing healthy relations with China to improve economic growth and using oil revenue to improve water, electricity, taxation, and loans (Lieber, 1992).

China's involvement in the Middle East has also sparked global competition, as European policymakers struggle to understand China's political and regional interests in the region. Literature analysis (Lons & Fulton, 2019) shows China's relationship with the Middle East revolved around energy demand. China requires oil and other resources for many projects. As the most populous country, China needs energy and oil to meet public demands and improve the quality of life, and its excellent connections with the Middle East serve that need. Logistics were China's biggest barrier to exporting to the Middle East, so it created One Belt Road to help traders and exporters. This lowered travel costs and introduced new export markets, resulting in increased revenue and economic benefits.

China prioritises economic growth over regional power control. China seeks to be the strongest country in international relations, regional power, and economy. It knows the future is an economic race where survival requires enhanced R&D, industry investment, and exports and other economic investments. China focuses on the basis of bilateral ties and soft power impact

to benefit the developing region and maximise regional influence, revenue control, and economic strength. Deutsche Bank and IMF (Fahey, 2015) report that Libya can handle its domestic budget with \$184 per patrol barrel, Iran \$131, Algeria \$131, Nigeria \$123, Venezuela \$118, Russia \$105, Saudi Arabia \$104, Iraq \$101, UAE \$81, Kuwait \$78 and Qatar \$77 per patrol barrel (Fahey, 2015; McMahon, 2015). These numbers demonstrate Saudi Arabia can manage its budget well at \$104 per barrel. At \$50 to \$70 per barrel, Saudi Arabia faces economic and budgetary concerns (McMahon, 2015). Now, oil is China's key requirement to work on its many initiatives, so it must create good bilateral relations with the Middle East and enjoy wonderful oil supply at international pay rates.

China aims to be a world power. In recent decades, China's troubles were foreseen. Poverty and underdevelopment are problems. These challenges could limit China's worldwide impact (Arun, 2018). China's achievements and development toward becoming a significant world power are seen as aggressive moves to dominate. China has stated that it is not seeking regional or international leadership, but rather internal growth (Calabrese, 2017). China should approach international affairs by protecting its position, observing calmly, handling matters calmly, disguising its capabilities, biding its time, and maintaining a low profile.

China isn't a global power yet, but its political, economic, and cultural influence is increasing rapidly. China has seen recent economic success. China has \$1.8 trillion in foreign currency reserves and plans to invest via its sovereign wealth fund. China's need for oil and copper has lifted world prices (Admin, 2005). China is active in global security challenges like global warming, energy security, and HIV/AIDS. China's officials debate changing worldwide viewpoints. China defies the EU, US, and other global nations to promote its ideals and interests. China acts defiantly in international affairs when challenged by internal upheaval, currency

valuation, and human rights. China's power and influence have grown globally (Unit, 2008). No major international problem can be solved without China's help (Ameen, 2017).

China's globalization has boosted its interests. China's veto gives it unparalleled capacity to intervene on international issues like terrorism, weapons proliferation, energy security, climate change, and human rights (Marcus, 2018). China says it's a developing nation and doesn't want to change the international system. How can a nation of 1.3 billion not affect the world system? Few regional efforts or country foreign policy in Asia have been formed without China's input (Armin, 2015) . China's power growth is challenging (Admin, 2005). Multiplication and division have magnified China's difficulties and achievements by 1.3 billion. Inside a country looks different than outside. China faces political and economic per capita issues (Marcus, 2018). China's growth objectives and increasing economy influence foreign affairs, say Chinese researchers. China sees a "strategic opportunity" for "peace and development" worldwide. The US is more concerned about "war on terrorism" in South Asia and the Middle East (Calabrese, 2017). China can improve its appeal, focus inward, exhibit international conduct models, and affect the international system thanks to international revulsion.

China's relationship hierarchy with big countries, neighbours, and emerging nations is important (Sheet, 2013). China's interaction with the developing world began in the 1990s and was accelerated by Hu Jintao. China added multilateralism to protect its interests. This notion reassures China's international system obligations and boosts developing-world confidence. China's bilateral ties are split into "strategic partner" and "cooperative partner" categories whenever it forms a regional strategic partnership (Sheet, 2013). China makes such agreements to represent its international and bilateral relationships (Joseph S. Nye, 2005). Strategic relationships are an alternative to China's confrontational, exclusive, and damaging

ties.

