

China's Realignment Policy in the Middle East after Iran-Israel Conflict

Azmat Ullah

Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF, Pakistan)

Razia Sultana

Women University Mardan (WUM), Pakistan

The Iran-Israel conflict has caused a major geopolitical shift in Middle Eastern politics, particularly in the context of global powers that are keen to exploit the situation in their own favor. China's role in the Middle East has also changed after the Iran and Israel backlash, as its prime goal and foremost objective is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for the realization of which Beijing is to play the role of mediator and economic partner. This research conducts qualitative content analyses of secondary data from 2020-2025 to compare China's approach with those of its competitors in the Middle East. China's realignment policy requires it to expand its diplomatic, economic, and strategic influences. China, as a selectively neutral and economically vibrant country, is playing its part in the regional peace-building process and is benefiting from the easy flow of energy and trading routes. It does not adhere to the conventional Western model of interaction based on ideological convergence but is more adamant about economic collaboration. Iran is an emerging strategic partner, and it is the second-largest trading partner of China; however, it also involves the risks of American sanctions, and the pro-sovereignty stance is eroding Israel's political trust. The current study delves into the debate of hegemonic powers that balance themselves in finer struggles over regional conflicts alongside the promotion of strategic interests in a multipolar order of world politics. This is indeed a fresh contribution to modern research on the Middle East, as it does not focus on the war alone but on the Chinese realignment policy that tries to gain influence through a more robust economic way. This study attempts to answer the broader question of How China's realignment policy is helping it gain influence in the Middle East in the presence of its Western competitors, particularly the US after the Iran-Israel conflict.

Keywords: China, realignment policy, influence, Middle East, Iran-Israel conflict

Geopolitics in the Middle East, particularly Iran and Israel, have always been rich and confusing. The Iran-Israel conflict is one of the oldest and most central conflicts in the region (Bukhari, 2024). After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Tehran-Tel Aviv relations suffered, and the shift in the overall direction of the strategic partnership deteriorated to a situation of existential rivalry, which drastically transformed the security architecture in the region. This animosity has worsened over decades and has involved proxy wars, nuclear wars, and claims to regional domination. This scenario has intensified after recent militarism, which has brought forth unprecedented circumstances for regional balance and global security (Gupta et al., 2025). The conventional superiority of Western powers, specifically the United States of America (USA), regarding Middle Eastern matters has greatly changed over the past few years (Hahn, 2005). The US vested interest, along with political instability and celebrated war history of Asia, has attracted other players to seek influence. The emerging environment corresponds to remarkable Chinese economic growth coupled with its ambitious BRI, making the Middle East an important melting point between Asia, Africa, and Europe (Rehman et al., 2025). The Chinese position reflects a change in the traditional model of great power interaction in the Middle East compared to other former powers, which commonly depended on military or ideological orientation. Beijing followed a pragmatic strategy based on more economic collaborations, diplomatic neutralism, and win-win situations, making it especially useful during the labyrinth of regional rivalries, simultaneously providing an edge for having a successful partnership with conflicting powers (Xinlei, 2025).

The Iran-Israel conflict provides China with unprecedented opportunities to realize its diplomatic potential for greater involvement in the Middle East. In the presence of less credible mediators and a lack of trust within the region, China's role as a neutral and economically influential actor has gained worth. With its more pragmatic approach to cooperation, Beijing presents alternate frameworks for regional involvement that are appealing to different stakeholders

(Hassan et al., 2025). Economic factors take precedence in the way China handles its Middle Eastern policy since the region is a strategic source of energy resources and a market for goods and services produced in China. Iran, with all its oil and gas reserves (significant despite international sanctions), suits China's interest in energy security. On the other hand, Israel can provide high-level technology and innovation, which can support China's development agenda. Chinese economic pragmatism enables it to attract both parties, even when they are hostile to each other (Naha &, 2025). China's activism in the region has occurred during the world power transition is taking place (Liu & Feng, 2025).

The multipolar posture of world during the 21st century introduced options to middle powers and regional actors to formulate more independent foreign policies. China's emergence as world superpower is the result of complex diplomatic policies that offers alternative paradigms of international interactions based on win-win collaborations as opposed to zero-sum games (Doshi et al., 2025). East Asian states have responded to Chinese gambits with different levels of enthusiasm, indicating differences in their strategic calculations and domestic priorities (Sims et al., 2025). Some countries see Chinese engagement as a possibility to diversify their international relations and minimize their partnership with traditional Western partners. Other world leaders are wary of China's long-range plans and the consequences of more economic engagement with Beijing (Zreik & Mohamad, 2025).

The security aspects of the Iran–Israel conflict have ramifications beyond regional boundaries (Al-Khaled, Al-Humaidi & Al-Ro, 2025). Middle Eastern developments are linked to international peace and stability in general in the form of nuclear proliferation issues, the threat of terrorism, and energy security. Their solutions, which are a combination of diplomatic activities and economic venturing in China, have been cited as a test of its potential as a responsible world power (Yaron, 2025). The Iran-Israel confrontation has taken a different twist with the consideration of technological and cyber warfare, which has prompted both countries to develop advanced means of fighting wars that have the potential to alter the military dynamics in the region. China's status as one of the strongest technology hubs generates both opportunities and problems in such an environment, as different parties tend to access technological innovations in China, but issues of technology transfer and security remain (Berdaliyev & Muminov, 2025). The other factor is the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a faster pace of global and regional dynamics evolution in terms of economic relationships, diplomatic priorities, and security concerns. China's control of the pandemic and economic recovery since then has earned it a special status among the comity of nations that remained under great domestic stress and prevented them from gaining significant international interactions.

