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**OASES OF INFLUENCE:
GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S
ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARAB WORLD**

by

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OF CHINA'S ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARAB WORLD**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the political and security implications of China's economic expansion into the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. It employs a comparative case study method to assess the PRC's relations with three Arab states: Saudi Arabia, which is a major source of China's petroleum imports; Egypt, which is a significant destination for Chinese infrastructure development resources and a participant in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); and Jordan, which has relatively weak economic ties with the PRC. This research broadly encompasses the period between 1993, the year of China's emergence in the MENA region as a net energy importer, and the present. Ultimately, this thesis finds that China's increasing levels of regional economic engagement are linked with political responses from certain Arab governments. China's economic activities have not induced a shift in partner states' voting behavior as it specifically relates to human rights in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It has, however, influenced the Saudi Arabian and Egyptian governments to respond domestically and internationally to China's Uyghur situation in ways that align with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests. It is also correlated with the weakening of the political and security partnership between Egypt and the United States. As such, this analysis suggests that China's regional economic engagement may be having effects on the broader international order.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
B.	LITERATURE REVIEW	3
1.	China’s Motivations.....	4
2.	China’s Activities in the Middle East.....	6
3.	Consequences of China’s Activities in the Middle East	8
C.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	10
D.	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	12
E.	THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	14
 II.	 CHINA AND SAUDI ARABIA	 15
A.	BACKGROUND	15
B.	CONTEMPORARY SINO–SAUDI ECONOMIC RELATIONS: OIL, TRADE, AND INVESTMENT.....	17
1.	Chinese Investment in Saudi Arabia.....	21
2.	Saudi Motivations and Chinese Oil Demand.....	23
C.	SAUDI POLITICAL RESPONSES	26
1.	United Nations Voting	26
2.	The Uyghur Issue	29
3.	Bilateral Relations with the U.S.....	32
D.	CONCLUSION	34
 III.	 CHINA AND EGYPT.....	 35
A.	BACKGROUND	35
B.	CONTEMPORARY SINO–EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT.....	37
1.	China’s Motivations and Activities	39
2.	Egypt’s Motivations for Welcoming Chinese Investment.....	42
C.	EGYPTIAN POLITICAL RESPONSES.....	43
1.	United Nations Voting	43
2.	The Uyghur Issue	45
3.	Bilateral Relations with the United States	48
D.	CONCLUSION	51
 IV.	 CHINA AND JORDAN.....	 53
A.	BACKGROUND	53
B.	TRADE RELATIONSHIPS.....	55

C.	INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT	58
D.	JORDANIAN POLITICAL RESPONSES.....	61
1.	United Nations Voting	61
2.	The Uyghur Issue	63
3.	Bilateral Relations with the U.S.....	65
E.	CONCLUSION	67
V.	CONCLUSION	69
A.	FINDINGS	69
B.	IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY.....	71
C.	SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	73
	LIST OF REFERENCES	75
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	89

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Chinese Oil Consumption, Imports, and Domestic Production, 1986–2018.....	17
Figure 2.	Chinese Oil Imports from Saudi Arabia, 1992–2018	19
Figure 3.	Trade Interdependence between China and Saudi Arabia, 2001–2017	20
Figure 4.	U.S. Oil Imports from Saudi Arabia, 1993–2019	25
Figure 5.	SIPRI TIVs of Official Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia, 1993–2019	33
Figure 6.	Combined Values of Chinese Investments and Construction Contracts in Egypt, 2006–2020.....	38
Figure 7.	SIPRI TIVs of Official Arms Exports to Egypt, 1993–2019.....	48
Figure 8.	Sources of Egyptian Arms Purchases, 2000–2016	49
Figure 9.	Percentage of Jordanian Imports Originating in China, 1995–2017.....	55
Figure 10.	Percentage of Jordanian Imports Originating in China, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, 1995–2018	56
Figure 11.	Percentage of Total Jordanian Exports Based on Destination, 1995–2018.....	57
Figure 12.	SIPRI TIVs of Official Arms Exports to Jordan, 1993–2019.....	66

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Summary of Findings.....	70
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AEI	American Enterprise Institute
BIT	bilateral investment treaty
BPD	barrels per day
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GPC	great power competition
IPO	initial public offering
MBS	Mohammed bin Salman
MENA	Middle East/North Africa
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
NAC	New Administrative Capital
NOC	national oil company
NSS	National Security Strategy
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCZone	Suez Canal Economic Zone
SETC	Suez Canal Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone
Sinopec	China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOE	state-owned enterprise
TEDA	Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area
TIV	trend indicator value
UN	United Nations
UNCOMTRADE	United Nations International Trade Statistics Database
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

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I. INTRODUCTION

In May of 2017, Air Force One landed in Riyadh and Donald Trump set foot in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the first time as president of the United States. Red carpets were rolled out, brass bands played, and seemingly no expense was spared to impress the leader of a country that Saudi leaders viewed as a key ally and partner. In many ways this state visit mirrored a different one from the previous year. Red carpets had been trod upon and lofty cooperation deals had been inked, but that time, instead of translating into English, Saudi leaders had listened approvingly as their speeches were interpreted into Chinese for a very different guest: Chinese president Xi Jinping.¹

To date, a growing Chinese presence in the Middle East has been noticeable as the People's Republic of China (PRC) seeks to secure energy resources, but there has been uncertainty within the scholarly and policymaking communities regarding China's regional and global intentions and the consequences of an increased Chinese presence. In this light, this thesis seeks to answer the following question: What are the political and diplomatic ramifications of China's drive to ensure access to energy resources and expand its economic involvement in the Middle East?

