

China's Strategic Maneuvering in the Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Power Transition Theory Perspective

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Introduction

The significant influence of extra-regional powers is particularly noticeable in the Middle East. Particularly since the end of World War II, the United States has dominated the external power landscape. The United States' interests in the region have remained largely unaltered since the end of World War II, and it has been actively involved in the Middle East to safeguard those interests. Washington is once again making a significant impact in the Middle East.¹ However, China has also made an appearance. Its interests and presence in the region have significantly increased during the last 20 years. Beijing's highest level of bilateral ties, Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships, have been formed

¹ Altunisik, Meliha Benli. Regional Powers in a Transforming Middle East. IEMed, 2014.
<https://www.iemed.org/publication/regional-powers-in-a-transforming-middle-eas>.

with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). China's national strategy, which aims to reestablish the nation's position as a global power, is consistent with the significance it has placed on the Middle East over the past 20 years. However, despite China's increased and varied presence in the region, recent events do not seem to fully reflect the extent of its influence.² This paper investigates China's participation using the PTT, offering an understanding of its strategic goals and possible constraints.

PTT presupposes that international systems are hierarchical per se. Hegemonic or dominant powers occupy the apex of the pyramid through the mutual acknowledgment that it has a high status in world politics.³ This power shapes the rules and places the status quo according to its benefit, hence implying that it is satisfied with what it created. Notably, the theorists of power transition usually assert that the powerful state can hardly be regarded as a hegemon in that, as people say, it is beyond its strength to unilaterally regulate the activity of other strong countries, despite being a much greater power than the other actors of the system. Organski (1958)⁴ says that the leading power can acquire a larger portion of the favours which accrue to the presence of the international order, as it is the one controlling the current form of the dominant international order. Broadly, the status quo is the set of rules followed by the rulers that strengthen the existing pattern of actions in political, military, and economic domains, all of which are favourable to the interests of the ruling bloc.⁵

This study attempts to examine China's Middle Eastern foreign policy throughout the last several decades because Beijing has progressively taken a major global posture. Though not totally absent, its past engagement in the region was limited. China had trade

² C. Pina, The Role of China in the Evolution of the International and Middle East Situation. IEMed, 2025. <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-role-of-china-in-the-evolution-of-the-international-and-middle-east-situation>.

³ A., M. R.Gul, Shad, and S. Imran. "Great Power Competition and Pakistan: A Power Transition Theory Perspective 1947–1991." *Chinese Political Science Review* 9, no. 3 (2024): pp. 418–39.

⁴ A. F. K.Organski, *World Politics*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

⁵ Gul, A., S. Imran, and M. Hussain. "The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965: An Alliance Power Transition Theory Perspective." *Conflict Studies Quarterly* 52 (2025).

contacts with foreign nations and helped anti-colonial movements in the Middle East.⁶ However, China's rising economic power and political influence have changed it from a spectator to a Middle Eastern to an active participant. This region is vital as it boosts the hydrocarbon reserves and is well located at the junction of the world economy. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, reflects its strategic approach to improve interaction with Middle Eastern nations.⁷ Unquestionably, one of the most difficult and long-lasting issues in modern world politics and international relations, the Israel-Palestine conflict is within which China has developed and still shapes its foreign policy. China first took a moderate position and supported the split into two different entities. China abstained from meddling with other nations under influence or actively engaged in the conflict, including the United States.⁸

The study argues that in the Middle East, China's economic presence and the Israel–Palestine conflict have been constrained by the US power primacy, entrenched regional alliance networking, as well as its diplomatic stature. This makes the case that China's behaviour exhibits little challenge in terms of immediate systemic change, but it acts like a strategic maneuverer, positioning itself for long-term influence. The findings advance the PTT perspective to understand how China, as a rising challenger, may engage in the exercise of selective engagement in the Middle East as conflict conflict-prone region rather than choose confrontation.

Literature Review

PTT is a development of realism that holds that the anarchical and competitive nature of international politics defines its essence⁹. Unlike the balance of power theory,

⁶ Yan Hairong, and Barry Sautman. "China, Colonialism, Neocolonialism and Globalised Modes of Accumulation." *Area Development and Policy* 8, no. 4 (2023): pp. 416–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2023.2259459>.

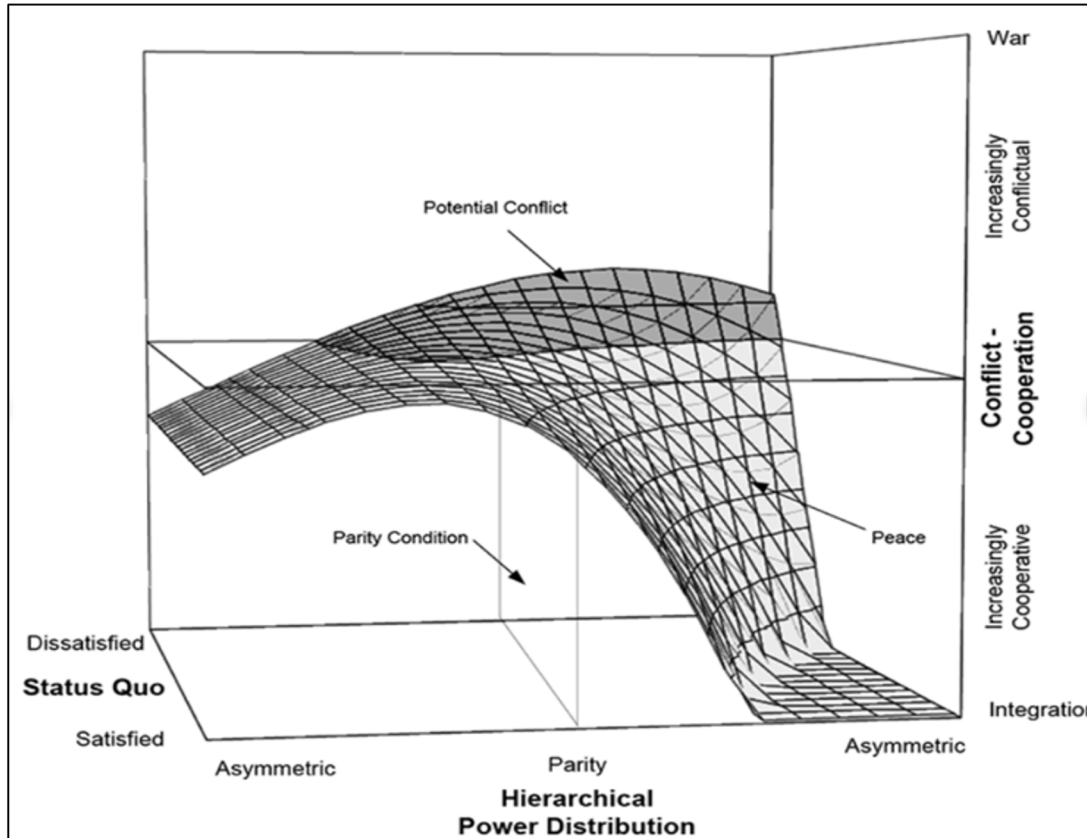
⁷ J., X.Chen, Yang, M. Wang, and M. Su. "Evolution of China's Interaction with Middle Eastern Countries under the Belt and Road Initiative." *PLoS ONE* 18, no. 11 (2023): e0293426.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0293426>.