China prioritises growth and territorial integrity. China considers developing its bilateral ties with the US a top priority. China realizes that US political, economic, and military dominance can hinder China's strategic ambitions and economic development (Jones, 2012). US technology, market, and investment affect China's economic progress. China and the US have many issues about Taiwan and Tiber commerce, but China is still confident in its relationship with the US. Growing economic interdependence between China and the US reduces public crises (EIA, 2018). Chinese scholars say the US may focus on China as Islamic extremism declines. China is promoting a multi-polar world and building alternative partnerships with East Asia's key nations.

China modified its attitude to Japan in 2007 because Chinese leaders realised that public messaging was causing problems in China-Japan relations (Joseph S. Nye, 2005). China is seeking to make up with Japan to reduce conflicts and maintain positive relations with its neighbours.

Not only with the neighbors but also China and the Middle East have had two-way contact for almost 2,000 years. This partnership has been smooth. The 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference began bilateral collaboration (Ghosa, 2016). Both the Arab Spring and the Chinese Cultural Revolution disrupted these contacts until the 1970s. Deng Xiaoping led China and the Middle East to improve relations in the 1990s (Hayoun, 2016). This relationship was based on economic interests, as China's fast-rising economy offered Middle Eastern countries new products and opportunities. China and Middle Eastern countries engaged more because of economic reasons. Middle Eastern countries helped China get energy in exchange. According to a BBC News (2011) analysis, the US and other foreign powers have had a huge impact on

the Arab Spring. This influence aimed to destabilise the Middle East's power system to obtain its oil. This involvement exacerbated crises like Syria's. Russia and China are helping Arabs and building deeper links with them (BBC, 2021). Since Russia and Syria have a solid partnership in major domains, weakening

Syria could help Russia preserve its regional and global clout. Russia first gave Bashar al-government Assad's material, technical, and political support. Assad's regime helped Russia tackle terrorism in the region. Russia later sponsored anti-military factions and pushed them to continue government operations. Political, economic, and social gains made this feasible. This reflected China's soft power structure and Middle East loyalty. Instead of seizing power, China has always concentrated on bilateral relations to gain benefits. China helped the Middle East's government to achieve its economic ambitions in the region and abroad (Jin, 2016). China realised that the Middle East became entangled in US-caused military confrontations, therefore it began helping Middle Eastern countries with weapons and resources. This led to amicable relations between China and Middle Eastern countries as both sides cooperated to advance their economic interests (Liao, 2013). China founded the China-Arab States Collaboration Forum in 2004. (CASCF). This meeting encouraged cultural, political, commercial, technological, and international interaction between China and Middle Eastern countries. This event also promoted peace and progress. This forum strengthened bilateral ties between the two parties, facilitating trade and cooperation (Luft, 2016). The nicest thing about China is that it has always committed to its stated rhetoric, which is that it does not intervene in other countries' domestic issues. The Chinese administration uses give-and-take instead of force or weapons. This policy makes the world think China is weak.

China thinks extending its influence in the Middle East through trade is easy. Beijing

is cautious about the military. China has benefited from the US's efforts to maintain Middle East peace and security. Chinese officials aren't always satisfied with how the U.S. handles regional security concerns and have established policies and had trade partnerships that affect U.S. efforts, but they haven't challenged U.S. dominance or major policy initiatives. Due to US pressure, Beijing has reduced the number of armaments it exports to Iran and helped the UN Security Council try to block Iran's nuclear enrichment programme.

China's military participation in the Middle East is restricted to the selling of weapons and the transfer of dual-use technologies. China participated in UN peacekeeping in Lebanon (UNIFIL). By the end of the 1980s, China was the world's third-largest armaments exporter, with 8% of the market. China provided cheap tiny firearms and low-end military equipment to its most significant market, the Middle East. In the early 2000s, wealthy countries, like most Middle Eastern purchasers, bought more modern weapons from the US, Russia, and Europe. China is a regional supplier.