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS), released in 2017, makes clear the concerns of American leaders and policymakers about perceived Chinese revisionism within the international order.² Indeed, China's presence around the world in various venues has increased consonant with its rapid economic rise. As its economy has ascended to a position that is second only to that of the United States,³ China's presence

¹ "Xi Visits Saudi Arabia to Improve Ties," *BBC News*, January 19, 2016, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35351391>.

² White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: White House, 2017).

³ Prableen Bajpai, "The 5 Largest Economies in The World and Their Growth In 2020," NASDAQ, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/the-5-largest-economies-in-the-world-and-their-growth-in-2020-2020-01-22>.

and influence has become increasingly visible on a truly global scale. This, along with the obscurity that results from a marked sense of vagueness from Chinese leaders regarding their intentions,⁴ has led to much study, speculation, and concern in the highest levels of the scholarly, government, and military communities. The United States must better understand the effects of China's activities on other countries' political decision-making if the U.S., in accordance with its NSS, desires to "strengthen partnerships."⁵

To date, though, there has been a mixed reaction within the scholarly community regarding the strategic reasoning behind and effects of Chinese initiatives in the Middle East. The United States continues to operate in a fashion that prioritizes a focus on "Great Power Competition" (GPC) in the Indo-Pacific region, but there has been a lack of analysis of the influence of its great power competitors in the Middle East and how that affects the domestic and international standing of those great powers and the decision-making within regional capitals. It is in this light that this thesis seeks to contribute to the subject literature and assist in narrowing a gap in research. The United States' focus on the Middle East has historically been oriented around subjects such as domestic energy security and limiting the spread of Islamic extremism and terrorism. The research that does exist related to foreign influence in the region primarily concerns itself with Soviet/Russian influence.⁶

Chinese activities in this region merit a deeper analysis, for they are by no means inconspicuous. In 2017, China became the world's largest oil importer, with roughly half of imported resources coming from the Middle East.⁷ Additionally, the Middle Kingdom is the largest foreign direct investor in terms of outward flow (the amount of foreign direct invest [FDI] going from China to the Middle East)⁸ in the region, with over 80% of its

⁴ Marc Lanteigne, "China's Maritime Security and the Malacca Dilemma," *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 (2008): 153.

⁵ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, 49.

⁶ Steve A. Yetiv and Katerina Oskarsson, *Challenged Hegemony: The United States, China, and Russia in the Persian Gulf* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 6.

⁷ Henrik Stalhane Hiim and Stig Stenslie, "China's Realism in the Middle East," *Survival* 61, no. 6 (2019): 155.

⁸ "Glossary: Foreign Direct Investment," SelectUSA, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.selectusa.gov/fdi-data-glossary>.

investments going into the energy sector.⁹ Viewed alongside China's recent push to integrate the Middle East into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure plans¹⁰ and placed in the context of China's rise as a global power, these dynamics can by no means be viewed as insignificant, for they augur a continued strengthening of Chinese-Middle Eastern ties. The potential effects on states that the U.S. maintains strong relations with in the region (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates)¹¹ may ultimately have negative implications on U.S. policy.

A deeper integration of regional analyses and understandings can only be beneficial to policymakers and scholars alike. In an era marked by a renewed focus on GPC, greater attention must be given to analyzing the effects of Chinese presence in a region where the United States has historically maintained preeminence and that is crucial to global economic stability. From an academic perspective, this thesis adds to the relatively small but growing body of literature that analyzes China's economic activities in the Middle East and political reactions by Middle Eastern governments. In a broader sense, it will increase scholarly knowledge by more deeply analyzing an aspect of China's potential influence and its degree of appeal around the world.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, the existing literature concerning Chinese economic, military, and diplomatic activity in the Middle East can be placed into three categories. These are broadly defined as, first, studies that focus on China's motivations for increasing its involvement in the Middle East; second, studies that assess China's strategy and activities in the region; and, third, studies that examine the consequences of these activities. Some studies cover multiple topics.

⁹ Hiim and Stenslie, "China's Realism in the Middle East," 156.

¹⁰ Xuming Qian and Jonathan Fulton, "China-Gulf Economic Relationship under the 'Belt and Road' Initiative," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 12–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023306>.