Literature Review

Dian and Silvia's work, *China's Blueprint for Global Leadership: GSI, GDI, GCI and Xi Jinping's Vision for the International Order*, discusses the coherent grand strategy of China based on global security, development, and civilizational ideological initiatives that were launched between 2021 and 2023 under Xi Jinping to secure a global position as a leader by challenging the Western-led liberal international order (Dian & Silvia, 2025). The book not only lacks a realistic explanation of the initiatives or in highlighting the inherent risks involved in comparing the Chinese model with those of the Western-led liberal models, but it also fails to fully comprehend the Chinese realignment strategies in the Middle East after the Iran-Israel war.

China's Changing Role in the Middle East: Filling a Power Vacuum is a book by Chuchu Zhang that is the most relevant to this study as it has already highlighted in its title the change that was occurring in the Chinese foreign policy towards the Middle East and was affecting the approaches of other foreign and regional actors (Zhang, 2025). Although the book is a recent publication, it leaves a gap, particularly in China's realignment policy in the Middle East after the Iran-Israel conflict.

The economic statecraft is used by China in the Middle East as an economic condition for attain diplomatic interests. Zhang Xiaotong's *China's Modern Economic Statecraft: A Wealth-Power Dialect* dwells on infrastructure development and trade-facilitating processes other than conflict resolution and the application of diplomatic intermediation tools. It argues that China's economic statecraft is based on a wealth-power dialectic, where it converts its economic strength into political and diplomatic influence and vice versa. For China, economic diplomacy does not mean trade or investment only, but is a strategic process for attaining its set targets (Xiaotong, 2024). Despite such relevant and important information, the book does not cover the entirety of China's realignment policy in the Middle East and limits its scope to particular events.

The edited work of Vinod K, Aggarwal and Tai Ming Cheung, *The Oxford Handbook of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft* contains a chapter titles, "Chinese Thinking of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft" by Norris, Xu and Hu that sheds light on the effectiveness of Chinese mediation. As neutrality, relevance and leverage are the main

concepts of traditional theory of mediation. China has a special power status being a huge player in terms of economic ties without regional divide and such power status offers chances and also challenges to mediating effectiveness which can be examined further (Norris et al., 2025). Despite such a convincing argument, the article missed the important aspect of Chinese policy and strategy for realignment in the Middle East and that particularly after the Iran-Israel conflict.

Mai Alfarhan Alsudairi and Mohammed in their research article “The Past, Present, and Future of Gulf Sovereign Wealth Fund Investments in China” argues that Chinese engagement in the region is viewed differently by different regional actors, as this depends on the national interest and strategic priorities of different countries across the region. The Gulf states tend to cooperate with the Chinese both in terms of investment and technology as long as they retain security ties with western powers. Countries such as Turkey and Egypt are interested in striking the balance between relations with several international players to ensure strategic independence. Such divergent styles lead to complicated field of diplomacy that China has to linger in (Alfarhan & Mohammed, 2024). The current research is a step forward and proves that China has emerged as the most reliable country for Middle East where it is successfully realigning itself with the various Gulf States after the Iran-Israel Conflict.

Theoretical Framework

China's realignment in the Middle East after the Iran-Israel conflict can better be understood through the blending of the theoretical frameworks of Allison's Thucydides Trap (Allison, 2017) and Robert Greene's theory of power (Greene, 1998). Both these frameworks elucidate and better explain the logic behind the diplomatic, economic, and strategic behavior of China in a transforming Middle Eastern order.

Graham T. Allison in his book, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Allison, 2017) argue that when the rising power threatens to displace the already established power, structural tensions emerge that raise the probability of miscalculation, rivalry, or even direct conflict. In Middle East, China's expanding presence is occurring at a moment when U.S. influence, although still significant, shows signs of relative decline. To support his theory, Allison further argues that despite deep trade, finance and climatic engagements, the risk remains high if both the power favors confrontation over cooperation. As tiny incident can cause a large scale confrontation, both states should try to manage perception, fear and status.

Robert Greene's theory in his book, *The 48 Laws of Power* (Greene, 1998) provides a micro-strategic, psychological lens for understanding how China pursues influence below the threshold of confrontation. Several of Greene's principles align directly with China's behavior in the Middle East. For instance, Greene theory of power says that powerful people do not need power overtly and instead they create conditions where other needs them, the criteria which is met by China as it do not need an empire but it requires dependence in the shape of trade, commerce, ports, energy routes and telecom infrastructure. The second principle that suits current Chinese engagement is that to “never take sides in unnecessary quarrels and instead appear neutral while maintaining hidden leverage.” As Greene suggests, China neither provoke resistance, nor vies for dominance and works below the threshold of a threat. Another principle of Greene China seems to following is power as the game of patience and is buying time as a weapon by making long-term planning and by demonstrating slow accumulation of leverage. Finally China again adheres to Greene's principle of winning through reputation rather than confrontation and thus to build power

Method

The methodological approach used in the present study is qualitative content analyses of the extensive secondary research conducted to discuss and compare the policy shifts of China with those of the western players in the Middle East after the recent Iran-Israel conflict. The current research is makes content analyses of books, think tanks' reports, scholarly research articles and press coverage during 2020-2025 for clearly elaborating the adoption of different approaches of China in the Middle East in comparison to its experienced competitors. The evidences provided for this study helps to analyze the events as well as to frame the clear picture.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include:

1. dependence on publicly available information and possible biases as access to confidential and most recent sources is beyond reach at this stage
2. In the absence of concrete primary sources, reliance on secondary data is a compulsion and;
3. The study does not elaborate on the complex internal relations of Middle Eastern Countries as a whole and only focuses on the economic strength of Chinese policy for realignment.