⁸ Cheng-Chwee, Kuik, and Yew Meng Lai. "Deference and Defiance in Malaysia's China Policy: Determinants of a Dualistic Diplomacy." *International Journal of Asian Studies* (2023): pp. 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479591423000104>.

⁹ Athanasios Platias, and Vasilis Trigkas. "Moral Realism and Hegemonic Transition." In *The Essence of Interstate Leadership*.) Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, (2023).
<https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529232646.ch007>.

which places the global order in multiple nations' interactions to keep any one power in check, the PTT focuses on the hierarchical character of an international system. The theory notes three important phases in the process of the power transition: domination, the development of a new power, and the period of power equivalency before the change of power, as well as the two kinds of outcome: peaceful and violent, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Power Transition Theory: Cooperation-Conflict



Source: Tammen, Ronald L., Jacek Kugler, and Douglas Lemke. 2017.¹⁰

PTT explains political power shifts in historical and modern worlds. In this context, the Emperor's New Road outlines the many keys to understanding conflicts, power fluctuations, and long-lasting peace building. PTT has long been used to analyze the exchanges between Britain and Germany before the First World War, the US and the USSR throughout the Cold War, and most recently the interactions between the US and

¹⁰ L Tammen, Ronald., Jacek Kugler, and Douglas Lemke. "Foundations of Power Transition Theory." Politics, "2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.296>.

China¹¹. In every scenario, PTT examines the aspirations of the aspiring power, responses of the power "on top," and the background of the interactions. According to this view, although the dominant power normally finds this offensive, every rising power seeks to change the structure and norms that control world politics in a manner most conducive to the ascending power. The dominating power could then negotiate with the challenger to maintain the status quo or attempt to lower its ascendancy.

China's rising global strength and increasing Middle Eastern involvement represent changes in the regional and worldwide system. For superpowers like America, Russia, and all European nations, with a unique geographical position and huge oil reserves, the Middle East has long been a main theatre of interest.¹² China's participation in these kinds of activities has therefore given the power structure of the area a fresh perspective. China's interests in the Middle East have economic, political, security, and other connected dimensions. The region is strategically important for ensuring the natural gas and oil supplies on which China's economy depends.¹³ Politically, China seeks to establish its domination and distribute power in international relations via diplomatic tactics and alliances. The BRI is a prime illustration of China's will to expand its position in the Middle Eastern nations by means of more connectivity and commercial links with their counterparts.

Applying PTT to the Middle East and specifically the Israel-Palestine conflict can help one to grasp China's strategy and objectives. China has always been somewhat moderate; it supports Palestinian statehood rights but also heavily funds Israel's economy. Such an approach also fits well with China's general foreign policy goal, which is realistic and non-interventionist. However, given its growing might, China also has an obligation to be more forceful in handling world issues, especially the Israel-Palestine conflict. According to the PTT, China will look for ways to change the global order once it has reached a certain level with the US and begins to challenge America's dominant positions. It could entail supporting multilateralism as a conflict resolution mechanism, opposing the unilateralism that America's foreign policy once

¹¹ Michael Lee, "Securing Securities: Political Risk, Sovereign Debt, and the Anglo-American Financial Power Transition." *Business and Politics* (2024): pp. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bap.2024.5>.

¹² Bülent Doğan, "Oil Politics." In *Colonial and Postcolonial Oil Politics in the Persian Gulf. Middle East Today*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60780-6_8.

¹³ Yu Lei, and Sophia Sui. "China–Russia Strategic Partnership and the Oil and Gas Collaboration." *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* (December 2023): pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2023.2289827>.

employed, and arguing for gradual development to stability in the Middle East. This concept also highlights the potential for tensions to rise between China and other strong countries, such as the US, which has long been the dominant force in the region. PTT also shows China's strengths and simultaneously shows distinct constraints and challenges. Comprising many vulnerabilities and paradoxes, the Middle East is among the most unpredictable and hazardous areas of the globe. This article shows that China cannot be regarded as a decisive power actor because of its non-interference policy and emphasis on economic power instead of military might.

This study uses PTT as the main analytical framework, but situating this along with other theories of international relations is also significant. Important examples include the theory of offensive realism of John J. Mearsheimer. He has believed that great powers have an inherent drive to increase their power, which comes through coercion and expansion¹⁴. In contrast to realism, Power Transition Theory posits that conflicts occur where these factors are present, such as a rising power's dissatisfaction and when it makes a power parity against a dominant power in the international hierarchy¹⁵. To place the case of China in the Middle Eastern region in terms of Power transition Theory, it has pursued selective engagement, which is not aligned with Mearsheimer's expectation of relentless expansion.