China's contribution of global arms shipments fell to 1.5% in 2007. China began designing cheaper, more efficient weapons, which increased its exports to the Middle East and other regions. China has limited its arms exports, but it is still the fourth largest exporter in 2020, behind the US and Russia (Jennings, 2021).

China has traditionally tried to build soft power influence in the region by expanding commercial investments and helping other countries with security and finance difficulties. China does not believe in generating arm influence by deploying its armed forces, but it has exported arm weaponry to strengthen other regions against the US, which gives it regional and worldwide backing and makes it stronger against the US. Beijing sold weaponry to Iran, Iraq,

Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, and Egypt during the Iran-Iraq War (Grimmett, 2007).

China has also joined the UN Interim Force in Lebanon to boost its reputation as a responsible stakeholder. In 2006, China sent 182 engineers to UNIFIL to help reconstruct Lebanon's war-damaged infrastructure. Beijing promised to expand its UNIFIL contributions to 240 after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. The UN requested aid expanding the mission. Even if an Israeli shell killed a Chinese UN observer, this was true. Premier Wen Jiabao committed 1,000 extra Chinese troops to UNIFIL and \$5 million in humanitarian help to Lebanon while in France and Italy (Knight, 2016). China hasn't sent the promised soldiers. In 2007 and 2008, 343 PLA troops were in southern Lebanon. Most were field engineers who removed mines and fixed infrastructure. UNIFIL's field hospital employed 60 employees. Along with this, Chinese military contacts with peers in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East have decreased. High-ranking PLA officials have met with colleagues in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel. Senior military officers from Iran, Kuwait, the UAE, Syria, and Qatar have visited China to improve military, economic, and bilateral international relations and promote regional and global peace.

Chinese diplomats in the Middle East don't understand why the West is upset about their minor efforts to develop cultural bridges, something the US and other Western nations have been doing for more than 50 years. These initiatives resemble those of the US and other Western nations. People are sometimes confused because the U.S.'s interest in the Middle East seems to be largely about national security, while China's current strategy is to follow the U.S.'s lead. A Chinese diplomat in Algeria said, "You handle security, we'll handle business." (2008).

China is becoming increasingly appealing to Middle Eastern governments and people

because it's rich, growing, and doesn't care about power politics. Example: Iran. It has been careful not to cause controversy and has worked hard to benefit from U.S. security without actively supporting it. China's cultural diplomacy is young. Chinese diplomats show regional governments how similar China and those countries are. China is likewise pursuing a well-trodden road, as its language programmes and exchanges have been the backbone of cultural programmes in the West for decades. People in the region say China has a lot of potential and doesn't want to be neocolonial. The Middle East views China's policy in their region as soft power, not hard force.

Beijing's foreign policy has improved China's Middle East ties. This policy strives to balance China's competing powers and encourage international cooperation. China's role in the region has centred on South-South cooperation and commercial objectives. Beijing has avoided long-term war dangers. The existing security arrangement and power balance in the region may change based on a number of circumstances, including the outcome of future nuclear discussions with Iran.

A 25-year deal has helped China expand its ties with Iran in recent years. Iran's foreign strategy focuses on expanding the "axis of resistance," which needs China's cooperation despite stalled nuclear talks. Iran sells most of its oil to China because it has few other options. The US is increasing sanctions on Iran. China's diplomatic backing for Iran's nuclear talks has been crucial, and China has pushed for Iran to join the SCO (SCO). China has held naval drills with Iran and Russia in the Gulf of Oman in recent years. This was a show of strength against the West as tensions rose. Drills were in the Gulf of Oman.

China's commercial relations with Iran's competitors in the Middle East have expanded.

This suits Beijing's goal of balancing its local interests. China has boosted commercial links with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. This is especially true for the Belt and Road Initiative's infrastructure, telecommunications, technology, and energy projects (BRI). Saudi Arabia and China formed an all-encompassing alliance in 2016. Time has improved this alliance. China and Saudi Arabia have collaborated more on infrastructure in recent years, and China is now repairing the Grand Mosque.