Strategic Location and Changing Diplomacy of China

China's neutral diplomatic posture during the Iran-Israel confrontation corresponds with Greene's 20th Law of power that prohibits from taking sides in local disputes and instead favors neutrality (Greene, 1998, p. 145), enabling Beijing to maintain ties with both adversaries without becoming entangled in their rivalry. Such neutrality simultaneously serves the logic of Graham Allison which says that by avoiding overt alignment, China minimizes the risk of provoking the United States while still expanding its regional influence (Allison, 2017, pp. 150-156). Strategic patience in China's diplomacy as compared to traditional ideological or military approaches reflects the laws of Greene which says that "plan all the way to the end" (Law 29) and "master the art of timing (Laws 35) (Greene, 1998, p. 236 and 291). It also reflects Allison's argument that rising powers often remain cautious and adopt incremental strategies as to avoid unnecessary confrontations (Allison, 2017, pp. 112-118).

It is this reason that China has worked smartly on the plan towards engagement in the Middle East by taking benefit from its status of a large power with no indebtedness or relations with any past colonial power and period (Lons et al., 2019). During the recent Iran-Israel tensions, it has canonized its diplomatic efforts by carefully maintaining its neutral posture to attract all sides (Sardana & Fard, 2018). Chinese leaders have repeatedly stressed on sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual respect as an attractive diplomacy model to all the actors in the region as compared to the western tactics of monopolizing mediation initiatives (Yuliantoro, 2025).

Chinese diplomatic change in the Middle East is very flexible as it follows strategic patience. As traditional approaches were usually based on ideological association or joint military work, China offers practical interaction with economic advantage and appreciation to other partners. Such strategy especially works in the unstable post-conflict scenario where states focus on their interests of attaining peace and development instead of relying on military conflict (Chaziza, 2019)

The formation of Chinese' Middle East Peace and Development Initiative' is a unique approach and strategic diplomatic innovation that offer direct solutions to regional conflicts and simultaneously enhances Chinese strategic interests. Economic development is indeed a pillar of sustainable peace and as proverbial alternative to military action or sanction programs. The Iran-Israel conflict as one of the major challenges demanded alternative cooperation mechanisms for mitigating tension with the passage of time (Dandan, Degang & Zhang, 2021).

The diplomatic ventures of China engaged bitter rivals in diversified activities. The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum and the frameworks of cooperation were thought to be catalyst for initiating dialogue rather than engaging in a traditional conflict mechanism. Such overtures elevated the confidence of China in its diplomatic skills and more responsibility to stabilize the region (Noor et al., 2025).

Implementation of BRI and Economic Statecraft by China

Chinese economic policy that revolves around BRI, investments and technological cooperation is the embodiment of the 11th Law of Greene that is based on "learn to keep people depend on you" (Greene, 1998, p. 82). China's structured policy of dependence among Middle Eastern states exactly reflects that. This deepening of China's strategic influence without military commitments with the Middle East that might result in Thucydides' dynamic with the US guarantees success for China. On the other hand Chinese expansion is also geopolitically consequential according to Allison. Economic penetration into areas historically dominated by the US affects the balance of power without direct confrontation by intensifying the structural stress characteristic of power transitions (Allison, 2017, pp. 38-41)

The Chinese economic involvement in Middle East has unprecedentedly increased after the recent Iranian-Israeli conflict because regional instability and uncertainty was not only a challenge but also was a blessing in disguise as it offered an opportunity to extend its influence in the region (Saba, 2025). BRI as a mega project and a result of Chinese economic diplomacy proved a step beyond traditional aid and investment approaches (Junhua Chen, 2023). China boasted economic interactions based on infrastructure development, technology transfer, and trade facilitation actually combined leverage and influence in the Middle East region (Mangi, 2024). Chinese BRI reached to \$19 billion in construction in Middle East, the major share being received by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Wang, 2025). In 2021, China and Iran signed a twenty-five years cooperation agreement of \$400 billion to make a massive investment in Iranian infrastructure and energy sectors despite the fears of American sanctions and it is through this agreement that Iran was linked to Chinese BRI. China and Israel trade started from \$50 million which reached to \$17-21 billion in 2021-2022 and thus, China emerged as the second largest trading partner of Israel after America, with 30 Chinese companies providing jobs to the local Israeli citizens (Force, 2025).

China has also cautiously balanced its economic interactions for avoiding security problems and for achieving strategic advantages. Investment has been made in a varied way to internationalize across states and to limit relying on one entity for offering multiple avenues of geographical levers (Jin Liangxiang, 2024). It is a venture of that directly run counter to the historical approaches of great power that looked for resources or had pursued some strategic gains.