The "Thucydides Trap," popularized by Graham Allison, has highlighted the threat of great power transition, suggesting that war becomes inevitable when a rising power challenges an established power.¹⁶ Although this is in line with the Power Transition Theory, Alison's studies are not very systematic and are more deterministic. Contrary to this, Power Transition Theory makes the case that there are both peaceful transitions in power as well as violent both. Applying this to the case of China shows that it captures China is avoiding confrontation with the US despite expanding its position in the Middle East and its role in the Israel–Palestine conflict. China is a dissatisfied power, as can be seen by its continued selective engagement rather than its quick systemic change.

¹⁴ Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

¹⁵ A. F. K.Organski, *World Politics*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

¹⁶ Allison, Graham. "The Thucydides Trap." *Foreign Policy* 9, no. 6 (2017): pp. 73-80.

Literature Review

A significant amount of literature has been written about China's relations with the Middle East, specifically about the Israel-Palestine conflict. This literature covers both international and geopolitical factors, as well as economic ones. Most academics contend that China's actions in the Middle East, especially about energy supply, are motivated by self-interest.¹⁷ Currently, the world's largest importer of oil, China imports most of its energy from the Middle East. This is particularly true considering the BRI being emphasized as the primary strategic tool in the region in Sharma's (2023) writings.¹⁸ By supporting trade routes that are vital to China's economy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) seek to increase connectivity through investments in infrastructure. These experts claim that China plans to use the BRI to diversify its energy sources, which is a prerequisite for achieving economic dominance.

However, besides scholars' view that BRI is an engine of regional development, some scholars are critical of the program. For example, Jonathan E Hillman's work provides a skeptical assessment of the BRI. Hillman's assessment includes push back from great powers, overextension, lack of transparency, problem of debt sustainability of the member states. This work has provided a perspective that shows China's BRI in terms of financial risks and political backlash, and its rise in status as an inevitable rise. His work has been used by other scholars in the South Asian region to show such problems related to encountered delays, renegotiations, and local resistance, reflecting concerns about debt burdens and sovereignty.¹⁹

China's Western Horizon: Beijing and the New Geopolitics of Eurasia, Daniel Markey's outstanding and topical new book, usefully complements these methods in three important ways. First, Markey places local players at the forefront of his study, acknowledging their capacity to influence the extent and consequences of regional investment from China. He is better able to track the developments of China's

¹⁷ A. Ullah, and L. Xinlei. "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*, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-024-00250-6>.

¹⁸ A.Sharma, "China's Soft Power in the Middle East." In *China's Engagement with the Islamic Nations*, edited by Y. C. Kim. Understanding China. Cham: Springer, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31042-3_2.

¹⁹ Gul, A., M. Munir, M. Hussain, and M. Hussain. "Revisiting US-China Strategic Competition in Central Asia and Its Impact on Pakistan." *Journal of Public Affairs* 22 (2022): e2764.

connections throughout the region and evaluate the ramifications and anticipated future paths of Beijing's engagement by putting these third-country powerbrokers and the intricate dynamics in which they function front and center. This focus also allows Markey to assess the complex ways in which China's role is likely to develop in individual states and subregions and across Eurasia as a whole. Situating Chinese engagement in the context of pre-existing governance, economic, and security challenges reveals how Beijing could accelerate or upset existing trends with concerning implications for regional, Western, and, indeed, Chinese security interests going forward. This method offers a more thorough knowledge of how local actors manipulate and take advantage of Chinese resources for their own political and personal ends, which impacts the overall trajectory of the BRI as well as the progress of individual projects. Markey is also able to evaluate the various ways that China's influence is likely to evolve nations, subregions, and throughout Eurasia because of this approach. Beijing might accelerate or buck current trends, which would have alarming ramifications for future regional, Western, and even Chinese security interests when placed within the framework of pre-existing political, economic, and security issues

Marky's test of reservation regarding is increasing tension due to China's rise as a new power. This case's test is seen in the March 2023 agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was made by China. To see on the surface, it appears that to challenge Marky's prediction, such as heightening rivalries. China's role was to facilitate the brokering.²⁰ Nonetheless, the case also shows i.e., China's role to end the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is also met with challenges of underlying structural rivalries, nor does it guarantee long-term stability²¹. In this context, China, beyond the economic role, also makes and creates new areas of competition and recalibrates the region's geopolitical landscape.

²⁰ CNBC. "Arch-rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia Agree to Revive Ties, Reopen Embassies in China-brokered Deal." CNBC, 10 March 2023. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/10/arch-rivals-iran-and-saudi-arabia-agree-to-revive-ties-reopen-embassies.html>.

²¹ South China Morning Post. "After Saudi Arabia-Iran Deal, China Should Be Realistic about Its Power as a Broker in the Middle East." *South China Morning Post*, 14 March 2023. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3213726/after-saudi-arabia-iran-deal-china-should-be-realistic-about-its-power-broker-agreements-middle-east>.

Ikenberry (2024) stated that China wants to position itself as a global power, which helps to guarantee growth and order in the area.²² Unlike the West, he argues, China's strategy of state non-interference combined with economic diplomacy helps it to stay neutral to the Middle East's conflict events despite maintaining strong ties with the many nations in the region. It is progressive of China's long-term goals as it creates a stable environment.

Nonetheless, the issue of projecting the Israel-Palestine situation onto China seems to arise as the environment offers certain opportunities and challenges. China has traditionally always been in a delicate center ground. Yakubu and Oyigebe (2024) said that while China has always supported for Palestinian right to independence, it has also politically, technologically, and economically interacted with Israel.²³ Such a posture may be seen as part of China's general strategy towards the conflict, where the main purpose is to guarantee that neither party is insulted so that the war may be handled amicably. Fung's (2022) writings demonstrate China's preservation of the international forum akin to the United Nations, therefore endorsing a two-state solution.²⁴ Nonetheless, the detractors have said that this strategy, for example, is meant to establish itself as a responsible global stakeholder when its behavior is far from this direction. For example, Ke and Zou (2023)²⁵ note that while China supports the settlement process vocally, it has not actively engaged in mediation attempts using its overwhelming might.