Beijing is participating in many Egyptian initiatives. China's state-owned firms are constructing Egypt's Central Business District. Egypt must complete these projects. China has expanded business connections with Egypt during the past 20 years. Egypt's superior location and potential to become an industrial and transportation centre fascinate China. China made substantial gains in Egypt once the Suez Canal economic zone opened. The Suez Canal Area Development Project is China's major means to reach Europe by water.

China has invested heavily in rebuilding Iraq and Syria. China's reliance on Iraq's oil and its location in a critical area have grown, while US sanctions against Syria have pushed Damascus to improve its connection with China. Its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has aligned regional and Chinese interests. It's also getting better at collaborating with other economic and social reform programmes in the region. Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Egypt all have Vision 2030 goals. China's Belt and Road Initiative includes building and expanding the Maritime Silk Road (BRI). Through the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and Suez Canal, it would connect China to the Mediterranean. Currently, this is being planned. Along these trade routes, choke points make it difficult for ships to pass. This provides Beijing another motivation to invest in Middle East infrastructure.

Beijing has a financial and geopolitical stake in the region because it gets most of its oil from Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Iraq, and the UAE. China has imported more cheaper oil from Iran in recent years. As tensions in the region build and outside countries focus on adjusting to the shifting geopolitical situation, China will likely strengthen its military relations to preserve its strategic interests.

Beijing has taken advantage of U.S.-sanctioned Middle Eastern regimes like Iran and Syria. Washington imposes fresh restrictions to deter China from collaborating with Iran. China's sale of military weapons to Middle Eastern countries will be a crucial factor in this situation. China's military connections with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and the UAE can help us understand how the region's politics are changing. Due to U.S. efforts to curb Chinese ambitions in the region, Washington's Middle East allies may limit military cooperation with China. China will remain participating in maritime drills and engaging with regional partners on non-routine security actions.

Diplomats and strategic analysts in China explain China's proactive regional participation. "Traditional security view" focuses on destroying the enemy and retaining exclusive military partnerships. Beijing believes "shared security perceptions" can assist develop peace. Beijing disagrees with our definition of "traditional security" China's ambitions to stimulate political communication between competing countries and set up multilateral structures to minimize mistrust and widen mutual interests are unclear, especially in the midst of current disputes. Chinese diplomats have been circumspect when responding to regional political upheavals, concentrating on shared interests and avoiding mentioning political disputes. They've called for a multi polar alternative to US-led security policies. China struggles to preserve its maritime interests and maintain peace and stability in choke points

and crossroads. Because of worsening security, more conflicts and attacks are anticipated. China's role in the new security system is unclear, but it's unlikely that China will replace the US as the main supplier of protection. Beijing hasn't demonstrated much enthusiasm for this mission. Regional authorities may gain authority by being more assertive and outspoken.

Regional powers may take on new responsibilities in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to preserve their own interests amid political stalemates and national security threats. Iran is filling a hole in Syria. Other proxy militias and groups may follow a similar approach after the US withdrawal and thus the new security situation in the region will depend on China's response.

7.2. Conclusion

China is a "wary dragon," which means it is very careful and afraid of getting involved in problems in the Middle East or getting too close to any one country in the area. Also, China hasn't given a clear plan or strategy for the Middle East because they don't want to upset any of the countries there. Beijing does not have a clear plan for the Middle East while Xi is in charge. Instead, China tries to rebalance its centre of gravity and unbalanced national security posture by putting its policy toward the region under the guise of a larger "march west" idea. This is done to try to change China's approach to national security. In essence, this programme is an extension of Beijing's strategy toward Central Asia, which focuses on improving economic connections, especially through trade and better transportation. China's leaders have pushed for a vision of shared economic prosperity and mutual benefit on land and at sea. They have done this by making clear references to the Silk Road, which is the name for a network of trade routes that date back hundreds of years. Because of these worries, Chinese analysts and government officials see the Middle East as an extension of China's border. The phrase "larger Middle East" has been

used more than once, which is a clear sign of this framework. This word refers to the area that includes both the Middle East and South and Central Asia.¹ This "march west" strategy is based on China's economic strength and is channelled through the "One Belt, One Road" programme. Beijing wants to build on what it has already done well in Central Asia and do the same in other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East. China's Middle East policy has done a lot of good things, but it also has some problems.