The firms of China not only proved competitive but also added value to the local demands to meet their financing conditions and technological potentials. As opposed to the political restrictions or scarcity of resources, the western competitors faced, the Chinese economic frameworks worked efficiently and enabled it to establish relations beyond ideological and political boundaries so as to counter the regional rivals (Ruigrok, 2010).

Energy proved another tool of Chinese diplomacy in the Middle East as it navigated through the systems of sanctions and political unsteadiness to offer sufficient resource supply (Yaseen, 2023). China-Iran energy partnership is the prime example of overcoming political differences and has proved that economic pragmatism is not the end because both have developed some mutual dependencies and the incentive of stability and cooperation went all the way. The same example is followed in relations with other gulf countries and regional sources of energy (Amjad Abbas Khan, 2024).

Innovation cooperation and technology transfer have been gaining more and more meaning in the context of Chinese economic activities. It is apparent in this analysis that China has successfully positioned herself as key source of modern technologies to the development of the region as well as enjoying access to the Israeli capabilities to innovation and markets in the Middle East (Tallat Yasmin, 2024). The technological aspect introduces a level of reliance that is based on new ways of interacting and forms a new level of interdependence to existing economic relationships.

China Amidst of Multilateral Engagement and Regional Power Plays

China's engagement with all parties while avoiding formal alliances also reflects Greene's flexibility and strategic ambiguity, particularly his emphasis on adapting to shifting power structures while revealing little of one's long-term intentions (Greene, 1998, pp. 29-35). It helps Beijing to escape entrapment and increases its bargaining power, consistent again with Greene's argument that power is maximized by maintaining room to maneuver rather than becoming tied to fixed positions (Greene, 1998, pp. 215-221). Simultaneously, Allison's framework suggests that it is a rational strategy for a rising power seeking influence in an order still shaped by US security architects. China must expand without appearing revisionist, a balance reflected in its multilateral engagement approach (Allison, 2017, pp. 150-160).

The transformation of regional power status with growing importance of China has radically changed the value that conventional powers had in the Middle East, opening the door to the newly emergent opportunities of diversifying the opportunities of international relationships available to the regional actors (Papageorgiou, 2023). Other countries have also adopted Chinese model of interaction as a source of less relying on their traditional western allies for investment and technology which ultimately is helping the smaller powers to reclaim their autonomy and bargaining position.

This interaction of China and the security problem is a complex issue because it is based on the intricate variants of cooperation and competition. China has not threatened the existing partnerships directly but has endeavored to establish similar institutions and arrangements, which do not require of leaving the already established interactions. This strategy has been useful as it has helped to avoid direct clash with established powers as Chinese power is slowly spreading (Nanda, 2025).

Local reactions to Chinese initiatives are varied as it depends on local politics, strategies and history. Dictatorship regimes also tend to have fewer political complications with Chinese involvement than versions practiced by democracies and economies struggling with sanctions imposed by the West have found a strong economic viability with the Chinese (Ivan Campbell, 2012). Such different reactions provide options to China to work out the strategies of engagement thus subjecting to special needs and interests of the nations.

The discussion identifies that through the regional rivalries, China has been able to secure itself without directly engaging into conflicts. Through the existing fruitful relations with other powers in the region, China provides it with incentives to restrain since this makes China a key partner in the stability of the region. This balance policy is a show of advance diplomatic powers that are beyond the alliance system.

China's Peace Initiatives and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

China's slow-paced and confidence-building mediation again supports Greene's 9th Law that says that "win through your actions, never through argument" and which emphasizes subtle influence and quiet diplomacy in place of overt declarations (Greene, 1998, pp. 69-75). The avoidance of high-profile mediation protects China's reputation, consistent with 5th Law of Greene holding that "guard your reputation with your life," which will help minimize risk of public failure while enabling the gradual accumulation of influence (Greene, 1998, pp. 33-38). Similarly, from Allison's viewpoint, such low-visibility mediation helps avoid provoking war with the US while helping China to gradually emerge as an alternative order-shaping actor, a factor Allison identifies as common among rising powers attempting to avoid premature confrontation with the established hegemon (Allison, 2017, pp. 180-83).

The solution of China to Iran-Israel conflicts signifies to a slow process of confidence-building measures, followed by economic collaboration. Chinese statesmen have not adopted high-profile mediatory initiatives that might cause public failure and instead have chosen to promote dialogue through the lower-key mechanisms of practical cooperation. This patient approach is the result of the strategic culture of China as compared to other international experiences of mediation.

Economic regions and development schemes of China will one day ensure the participation of both Iran and Israel and will give a new direction to the confidence-building measures. Although direct cooperation with China is not possible at the moment, but in future whenever the political environment allows, the collaboration might materialize. Such visionary policy hints towards strategic thinking which is not subjected to the short term diplomatic gains (Kalhor & Fakhar, 2023).

For China, peace is conditional with undictated regional ownership and progress and which is not artificially pushed by any deadline. Chinese in their analysis have learnt from their previous experiences of successful and failed international mediation efforts such as the drawbacks of pressure tactics which create resistant merger than relaxation (Yuan, 2022). As Chinese programs are focused on mutual benefit and voluntary involvement, they establish more feasible resolutions to long-term conflicts.