The comparative study of China's Middle East influence and that of other world powers, including America, is covered in detail. Such analogies help China to be in its proper position and determine its kind of strength as well. Altaf and David (2023)²⁶ said that by use of military force and strategic alliances with significant Middle Eastern

²² Ikenberry, G. John. "Three Worlds: The West, East and South and the Competition to Shape Global Order." *International Affairs* 100, no. 1 (January 2024): pp. 121–38. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaad284>.

²³ M. A. Yakubu, and P. L. Oyigebe. "The Current Israel-Palestine Conflict and Its Impacts on Israel's Economy and Diplomatic Ties." *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2, no. 1 (2024): pp. 213–21. <https://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kjpir/article/view/236>.

²⁴ Courtney J. Fung, "Rising Powers and Normative Resistance: China, India, and the Responsibility to Protect." *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 141 (2022): pp. 386–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2090076>.

²⁵ X., Ke, and S. Zou. "An Empirical Study on Court-Related Mediator's Discourse Strategies from the Perspective of Proximity: Based on a Workplace Injury Pretrial Mediation Case." *Discourse & Society* 34, no. 3 (2023): pp. 336–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221149530>.

²⁶ A. Altaf, , and S. David. "Saudi Israeli Relations: The Benefits and Implications of an Alliance." *Journal of Student Research* 12, no. 1 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v12i1.3321>.

countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, the United States has always been in control of the politics of the area. China does, however, barely engage in any military activity, and its supremacy is mostly of a socioeconomic kind. Elenwo (2023)²⁷ has argued that while the US has adopted a method of straight interference and coalition-building, the Chinese statecraft is mostly linked with economic power and multilateralism. It posits that China's approach of using economic enablers, including investments and trade, makes it look like a harmless counterweight to the West. Beijing gains the power it needs to participate in economics from this same concentration, which limits its ability to operate in the political sphere, specifically, in the geopolitical conflict of Israel and Palestine.

Historical Context

China entered the Middle Eastern area via economic ties strengthened by the well-known Silk Road, which linked China's traders with those in Persia, Arabia, and other countries. Political activity was little until the middle of the seventh century; the links were essentially civilizational and commercial.²⁸ The results of these connections show themselves in the trade of products as well as technology and philosophical ideas shared throughout the provinces. Other main elements defining the Sino-Middle East interactions in the twentieth century were ideological orientation and the Cold War. Beijing tried to support anti-colonial revolutions and newly formed Middle Eastern countries when the People's Republic of China came into being in 1949.²⁹ This was the period when China was supporting many Middle Eastern nations as well as other liberation movements.³⁰ Chinese sympathy for the Palestinian cause, as well as for non-imperialist, anti-colonialism ideas, surfaced during this time.

²⁷ Elizabeth Elenwo-Roger, Investigating the Detriment of Development Assistance: A Geopolitical Analysis of Sino-Djibouti Relations through the Lens of China's Belt and Road Initiative. 2023. *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, no. 3634. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/3634.

²⁸ A. Altaf, , and S. David. "Saudi Israeli Relations: The Benefits and Implications of an Alliance." *Journal of Student Research* 12, no. 1 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v12i1.3321>.

²⁹ Nasser, Yasser Ali. "'To Defend the Peace of Asia': The Chinese Peace Committee and Visions of Asian History, pp, 1949–60." *Cold War History* (May 2023): pp. 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2023.2207012>.

³⁰ Zhiguang Yin, "'World of Tomorrow': Afro-Asian Solidarity and the Great Leap Forward of Culture in the People's Republic of China." *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 10 (2022): pp.2263–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2074391>.

One can find many incidents that helped China engage in the Middle East policy as well as in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The first pivotal event was mainly the early 1990s Oslo process that resulted in agreements on the future evolution of Israeli Palestinian relations.³¹ China began to change at this time from the historical backing for the Palestinians to the more strategic goal of developing commercial and political engagement with Israel. By promoting economic cooperation with both Israel and Palestine and demanding their respective statuses, the Accords gave China the opportunity to act as a mediator.

The 2011 Arab Spring, which was characterized primarily by political unrest across the Middle East, was another noteworthy occasion.³² The strategic significance of this region was indicated by these upheavals, which exposed the anxiety that characterized China's access to the oil and other resources in the area. As a result, China took a more assertive and aggressive posture, drawing attention to the governments' opposition to the measures intended to safeguard investments and interests. The failures of Beijing's non-interference strategy were also made clear by the Arab Spring, which forced it to negotiate over politically unstable areas like Syria, Libya, and Egypt.

A turning point for the western component occurred in September 2020 when four Arab governments acknowledged Israel inside what was known as the Abraham agreements.³³ These accords were shifting the dynamics and direction of the regional alliances and creating new economic frontiers for China to improve relations with Israel and the Gulf nations. However, China reaffirmed its political support for Palestinians' rights and political solution to the Israel-Palestine problem even as it praised the Accords as an attempt towards regional peace.

³¹ Yaron Salman, "The Oslo Accords and Israel–Africa Relations." *Israel Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2023): pp.123–42. Accessed 6 August 2024. <https://doi.org/10.3167/isr.2023.380209>.

³² Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin, and Lise Storm. "The Challenges of Regime Change and Political Transition in Egypt and Libya after the Arab Uprisings: Critical Reviews of Factors and Implications." *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2335771>.

³³ Dan Schueftan, "The Beginning of the End of the Arab Israeli Conflict?" *Strategic Assessment* 24, no. 4 (November 2021). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4001913>.