This is made clear by Beijing's growing involvement in the area and its growing interests there. To be more specific, there is a mismatch between China's goals and the goals that match its interests, as well as between these goals and the tools and methods Beijing is willing and able to use to reach them. China's main goals and interests in the Middle East depend on the fact that things are calm and stable. But Beijing puts a lot of effort into economic operations and not much into diplomatic or military ones. On the ground, the Middle East is not at all peaceful and stable. For there to be even a semblance of stability, outside powers need to work hard to reassure allies, discourage enemies, and, if necessary, fight with them. China has not shown that it is either willing or able to take on this role as of yet. The United States is mainly responsible for this role, and it looks like China is happy with the way things are right now and is more than happy to free ride for the foreseeable future. Both the US and China want to make sure that the Middle East stays stable and that they have unrestricted access to oil resources.² On the other hand, unlike the US, China does not put a lot of importance on stopping "the creation, spread, or use of weapons of mass destruction." [Needs citation]³ This doesn't mean that China is against these goals; it just means that these things are much lower on China's list of priorities. Also, Beijing does not agree with the goals of the US government, which are to promote democracy and human rights in the Middle East. Beijing is sceptical of Washington's foreign

policies because it thinks that the US backs authoritarian governments and wants to get rid of the CCP. At the very least, China thinks that the US is trying to stop or at least slow down the growth of Beijing's military and economic power. Even though Beijing sees itself as competing with Washington as a great power, it still wants to keep friendly and cooperative relations with the U.S. and work for peace in the Middle East. Even though Beijing thinks it is in a competition with Washington, this is the case. In the meantime, Washington is still suspicious of Beijing's intentions, but it is open to the idea that China could do more to help keep the region safe. On the other hand, it is very unlikely that China will help the U.S. in a big way. It is also unlikely that China will fight against or openly question the U.S. position in the Middle East. There is a good chance that interests, commitments, and goals will continue to not match up. The best way to describe China's policy toward the Middle East is that of a wary dragon. China wants to do business in the Middle East and stay on good terms with all of the countries there, but it doesn't want to get involved more than is necessary to make money and make sure energy flows. This includes stepping up its diplomatic and security activities. The best way to describe this plan is as the plan of a wary dragon. Beijing also tries to stop the public from criticising China's policies, especially those that affect Chinese Muslims, and to get the world to recognize China as a great power. The end result is that China is becoming more important in the Middle East, but it has also become an economic heavyweight even though it remains a diplomatic lightweight and is likely to stay a military featherweight in the region for the foreseeable future.

Both of these are happening because China is becoming an economic powerhouse. The Chinese government would want to stay out of the Middle East military scene as much as possible. It is much easier to stay out of the way, keep good relationships with all the countries

in the area, and let the United States do all the hard work. And most Chinese analysts don't think that the United States will pull all of its forces out of the area.⁴ However, Beijing knows that Washington is putting pressure on it and that countries in the Middle East have high hopes. Reports say that Susan Rice, the National Security Advisor, went to Beijing at the beginning of September 2014 and asked China to do more to help keep the Middle East safe and to join the fight against ISIL. As soon as her trip was over, Chinese commentators didn't seem to know how to respond or what kind of help the Obama administration wanted from China. She went to China to talk to government officials there.

The United States is the unspoken problem that China has to deal with. If the economy of the area is going to keep growing and trade and investment are going to increase, there needs to be peace in the area. This is based on the idea that things are calm in the Middle East. China can't give or help in a big way. The most it can do is make symbolic efforts, like sending UN peacekeepers and a small naval task force to patrol the seas and look for pirates. This is because China doesn't have what it takes. Beijing knows that peace and stability in the region need to come from someone else, and it thinks that the United States would be a good choice. What does China's growing influence in the Middle East mean for the long-term interests of the United States there? Does China's growing power pose a threat to the security alliances the U.S. has with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and to the way the U.S. military acts in the Middle East? Up until now, most of China's influence in the area has come from its business activities. But as trade and investment grow, Beijing also becomes more important on the world stage. Also, China needs a lot of energy, which makes the Middle East very important to China's economy. China would not be able to sit still if instability made it hard for it to get these resources. At the same time, countries in the area think that the United States' economic and political