Security and Strategic Alliances of China

China's avoidance of deep military alliances or arms transfers corresponds to Greene's 18th Law and 20th Law demanding that "do not build fortresses to protect yourself and avoid isolation" and "do not commit to anyone" (Greene, 1998, pp. 137-145, 127-133). By maintaining strategic ambiguity, China must avoid obligations that could drag it into regional conflicts or undermine its balancing posture. This restraint is also suggested by Allison that direct military involvement accelerates the risk of confrontation, especially when rising powers appear to challenge domains in which the already established power enjoys hegemony (Allison, 2017, pp. 210-218).

The attributes of China can be seen in its regional actions in terms of security where great care is observed to maintain its position in its international relationship. China has primarily stopped arms export and military relationships that causes regional tensions and impact civilian technology and economic relations. For Beijing, the economic power is more sustainable than military relations in modern times.

China has achieved mastery in cybersecurity and has formulated some wonderful technological policies the effects of which have gained more significance on regional security. Both Iran and Israel vied for receiving Chinese technological capacity but China observes caution and extends selective cooperation only to meet genuine security requirements of its clients while keeping the sensitive technologies and information with itself (Creemers, 2022). This focus of China on cybersecurity and controlled technology transfers signifies 31st Law of Greene which instructs to "Control the options," ensuring that Beijing retains leverage and influence while minimizing exposure and preserving asymmetric advantage (Greene, 1998, pp. 247-254).

With the passage of time, Chinese regional activism and global strategic rivalry interplay has turned into a more complicated situation because it is causing escalated tensions between the United States and China. The affairs of Middle East weigh high and central in the Chinese foreign strategic policies but it also offers some unknown results of intensification of relations with other stakeholders in the region particularly the United States of America which may result in a kind of adventure and mishaps in the long run. Regional stability on the other hand will be in favor of China as it would curb American military dominance in the region and the role of America in the local economies.

China's Approach to Economic Integration and Development Partnerships

China as one of the massive changes has promoted the economic integration of the Middle East over a period of time because its economy always remained dependent on foreign aid and exportation of their resources by the dominant foreign stake holders (Zoubir, 2017). Chinese BRI and its related projects have culminated in opportunities for China to initiate interregional cooperation mechanisms as to define the political boundaries afresh at some point. Such economic integration frameworks are based on interdependent relationships that enabled the partner states to remain stable and cooperative (Liu, 2020).

Chinese development models not only give it leadership roles but also ensure that regional integration can be achieved without political dominance and only to offer immediate benefits. Chinese projects are a step in that direction as it promises the regional countries infrastructures, technology sharing and trade facilities which indeed will culminate in effective relationship formation as compared to the conventional diplomatic activities meant for political agreements (Xinhua, 2023). The regional leaders readily opt to get benefits from such generous offers for their countries and for their people.

The financial institutions of China allocate an important source of capital development with easy, competitive and flexible terms and conditions to the regional projects to meet the local needs. Such finances of China are again a success story as compared to the traditional international financial institutions which holds the seeds of political maneuvering and exploitation. This approach makes China a great bargaining power to determine regional development priorities.

Chinese Technological Networks of Cooperation and Innovation

Chinese regional relations based on technological cooperation have grown so rapidly that it has formed new interactions beside the conventional economic cooperation frameworks. China's rise as a major superpower in technology has also increased the interest of the regional players to have a hand on the sophisticated systems for boasting their economies and sources of beefed up securities. Chinese technology are sophisticated to the level that it helps the receiver countries as well as it promotes the strategic goals of China (Chunjiao Yu, 2020).

The technological conglomerates of China in the Middle East include the installation of telecommunications infrastructure, artificial intelligence and digital platforms for promoting economic capabilities which indeed results in long-term dependency relationships as against the conventional trade, commerce and investment relationships (El-Kadi, 2024). Technology-based relations are more durable and enduring as compared to the traditional political cooperation of vested selfish interests.

The China innovation partnership with regional partners has developed new paradigms of technology development as integration of Chinese capabilities of manufacturing and regional skill and market access. The Chinese-Israel technology relations can serve as an example of how the economic collaboration can be beyond political differences in case the benefits of cooperation are high. China is also surrendering to similar patterns of its relations with other regional innovation centers.

Challenges and Limitations of Chinese Engagement

Although there has been great success, the Chinese presence in the Middle East has to contend with massive obstacles that limit the power of Beijing and its proceedings. As can be seen in the analysis, frequent hurdles facing Chinese efforts that need multilateral involvement are political conflicts among the regional players. Even in terms of the current situation, it is very hard to establish the framework of interaction with competing powers as China could continue the independent relations with them but still learn the interaction (Junhua Chen, 2023).

This reduces the capacity of China to react to every regional demand and expectation due to limited resources and other priorities. It is equally true that Chinese role is not enough to act as a replacement of traditional aid and other sources of cooperation which the regional actors still need. Middle East is bound to accept cooperation from USA or other western nations even when the China as alternative is available to them. Another important barrier for China's close interaction with Middle Eastern states is the language, culture and inadequate local knowledge (Zafar, 2025). These barriers and shortcomings affect the overall interaction despite the fact that many Chinese officials have adapted impressively to the Middle Eastern geo-political and geo-economic environment. Such barriers of course can reduce the depth and durability of Chinese relationships with the regional states of Middle East. Beside technology and cybersecurity fields, China can cooperate with the Middle Eastern states in future are education and cultural exchange programs but that is only possible if China overcome those linguistic and cultural barriers.