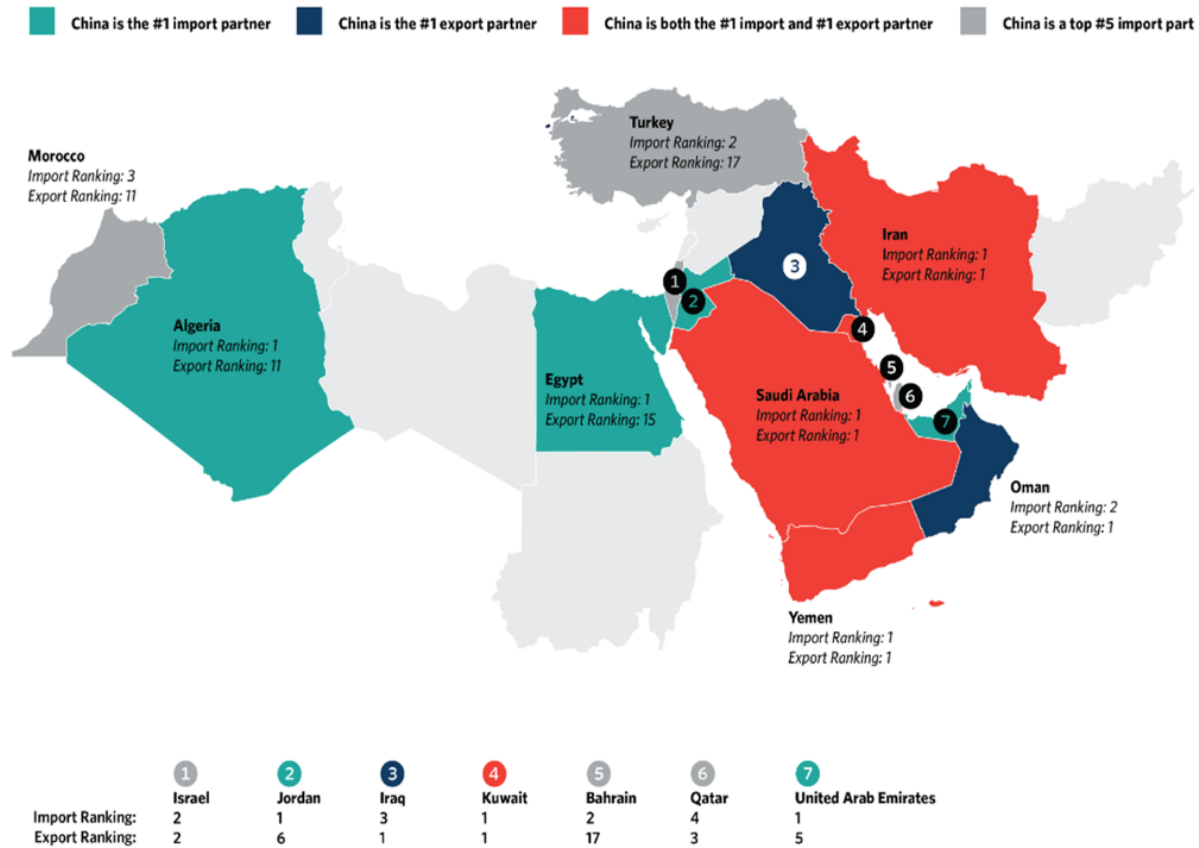
China's Strategic Interests in the Middle East and the Israel-Palestine Crisis

For China, in many respects, including arguably most crucially in commercial and energy challenges, the Middle East is vital. China now imports the crudest oil worldwide and relies mostly on the Middle East for its energy sources.³⁴ China depends on Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, among other oil partners, to satisfy its energy demands, so the security of these areas is vital for China. It is impossible to overestimate the constancy of Middle Eastern oil for China; it is essential for enabling the industrial expansion that defines China's economic progress, as shown in Figure 2. The Middle East's part in China's global economic plan is underlined in the BRI China supported. Combining the Middle East region, the BRI is meant to increase the accessibility of a commerce network and transportation system in Asia-Africa-European. Port expansion, railroads, and industrial zones all clearly show this as efforts to open the supply chain to support trade and economic cooperation. Two instances of such goals are the building of the Arabian Peninsula's transit system and the Gwadar Port in Pakistan.³⁵ Apart from infrastructure and energy, the Middle East represents China's fast-expanding market for the sale of Chinese goods and services. While the diversification of the economy, particularly in the Gulf states, gives Chinese firms strong commercial possibilities, the spending power of the middle class is on the increase in the region today. Among the SEZ investments are subgroups in technology, communications, building, and financial investments. According to the Chinese strategy, commercial cooperation and economic development will be thrown down stakes.

³⁴ Hao, Xiaoqing. "Import Competition and Pressure in the International Crude Oil Trade: *A Network Analysis*." *Resources Policy* 82 (2023): 103468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2023.103468>.

³⁵ S. M. Shahzad, "An Insight into Pakistan's Maritime Trade Comparing Maritime Neighborhood." *Punjab University Journal of Zoology* 38, no. 1 (2023): pp. 27–35. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17582/journal.pujz/2023.38.1.27.35>.

Figure 2. China's Trading Major Trading Partners in the Middle East



Source: Amr Hamzawy, "The Potential Inroads and Pitfalls of China's Foray into Middle East Diplomacy." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/03/the-potential-inroads-and-pitfalls-of-chinas-foray-into-middle-east-diplomacy?lang=en>.

Through diplomacy, economic and developmental assistance, military and security power, and membership in international organizations, China both directly and indirectly influences the aspects of the Israel and Palestine dilemma. Aimed at the development of China's influence with a low commitment to direct confrontation and engagement in long-term conflicts, this method is a component of China's overall approach of smart balance and moderation in foreign policy.