power in the Middle East is either staying the same or going down, and worries about Washington's ability to stay a reliable friend or security partner have grown. Countries like Saudi Arabia want to work more closely with China on defence not because they are crazy about a stronger Chinese military presence in the region, but because they are worried about Washington's commitment to security. The truth, on the other hand, is very different: the United States has always been committed to the Middle East. This is clear from what the Obama administration has done, said, and written, like the National Security Strategy, which came out in 2015, and the Quadrennial Defense Review, which came out in 2014.

Also, it seems unlikely that the next administration will move away from this level of commitment very much. Even though one American analyst said that some analysts think that "China may replace the United States as the kingdom's main security guarantor" in the long run, this seems very unlikely in the short to medium term. You can reach this conclusion for two main reasons: First, there are no signs that the U.S. government has any plans to leave the Persian Gulf. Second, there is no sign that the Chinese government is ready to take over as the main security force in the area from the United States government. China can't use the same range of high-tech weapons as the US, and its military doesn't have the same level of interoperability or as much experience in war and non-combat operations as the US military. But if the US stops caring about the Middle East or the Persian Gulf, which is very unlikely, China and Saudi Arabia might get closer. The fact that China and Saudi Arabia are working together more on security is not necessarily something that should scare the United States. In fact, this kind of cooperation could be helpful and help keep the area safer. But secret arms sales and backdoor deals are likely to make other countries in the area worried and suspicious, which could hurt U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East. Most likely, a higher level of

security cooperation between China and Iran would be worrying.

However, if the relationship was open and happened after the nuclear agreement, it wouldn't be a big deal. But Beijing hasn't always been a great or loyal friend, and the PLA hasn't always worked well with other militaries to reach long-term goals through alliances. Both of these are correct. Even though there are a few notable exceptions, like North Korea and Pakistan, even these countries have been dealing with tense relations and political unrest in recent years. To put it another way, China has nothing even close to the United States' large network of reliable military allies and partner militaries. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is not used to training and working with friendly and allied troops like the U.S. Military is. Also, it is not clear how quickly China and its possible military allies and partners could work well together if China did find such allies and partners. Military drills with the armed forces of other countries are still in their early stages. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan did their first drill together in 2003. Even though China takes part in a lot of international and bilateral drills, most of them are much smaller and have a lot less going on.⁷ It is hard to imagine China putting together a large and complicated multilateral project to fight ISIL forces in Iraq and Syria, or even coming close to what the US did in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm by getting a group of different countries to work together.

7.3. Recommendations

China should continue to invest in infrastructure development. China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in the Middle East, such as ports, roads, and railways. These investments have helped to boost economic growth and connectivity in the region. China should continue to

invest in infrastructure development in order to maintain its geo-economic and geopolitical interests in the Middle East.

The Middle East is home to some of the world's largest oil and gas reserves. China is a major importer of energy, and it has been working to expand its energy cooperation with Middle Eastern countries. China should continue to expand its energy cooperation with the region in order to secure its energy supplies.

China should not only engage with governments in the Middle East, but also with civil society organizations. This would help to build support for China's geo-economic and geopolitical interests among the general public.

China has been increasingly involved in regional security efforts in recent years. This includes its participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) security dialogue and its support for the Saudi-led coalition against Houthi rebels in Yemen. China should continue to play a constructive role in regional security efforts in order to maintain its geopolitical interests in the region.

Some Middle Eastern countries have expressed concerns about China's rise, particularly its growing economic and military power. China should address these concerns by being more transparent about its intentions and by working with Middle Eastern countries to build trust.

China and the Middle East have different cultures and values. China should be mindful of these differences when promoting its geo-economic and geopolitical interests in the region. This includes being sensitive to religious beliefs and cultural sensitivities.