Another barrier in relations of China with Middle East is its domestic politics that create certain gaps and that might hinder the future relations. Its policies particularly towards Chinese Muslims of Xinjiang Province and the human rights situation are a major source of concern for some partners in the Middle East. These internal factors in the long run have the potential of limiting the Chinese diplomatic autonomy in case there is increased pressure in the region (Tallat Yasmin, 2024).

China may exploit the changing circumstances in the Middle East to fulfill its own strategic interests. The state of insecurity in the region demand more increased Chinese engagement in the region for securing and protecting its investments, partnerships and dominance as compared to other external stake holders. There is also a possibility of stabilization in the regions which might reduce Chinese engagement but still the developing possibility would be of a more efficient economic integration (Noor et al., 2025).

The nature of China-US global competition will decide the future of Chinese regional interest. The strategic rivalry of both these super powers in Middle East may result in the formation of new political and security alliances which ultimately may result in a limited space for Chinese diplomacy and even an increased pressure for doing more. China on the other looks for ways to avoid such exclusiveness and instead develop closest and stronger relations.

As a regional engagement tool, China benefits from its new technologies and digital economy because its technology particularly offers long-term competitive strength that help boast other economic resources. The increased demand of technological cooperation allows the greater influence of China through innovation partnerships. Besides, environmental issues and climate change also demand the increased role of China as it trespasses the conventional political boundaries. Such issues and problems require accessible solutions to the local issues which the Chinese technological advancement can help to address. Any sort of collaboration in environmental sphere will have its impact on the overall politics in the region.

The balanced approach of China based on economic relations, diplomatic abstinence, and slow accumulation of relation makes it a key geopolitical actor in the Middle East. Such a strategy of China again runs counter to the traditional military interventions, ideological orientations, or any kind of alliances. China has displayed its diplomatic potential and skill in effectively managing the Iran-Israel rivalry by maintaining good relations with both countries (Kalhoro & Fakhar, 2023).

The successful Chinese economic policy in the Middle East is a wonderful example of respecting local behaviors, cultures and religious orientations. There is no doubt in that military strength and protection assurances are still very important but economic and technological integration as well as development projects could ensure long-term influence (Creemers, 2022). Chinese pragmatic cooperation with developing countries has demonstrated its usefulness as compared to the previous motifs of imposing ideas on others or asking them to enter into exclusive relationships. Chinese model offers a flexible multi-alignment approach as compared to the western closed alliance structures.

The active countries of Middle East would adopt more systematic approaches of engagement with China to maximize mutual benefits, strategic autonomy and flexible multi-alignment inclusive relationships. Such institutional arrangements would be made to facilitate multilateral cooperation as against the conventional patterns of rivalry and instead help in fostering more international interactions, for instance, educational cooperation, cultural exchange programs, and language training will increase durability of China-Middle Eastern relations.

China's increased influence could be noted by those international organizations and established powers that do not see relations with the lenses of competition only but for entering into positive relationships (Xinhua, 2023). In order to exploit it, China can forge structures of cooperation in regional development schemes, mediation programs, and management of security issues to meet local needs of the partners and strategic complications because global organizations would not compromise on their principles or activities and instead would design such strategies to meet the diplomatic offenses of China.

Conclusion

China has emerged as a critical and assertive participant in Middle Eastern geopolitics during the recent Iran-Israel conflict, utilizing economic connectivity and diplomatic restraint to consolidate its regional presence. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and related diplomatic platforms, Beijing has offered alternative modes of regional engagement based on mutual gain, non-interference, and sovereignty as emphasized by Greene on indirect power, reputational influence, and quiet consolidation rather than declared hegemony. By prioritizing development-oriented

partnerships rather than ideological interventions, China has positioned itself as a dependable actor in a politically unstable post-conflict environment where regional states sought flexible cooperation and diversified external relationships over rigid alliances or militarized solutions.

China's expanding presence in the Middle East carries significant implications both for regional dynamics and global governance as well as shifting patterns of power. As the region becomes more receptive to economic collaboration over security-centric engagement, China's strategy reflects Allison's logic of a rising power by carefully maneuvering within a system still shaped by US security architects. Instead of directly challenging Western influence, Beijing's slower economy driven engagement correspond to Allison's argument that rising powers often avoid rapid or confrontational moves to reduce the risks associated with structural stress in power transitions. At the same time, its practice of cultivating parallel relationships with states divided by ideology or rivalry reflects Greene's laws of strategic ambiguity and non-commitment, enabling China to maintain influence without becoming entangled.

Yet, China's realignment strategy also faces limitations that reflect both theoretical frameworks of Greene and Allison. Greene warns that power built on ambiguity must be constantly managed to avoid overextension, and China's diplomacy remains limited by internal political considerations, cultural barriers, and reputational vulnerabilities. Similarly, Allison suggests that China cannot escape the structural pressures of great-power competition in the shape of US-China rivalry in the Middle Eastern political space, and any deepening of Chinese influence involves the risks of confrontation from Washington or its local allies.