Based on non-interference and demand for peace and acceptance of the two-state solution, China's diplomacy in the framework of the Israel-Palestine conflict is

grounded.³⁶ China has always acknowledged the Palestinian right to self-determination and pushed for the establishment of the Palestinian state on East Jerusalem's boundaries along with the capital³⁷. This mindset corresponds with the main patterns of China's foreign policy in terms of sovereignty and land ownership. As China tries to be a mediator between Israel and Palestine, diplomatic activity has increased. Chinese officials have long underlined their support of discussions between the Palestinians and Israelis and welcomed both parties to Beijing to discuss the matter. China, for instance, presented a four-point vision of peace in early 2017 that includes support for the two-state solution; preservation of the concept of land for peace; recognition of Israel's security concerns; and peace via development and collaboration³⁸. This project shows that China has been actively trying to be a problem-solving agent, so it reflects China's will to look for diplomatic answers to the crisis.

Furthermore, rather than supporting one side of either party, diplomatic engagement, a Chinese characteristic, aims to strengthen ties between Israel and Palestine. China has successfully demonstrated this by continuing to make active investments in trade and technology with Israel, even as it votes for the Palestinian state at the UN and other international organizations. One such role is that of a mediator: China positions itself as a third-party mediator with the ability to sway the parties' communication by supporting these connections and acting as a party with an interest in the matter.

China also provides developmental and financial support for the Israel-Palestine conflict, mostly focused on helping Palestine with resource building and development. China has so made and still makes investments in the territories of Palestine in the domains of infrastructure, education, and healthcare under the framework of the BRI. These expenditures are meant to raise the living conditions for the Palestinians and provide economic opportunities that China finds important in ensuring long-term

³⁶ Edward Newman, and Gözim Visoka. "The Geopolitics of State Recognition in a Transitional International Order." *Geopolitics* 28, no. 1 (2021): pp. 364–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1912018>.

³⁷ Ibrahim Fraihat, and Basem Ezbi. "The Lasting Impact of Trump's 'Deal of the Century' on the Question of Palestine." *Middle East Critique* 33, no. 1 (2023): pp. 121–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2023.2261082>.

³⁸ Karakır, İ. A. "China's Conflict Management in the Middle East: Involvement without Impact?" *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 9, no. 2 (2022): pp. 240–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477989221080632>.

stability in the region. Schools, clinics, vocational training facilities, and scholarships to let Palestinian students' study in China make up recent aid to the country.

China's charm diplomacy includes this developmental support, which aims to gain the respect and gratitude of neighboring countries in the area. China wants to solve some of the underlying reasons of the conflict by pumping money on the development of Palestine, therefore lowering the likelihood of a war. Simultaneously, China's and Israel's financial ties have grown closer, particularly in areas of high technology, commerce, and inventions. China now ranks highly among Israel's commercial partners in Asia; in recent years, the two nations have carried out several high-tech initiatives spanning far-reaching research and development across artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and agriculture.³⁹ All commercial interactions with Israel expose realistic strategies China employs to strike a balance on its sides in the area in line with corporate self-interest.

Unlike political and economic diplomacy, the military and security components of China remain somewhat limited in the dispute between Israel and Palestine. China does not actively participate in military adventures in the war as China has a no-intervention policy in the affairs of any other nation. Still, China is involved in regional security via peacekeeping and collective security projects. China has also maintained foreign policies on security covering both Israel and Palestine.⁴⁰ This covers counter-terrorism and mutual education as well as information sharing. Thus, this security cooperation is meant to inspire trust and provide a platform for China to get a "feel" of the security environment in the area.

Active participation in the international forums is another way China is involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Having a permanent membership to the UNSC, the Chinese side has supported and still supports many UN resolutions aimed at the peaceful resolution of the conflict. China may influence world affairs and promote two states, as it is a permanent member of the Security Council. China does, meanwhile, actively

³⁹ Omer Aamir, *Warfare's Future in the Coming Decade: Technologies and Strategies*. 27 May 2021. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3854390>.

⁴⁰ Jiazhang Zhao, Xinrui Wang, and Jinyong Zhan. "Is International Cooperation Effective in Combating Terrorism? *Evidence from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*." *Applied Economics* 56, no. 47 (2024): pp. 5575–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2024.2331030>.

participate in other international organizations and multilateral conferences on the Israeli Palestinian issue.

Chinese Influence's Limitations

It is true that China's recent Middle East activities are subject to several important limitations, especially in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict, which need to be considered. Geopolitical realities, bilateral and multilateral interactions between countries and regions, political constraints addressing domestic demand, and the influence of other major world powers in the projected area are the causes of these. When evaluating China's position and capacity to impact Middle Eastern events, these considerations should be made.

However, the regional framework of ties is one of the main disadvantages of China's involvement in the Middle East. It is widely accepted that the Middle East is a politically unstable area that is rife with conflicts and has ideal circumstances for them to arise. China's non-interventionist policy limits direct control over long-standing political and territorial issues, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, but it is beneficial because it allows the nation to maintain close ties with other nations. Additionally, regional politics in the Middle East are influenced by the foreign policies of other international actors, particularly the US and Russia. Along with important allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel, the United States maintains a significant military presence in the area. However, rather than the other way around, Russia enjoys positive relations with nations like Iran and Syria. Beijing has created intricate systems for China to participate in because it must be careful not to enrage any of the major powers or regional players.

Nevertheless, China is somehow constrained by the web of regionally strained and distrusted ties. The Middle East is divided along many political, ethnic, and sectarian lines. Because every country has different circumstances, these factors make it challenging for China to engage with every country. However, historical hostility and the current push for dominance in the region make China's balance and hope for amicable relations with all the factions pointless. For example, China has many economic ties to Iran, and in the field of energy, the cooperation is significant. But because Iran is seen as an enemy, this connection might sometimes cause China and Saudi Arabia or other GCC countries to drift apart. Similarly, any attempts to strengthen China-Israel economic ties

must be viewed considering China's ongoing support for Palestinian sovereignty and its ties to Arab governments. This negotiation exercise's dynamic can occasionally produce a modest and mild supply, which could be interpreted as a lack of control over crucial decisions.

The Chinese influence in the Middle East can be compared to its competitors in several ways. For instance, the United States has long-standing interests in the Middle East for military, political, and economic reasons. The United States has asserted its dominance in the globalization process through the establishment of military installations, strategic partnerships, and extensive diplomatic missions. The United States has a powerful bargaining chip to regulate and influence the events in the region because of its established authority.