Social media is a powerful tool that can be used to promote geo-economic and geopolitical interests. China should use social media effectively to reach out to people in the Middle East and to promote its interests.

Educational exchanges are a great way to promote understanding between cultures. China should continue to support educational exchanges between China and the Middle East.

China should promote Chinese language learning in the Middle East. The more people who learn Chinese, the more people will be exposed to Chinese culture and values.

China should support cultural projects in the Middle East, such as film festivals, art exhibitions, and music concerts. This would help to raise awareness of Chinese culture and values. China should work with international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Arab League, to promote its geo-economic and geopolitical interests in the Middle East.

The United States doesn't need to worry about how China, Saudi Arabia, and other GCC countries are working together more on security. This kind of cooperation could be helpful and help keep the area safer. Even though China and Iran held naval exercises together in the Persian Gulf in September 2014, there is no evidence that Beijing wants to join forces with Tehran. Even though working together on security between China and Iran is more difficult. 13 In fact, continued but open security ties between Beijing and Tehran during the implementation of the nuclear deal could reassure Iran that it is on the right track and that a long-time partner has not left it. Neighbours might help ease rising tensions in East Asia in the long run.

The United States should keep being the main person in charge of security in the Persian Gulf while also asking China to get more involved in the region's affairs. There is a very

small chance that the United States and China will fight each other in the Middle East. In fact, China doesn't even have enough troops in the area to make such an effort, let alone the political will or desire to go up against the US directly in the Middle East or Persian Gulf. Even though China has enough forces in the area to make such an effort, this is still the case. The most dangerous things in the area are the mixed forces of ISIL, as well as other terrorist groups and Iran's aggressiveness.¹⁴ Iran's containment and deterrence, as well as the strengthening of the capabilities of the US's allies and partners, remain the US's most important strategic goals in the area. Two of the most important things the U.S. Army can do are keep a forward presence in Kuwait and build relationships with Arab ground forces that are working with them. This is not just the Army's job; it is a core joint mission for all component commands under U.S. Central Command to reassure allies when real threats are close by. Chuck Hagel, who was Secretary of Defense at the time, started some new projects that should be continued by the government in Washington. In May of 2014, Hagel went to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to take part in a meeting of the United States and Gulf Cooperation Council Defense Dialogue at the ministerial level. William Burns, who was the Deputy Secretary of State at the time, went to Saudi Arabia in February, and President Obama went there in March. Hagel's trip came after those two trips.

Reports say that each of these high-level U.S. officials stressed how strong the U.S. commitment to security in the Persian Gulf remains. This commitment is shown in many ways, such as putting about 35,000 troops in a dozen bases around the region and selling high-tech weapons, such as missile defence systems, to the six countries that make up the GCC.¹⁵ The Army is making a big difference in these ongoing projects, and they should keep doing that. At the operational level, the Obama administration is trying to get Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia to build a regional missile defence

shield. Qatar is in charge of this work. Hagel says that the goal of the United States is to improve the GCC's "interoperability and development of sophisticated multilateral forces." 16 Under the terms of a \$1.75 billion agreement that was approved in October 2014, the U.S. Army will help make it easier for the PAC-3 missiles to move from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia. 17 There may be more fighting between the US and its regional allies, which could give China a chance to play a bigger role in the Middle East. On the other hand, it looks like Saudi Arabia and the other smaller Gulf states will continue to look to the United States as their main security guarantee. China's growing economic, political, and even security ties with these countries won't necessarily hurt U.S. interests. Greater cooperation between the United States, China, and other Asian countries on security issues in the Middle East could at least lead to less tension in other places, like East Asia. It looks like there is no need for the United States to send more troops to the area right now to counter China's growing commitment to the area. Even though it seems like the U.S. wants China to do more to help make the area more stable, China is not eager to make promises of this kind. China's work has made the area safer and more stable. If there is instability in the Middle East that affects energy production, China will have to make a hard choice about whether or not to strengthen its security role. If the U.S. decided to get involved, China would probably wait for the U.S. to take action, as it has in the past. If the US and China worked together to prepare for something like this, they might be able to keep their already tense relationship from getting worse and get better results.

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