The future of the engagement of China in the Middle Eastern will be determined by evolving regional alignments, global strategic competition and Beijing's domestic political capacity to sustain its current trajectory. Its shift from long-standing non-intervention to more active involvement generates both opportunities and suspicions among regional actors. The Chinese-Iranian strategic partnership may cause US sanctions while relations with Israel are increasingly strained by Beijing's pro-sovereignty rhetoric and Iran's strategic relevance. During the Iran-Israel confrontation, China's attempt to maintain neutrality while still defending Iran's right to self-defense and urging for restraint and dialogue reflected an effort to avoid alienating either side. This balancing act is emblematic of Greene's principle of avoiding unnecessary quarrels and Allison's insight that rising powers must manage perceptions to prevent escalation with dominant powers.

Overall, China's realignment policy is rooted in economic statecraft, cautious diplomacy, and the strategic patience (highlighted both by Greene and Allison) has allowed Beijing to steadily expand its influence in the Middle East, often at the expense of its Western competitors. By leveraging economic integration rather than force, and by cultivating ambiguity instead of formal alliances, China continues to reshape the regional order in ways consistent with both Greene's subtle mechanics of power and Allison's structural theory of rising-state behavior.

References

Al-Khaled, Al-Humaidi & Al-Ro. (2025). The Configuration of Power in the Middle East Following the Israel-Iran Tension: A Geopolitical. *International Journal of Education and Social Science Studies*, 1(2), 123-132.

Alfarhan & Mohammed. (2024). The Past, Present, and Future of Gulf Sovereign Wealth Fund Investments in China. *Middle East Policy*, 66-87. doi:10.1111/mepo.12736

Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Amjad Abbas Khan, M. S. (2024). China's Efforts to Bring Political Stability and Economic Prosperity in the Middle East: The Case of Mending the Saudi-Iran Ties 5(1), . *Perennial Journal of History*, 5(1), 13-34. doi:<https://doi.org/10.52700/pjh.v5i1.173>

Berdaliyev & Muminov. (2025). Iran and the Arab States: Conflict and Cooperation in the Context of Regional Instability. *Eurasian Research Journal (ERJ)*, 7(3), 267-283. doi:<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.3-02>

Bukhari, A. U. (2024, June 30). Cracking the Enigma: Iran-Israel Relations Unveiled: A Provocative Exploration into Global Geopolitics. *Spry Contemporary Educational Practices*, 3(1), 444-460.

Chaziza, M. (2019). China's Economic Diplomacy Approach in the Middle East Conflicts. *China Report*, 55(1), 24-39. doi:10.1177/0009445518818210

Chunjiao Yu, R. Z. (2020). Has China's Belt and Road Initiative Intensified Bilateral Trade Links between China and the Involved Countries? *Sustainability*, 12(17, 6747), 1-19. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su12176747>

Creemers, R. (2022, April 8). *China's Cybersecurity Regime: Securing the Smart State*. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4070682>

Dandan, Degang & Zhang. (2021). "Peace Through Development": China's Peace Initiative for the Middle Eastern Conflict Resolution. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 7(4), 383-408. doi:10.1142/S2377740021500184

Dian & Silvia. (2025). *China's Blueprint for Global Leadership: GSI, GDI, GCI and Xi Jinping's Vision for the International Order*. Switzerland: Springer Nature.

Doshi et al., (2025, April 10). *Underestimating China: Why America Needs a New Strategy of Allied Scale to Offset Beijing's Enduring Advantages*. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from Foreign Affairs: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/underestimating-china>.

El-Kadi, T. H. (2024). Learning along the Digital Silk Road? Technology Transfer, Power, and Chinese ICT Corporations in North Africa. *The Information Society: An International Journal*, 40(2), 136-153. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2024.2317060>

Force, M. E. (2025, June 18). *Between Tehran and Tel Aviv: China's Strategic Balancing Act in the Middle East*. Retrieved October 24, 2025, from Beyond the Horizon: <https://behorizon.org/between-tehran-and-tel-aviv-chinas-strategic-balancing-act-in-the-middle-east/>

Greene, R. (1998). *The 48 Laws of Power*. London: Profile Books.

Gupta et al. (2025). Defensive Realism and the Balance of Threat: Analysing Israel's Actions Against Nuclear Weapons Programs in Iraq, Syria, and Iran. In P. Pietrzak (Ed.), *International Relations Theory and Philosophical Political Insights Into Conflict Management* (pp. 143-174). Hershey, London and Houyongkang Hutong: IGI Global Scientific Publishing. doi:10.4018/979-8-3693-9626-1.ch007

Hahn, P. L. (2005). *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*. Omaha: University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO).