Comparative Review

Examining China's influence on the Middle East in line with the other big powers reveals not only the outcomes but also the variations in tactics and their efficiency. The historical elements, strategic objectives, and general objectives of the United States and Great Britain, respectively, affect the modes of functioning of CIA and MI6.⁴¹ Therefore, this article attempts to evaluate China's diplomatic and financial strategy against those of more military and political approaches used by the US and Russia given their effectiveness.

Consequently, after the end of the Second World War, the US rose to become the most significant outside player in the Middle Eastern area. The important military, political, and financial ties with the main regional partners, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, help to explain this. In the area under reference, the US established many military bases, carried out several military actions, and provided significant military aid and support for friends and allies. Moreover, this has given the US a supreme influence over the supervision of regional issues, including politics and stability. Still, China's impact in the Middle East is somewhat new and largely of a financial kind. Under the terms of the BRI, China has sought to collaborate with other nations as an economic powerhouse in

⁴¹ F. J.Haberl, "Strategic Intelligence Background." In Jihadi Intelligence and Counterintelligence. *Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (MENA) Region. Cham: Springer, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24744-6_2.

infrastructure, commerce, and investment. China, whose strategic ties to other nations in the region are more constrained, has been primarily an economic power but takes up a more limited military and diplomatic function as compared to the United States. Russia has lately acted more aggressively in the Middle Eastern region, mainly through the military operations in the Syrian territory.⁴² Consequently, Russia has been able to re-establish its position in the Middle East, challenge US authority, and effectively emerge as the main power broker in the area by giving to the Assad government.⁴³ In this sense, Russia's strategy consists of the use of force mixed with political and diplomatic pressure, depending on military capability and might.

The US strategy has included both direct and indirect political affiliation and support, as well as military might and measurable economic aid. This somewhat convoluted plan aims to protect its allies, protect its own interests, and maintain regional stability. The United States has increasingly taken an active role in mediating conflicts such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict. In contrast, China's ideas are primarily economic in nature. China is reliant on projects, expanding trade partners, and improved infrastructure. This approach is thus less forceful and more focused on the financial success of all the participants. China does not interfere in the affairs of other countries or engage in armed conflicts. This has allowed China to be friendly to as many Middle East countries as feasible without being entangled in convoluted political issues.

Russia's attitude clearly is more of a strategic military participation and support of totalitarian governments. By actively participating in conflicts and providing military assistance as a result, Russia has achieved its goals of protecting and securing its strategic interests and a presence in conflict areas such as Syria. Russia may become a decisive factor in regional security, but its approach is weaker and less effective than China's. As a result, the outcomes of various tactics differ greatly. While the United States has acquired a lot of authority, many Middle Eastern countries see America negatively and exhibit great hostility towards its control and intervention in the area, and support of one







⁴² N. J.Kramer, "Navigating the Middle Ground: The Central Region's Middle Powers' Response to the Russo-Ukrainian War." In *The Great Power Competition*, Volume 5, edited by A. Farhadi, M. Grzegorzewski, and A. J. Masys. Cham: Springer, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40451-1_5.

⁴³ C. A.Pfaff, "Conclusion: Applying the Proxy Moral Framework." In *Proxy War Ethics: The Norms of Partnering in Great Power Competition*. Palgrave Studies in International Relations. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50458-7_6.

side over the other. Generally, China's use of economic strength to exercise influence is appreciated worldwide; therefore, promoting good trade ties and economic gain is advised. People pointed out, however, that China's influence is somewhat limited when it comes to addressing security or political issues. The Russians ended up winning several fights in Syria, and they have gained influence in the Middle East; yet the intensity of their activities made them more hostile to Western nations.⁴⁴

China has usually used the reciprocal economic benefit strategy, which has been greeted with excellent reaction and positive opinion, as it fosters goodwill and more stable partnerships, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. However, China stays non-committal as a non-interference tactic, so it has little actual political influence in terms of resolving regional issues.







Table 1. Chinese Imports in the region

Country	 Chinese Imports (\$ billion)
 Saudi Arabia	45.8
 UAE	16.2
 Egypt	1.8
 Turkey	3.7
 Israel	4.6

Source: STRATEGIECS Team. China's Strategy in the Middle East from an Analytical Perspective. Strategies Think Tank, 2022. <https://strategiecs.com/en/analyses/chinas-strategy-in-the-middle-east-from-an-analytical-perspective>.

⁴⁴ D. I. H.Ibrahim, "The Russian War on Ukraine and Its Repercussions on the Middle East." *The Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government* 29, no. 3 (2023): pp. 330–51. <https://cibgp.com/au/index.php/1323-6903/article/view/2602>.

Table 2. Chinese exports in the region

Country	 Chinese exports (\$ billion)
 Saudi Arabia	17.6
 UAE	29.9
 Egypt	12
 Turkey	17.8
 Israel	9.3

Source: STRATEGIECS Team. *China's Strategy in the Middle East from an Analytical Perspective*. *Strategies Think Tank*, 2022. <https://strategiecs.com/en/analyses/chinas-strategy-in-the-middle-east-from-an-analytical-perspective>.

Consequently, the US's great impact and Russia in this regard are indisputable, even if, from an economic standpoint, China's relative position is much more stable and less intimidating. The US has a wider but complained participation because of its military and political activities all throughout the globe. Russia's influence in the area is noteworthy as military strength supports it; so, Moscow's ability to keep its friends and military outposts determines its relevance greatly. The established economic power and soft power to create collaboration reveal their strength and help to explain why one loses ground in being decisive in political and security issues.

Outlook

Based on the Chinese experience, Beijing's soft power and resource expenditures seem to be rising in the Middle East in line with predictions of increased influence and interaction. Consequently, while China keeps growing in the global system, the Middle Eastern nations should be ready for a more active and major engagement from China. One may expect China's participation in the area in terms of benefit conditions for its engagement, the behaviour dynamics of its future operations, the risks it will run against as well as the chances it will be able to grab.

Several concepts form the foundation of the increasing opportunities for China to expand its influence in the Middle East. Economically speaking, BRI has enabled China to engage in more economic cooperation with the area of concern. Investments in infrastructure like ports, railroads, industrial zones, etc. help to create the economic interconnectedness that will always result in some degree of political power or influence. The Middle East is seen as a link between Asia, Africa, and Europe; so, China's relations depend on this area and find great importance.⁴⁵ Furthermore, China's ravenous energy consumption suggests that Arab nations will always lead first in Chinese foreign policy orientation. China's reliance on reliable energy sources makes it imperative that it pursue additional economic growth, which drives it to preserve and consolidate its power. Similarly, China's economic growth model, which emphasizes long-term investments and state-controlled infrastructure development, attracts several Middle Eastern countries that are keen to diversify their infrastructure and economies.

There are plenty of opportunities for China to get involved in the Middle East in the future. More economic cooperation within the BRI framework is one of the most likely scenarios. In this scenario, China would increase its energy investments, technological initiatives, and regional infrastructure interests to bring the Middle Eastern economy up to par with its own. This would strengthen China's position in the region through mutual benefit and economic interdependence. Another possibility is that China will become more involved in interstate conflicts and peacemaking processes to boost its diplomatic activity. Given its increasing global influence, China might join the peacekeeping effort and work to address problems like those in Palestine or Syria. In addition to occasionally more active participation in the activities of the organizations and peace missions, this would increase the level of diplomatic relations. By doing this, one may acquire political power and authority, be a "kingmaker," and significantly help to ensure peace and stability in the area. There is another viewpoint on the matter wherein China raises the security presence in the area and becomes more forceful. This might include creating more military bases, exporting weapons, training, and running drills with troops of allies inside the area. Though this is not likely given the Chinese policy of non-interventionism,

⁴⁵ Defne Gönenc, Emre İşeri, and Qingan Huang. "Editorial to the Special Issue on 'Asian Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean'." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (2022): pp. 40–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2143965>.

it cannot be fully excluded, particularly when there is instability endangering China's investment and nationals in the area

Still, given the numerous significant difficulties the PRC faces in the Middle East, it is interesting to evaluate China's influence in Middle Eastern events. Among these, one of the most important problems is the reality that it is usually almost impossible to grasp all the features of regional disputes and rivalry. Problems having a long history and non-trivial relevance for China that attempt to have good relations with all parties engaged include the Sunni-Shia divide, Saudi Arabia's Iran rivalry, and the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

Conclusion

With special reference to the Israel-Palestine conflict, this study has investigated and examined China's position in the Middle East and showed that China has complicated and changing interests in the Middle East and in the conflict. Based mostly on the nature of business, commerce, and energy security, which is very vital for the steadily expanding Chinese economy, the results provided in this article reveal that China has self-interests. By means of such initiatives as BRI, China distinguishes itself as the major operator in the area, making infrastructure investments and fostering economic links. This economic might has given the nation the chance to develop a lot of might without intervening in the army operations.

From this vantage point, China develops strong commercial ties with both Palestine and Israel and subtly supports the creation of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. The Chinese concepts of political expansion, stability, and peaceful political and economic growth align with this strategic orientation. Due to China's cautious diplomatic style, regional politics are extremely complicated, and its economic achievements in the Middle East have not resulted in political or security clout. The comparative analysis indicates that China interacts with the globalized world in a different way than Russia and the United States. Russia uses aggressive military actions to maintain its power, while the United States maintains its dominance through its political and military ties. China has had considerable success using economic diplomacy and soft power to establish stable economic ties and relations of non-interference, but it has been less successful in managing political and security issues.

In the context of international relations, the findings have the following policy implications. It first explains China's economic-driven strategy and then shows how this type of strategy is distinct from other forms of economic diplomacy in the contemporary interconnected world. Therefore, other world powers may need to adjust to effectively collaborate with expanding commercial exchanges, even though the development of economic ties between China and Middle Eastern countries is still ongoing. Second, the success of China's BRI in promoting development and regional ties indicates that economic systems are effective in maintaining and uniting areas characterized by conflict-accentuation. Thirdly, compared to the assertive foreign policies of the United States, China offers a different and more varied foreign policy.

Recommendations

First, case studies examining how Chinese investments under the BRI have impacted the political and economic advancement of the nations in the regions are scarce. Building on the findings, this will enhance knowledge of China and its place in the Middle East. However, studies of this kind ought to examine whether these investments promote long-term stability and growth or if they only create reliance points that could lead to political and economic problems.

Second, there is a lack of comparative studies of China-Russian relations and China's policies toward other emerging nations, such as India, the European Union, and so forth, which could provide insight into the efficiency and relationship models of today. Finally, there is a great need for research on the probable outcomes of China's non-interference policy in the future. Even though it has contributed to China's excellent relations with other countries, it restricts China's direct control over political governance. To predict future diplomatic trends, it is crucial to evaluate the strategy's feasibility considering the region's increasing instability and the potential reactions of China's more competitive international competitors.

By implementing diplomatic and economic measures and expanding its presence in the Middle East, China essentially combines cautious diplomacy with an aggressive economic strategy. Thus, this tactic has proven helpful in creating a stable, favorable atmosphere in business dealings; nevertheless, it presents difficulties in the political and security spheres.

Not every aspect of China's foreign policy is consistent or logical. Internal factions instead form it. The so-called "wolf warrior diplomacy," which is defined by confrontation and assertions towards the United States and its allies in 2010 and the beginning of 2020, is one example; however, this trend is trending downward. It requires a flexible and adaptive policy analysis to evaluate China's role in the Palestine-Israel conflicts. Therefore, it is important to continue researching and studying the concepts and outcomes of China's policy as well as the trend toward its growing influence because it offers important insights into how to interact with others and formulate policies in the current geopolitical environment.

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