Hassan et al. (2025). Navigating the Crossroads: Analyzing China's Middle East Policy in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict Context. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 12(1), 10-28. doi:DOI: 10.1177/23477989241311334

Ivan Campbell, T. W. (2012). *China and Conflict-affected States: Between Principle and Pragmatism*. London: Sage World. Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08aad40f0b649740006f2/China-and-conflict-affected-states.pdf>

Jin Liangxiang, M. Y. (2024, March 20). *China's Evolving Economic and Security Role in the Middle East*. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2024/03/chinas-evolving-economic-and-security-role-in-the-middle-east?lang=en>

Junhua Chen, X. Y. (2023). Evolution of China's Interaction with Middle Eastern Countries under the Belt and Road Initiative. *PLOS One*, 18(11), 1-17. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293426>

Kalhoro & Fakhar. (2023). A New Path to Peace: China's Economic Development Strategy in the Middle East. , 5(1), 64-77. *Journal of Peace and Diplomacy*, 61-77. doi:<https://doi.org/10.59111/JPD.004.01.037>

Liu & Feng. (2025). *China's Bilateral Relations and Order Transition in the Indo-Pacific*. London: World Scientific Publishing Europe Ltd. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1142/q0480>

Liu, L. (2020). Beyond the Status Quo and Revisionism: An analysis of the Role of China and the Approaches of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the Global Order. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 29(1), 88-109. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2020.1837193>

Lons et al., (2019, October 21). *China's Great Game in the Middle East*. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from European Council on Foreign Relations: https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/china_great_game_middle_east.pdf

Mangi, M. S. (2024). China's Presence in the Middle East and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). *Global Foreign Policies Review*, 7(4), 13-22. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2024\(VII-IV\).02](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2024(VII-IV).02)

Naha &, A. (2025). Regional Instability and Changing Power Dynamics: Ongoing Crisis in the Middle East. In D. N. Das (Ed.), *Decoding the Chessboard of Asian Geopolitics: Asian Powerplay in South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia* (pp. 403-421). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-3368-5_19

Nanda, B. J. (2025). China's Normative Balancing: Global Security Initiative and Middle East Security Architecture. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 19(3), 34-49. doi:10.51870/CWAI3912

Noor et al. (2025). China Influence in Middle East: A Critical Analysis. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 199-210. doi:[https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2025\(6-I\)18](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2025(6-I)18)

Norris et al., (2025). Chinese Thinking on Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft. In V. K. Cheung (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft* (pp. 455-476). London: Oxford University Press. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197673546.013.28>

Papageorgiou, M. E. (2023, June 2). *China's Increasing Role in the Middle East: Implications for Regional and International Dynamics*. Retrieved September 22, 2025, from SFS: Georgetown Journal of International Affairs: <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/06/02/chinas-increasing-role-in-the-middle-east-implications-for-regional-and-international-dynamics/>

Rehman et al. (2025). China's Growing Influence in the Middle East: Economic and Strategic Implications. *Center for Management Science Research*, 3(4), 447-456. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16417403>

Ruigrok, I. (2010). Facing up to the Centre: The Emergence of Regional Elite Associations in Angola's Political Transition Process. *Development and Change*, 41(4), 637-658. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01657.x>

Saba, S. A. (2025). China's Soft Power: Views from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 5(1), 1-14. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksae090>

Sims et al., (2025). Legitimacy through Diversity: China's Leadership in the BRICS+ expansion for global balance. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(2), 265-302. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-024-00411-6>

Tallat Yasmin, Q. S. (2024). China's Growing Influence in the Middle East: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Prospects. *Global International Relations Review*, 7(1), 1-13. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/girr.2024\(VII-I\).01](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/girr.2024(VII-I).01)

Wang, C. N. (2025). *China- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2024*. Shanghai: Fanhai International School of Finance (FISF) at Fudan University. Retrieved October 14, 2025, from https://greenfdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Nedopil-2025_China-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-BRI-Investment-Report-2024-1.pdf

Xiaotong, Z. (2024). *China's Modern Economic Statecraft: A Wealth-Power Dialect*. London: Routledge.

Xinhua. (2023, October 10). *The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future*. Retrieved September 24, 2025, from The State Council Information Office, PRC: http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2023-10/10/content_116735061_6.htm

Xinlei, A. U. (2025). Navigating complex interdependence: An in-depth analysis of Iran and Saudi Arabia's strategic engagement with the BRI in the Middle East. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 10(1), 72-100. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-024-00250-6>

Yaron, K. (2025, May 14). *Rethinking the Iran-Israel-Palestine Triangle*. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5250410>

Yaseen, N. A. (2023). China's Interests in the Middle East: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 4(4), 239-249. doi:[https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2023\(4-IV\)23](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2023(4-IV)23)

Yuan, X. (2022). The Chinese Approach to Peacebuilding: Contesting Liberal Peace? *Third World Quarterly*, 43(7), 1798-1816. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2074389>

Yuliantoro, N. R. (2025). China's Role in International Conflict Mediation and its Implications for International Relations. *Nation State: Journal of International Studies*, 8(1), 1-19. doi:<https://doi.org/10.24076/nsjis.v8i1.2051>

Zafar, A. (2025). The US-China Rivalry in the Middle East: A Critical Analysis. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 44(520), 86-93. doi:[10.5281/zenodo.15322912](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15322912)

Zhang, C. (2025). *China's Changing Role in the Middle East: Filling a Power Vacuum*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Zoubir, D. S. (2017). China's Participation in Conflict Resolution in the Middle East and North Africa: A Case of Quasi-Mediation Diplomacy? *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(110), 224-243. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1389019>

Zreik & Mohamad. (2025). China's Gobal South Engagement: Balancing Soft Power and Strategic Influence. In E. Yazdani (Ed.), *Implications, Prospects, and Challenges in China's Global South Strategy* (pp. 461-484). Hershey, London and Houyongkang Hutong: IGI Global Scientific Publishing. doi:10.4018/979-8-3373-0938-5.ch016