¹¹ William F. Wechsler, "US Withdrawal from the Middle East: Perceptions and Reality," in *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, ed. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (ISPI and Atlantic Council, 2019), 13–38, <https://atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Region-Great-Power-Competition-Report-Web-2.pdf>.

1. China's Motivations

In terms of motivations behind the building of Sino-Middle Eastern ties, many, if not most, scholars attribute China's increasing engagement in the region to the state's need to secure access to foreign oil resources. These scholars have observed an increasing appetite for petroleum resources in China,¹² a dynamic that the group links to the rapid growth that has characterized the Chinese economy over the past three decades and static levels of domestic oil production in China.¹³ The resulting branch of scholarship generally emphasizes the role of domestic motivators in Chinese foreign policy.¹⁴ Leung represents this trend in his analysis, noting that energy security "underpins the core objectives of Beijing and the political legitimacy of the Communist Party of China."¹⁵ In this assessment, maintaining access to oil resources is less about public prosperity than it is the survival of the ruling regime; as such, the government, in addition to promoting initiatives that make China more energy-efficient, is motivated to become more involved internationally to secure access to petroleum.¹⁶ The desire to maintain social stability and strengthen survivability of the ruling party encourages the Chinese government to become more actively involved in certain strategically important regions.¹⁷ Other scholars emphasize this point even more emphatically, with Olimat asserting that the Middle East and the energy resources that the region contains are necessary and essential to any continued Chinese growth.¹⁸

¹² Andrew Scobell et al., *At the Dawn of Belt and Road: China in the Developing World* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 151, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2273>.

¹³ For an example, see Erica Strecker Downs, *China's Quest for Energy Security* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2006).

¹⁴ Hiim and Stenslie, 156.

¹⁵ Guy C.K. Leung, "China's Energy Security: Perception and Reality," *Energy Policy* 39, no. 3 (March 2011): 1330.

¹⁶ Leung, 1337.

¹⁷ Mordechai Chaziza, *China's New Silk Road Strategy and the Middle East* (Tel Aviv: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2020), 1-4.

¹⁸ Muhamad S. Olimat, *China and the Middle East: From Silk Road to Arab Spring* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

To ensure access to foreign energy resources, states require the safe and uninhibited passage of these goods through maritime trade routes and the maintenance of stable sea lines of communication. With regards to China, scholars have noted the existence of a “Malacca Dilemma,” which refers to China’s dependence on energy resources that transit the Strait of Malacca chokepoint and the risk that foreign powers will blockade this maritime route in the future.¹⁹ Lind and Press argue that China’s economic actions are a response to perceived vulnerability in the form of potential outside interference and energy market volatility.²⁰ Similarly, Downs asserts that China’s economic initiatives are primarily part of a defensive response to a strategic vulnerability²¹

Scholars have also observed a number of potential motives for China’s activities in the Middle East that are unrelated to its drive to secure energy resources. One of these involves economic concerns that are less focused on energy. According to scholars in this camp, China is motivated by a desire to enhance trade relations with the Middle East.²² This dynamic is influenced by a recognition amongst China’s leaders of the need for new markets to absorb increasing amounts of Chinese exports.²³ Because many Middle Eastern countries represent opportunities to further fuel China’s economic growth, China’s leaders are increasingly motivated to become involved in the region.

China’s status as a great power within the contemporary international order has also been a subject of analysis. According to Shambaugh, China is motivated to invest and become involved in various regions around the world primarily to improve its global image and international appeal.²⁴ Much attention is also given to China’s intentions and/or

¹⁹ Lanteigne, 143–44.

²⁰ Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, “Markets or Mercantilism?: How China Secures Its Energy Supplies,” *International Security* 42, no. 4 (Spring 2018): 170–204.

²¹ Downs, *China’s Quest for Energy Security*.

²² Olimat, 56.

²³ James Chen, “The Emergence of China in the Middle East,” *Strategic Forum* 271 (December 2011): 1, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a555783.pdf>.

²⁴ David Shambaugh, “China’s Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (August 2015): 99–107.

abilities to affect the hegemonic regional role of the U.S.²⁵ Hiim and Stenslie assert that China is motivated to expand its economic influence in the region in response to an American role that is perceived to be declining and the resulting power vacuum.²⁶ Wechsler's analysis fits this trend, noting that the perception of U.S. withdrawal from the region is developing into a self-fulfilling prophecy that undergirds deepening Chinese involvement and investment.²⁷ Alterman also observes that China is motivated to become the primary source of economic development in the region. This motivation is notable, though, for its awareness of American vulnerabilities and lack of desire to clash with American interests.²⁸ In sum, China may be motivated to take a larger role in the region because of a perceived reduction in American presence and commitment. Even if it is not, China is still cognizant of the balance of power between foreign states in the region, which factors into Chinese motivations.

2. China's Activities in the Middle East

The second prominent strand of research examines China's repertoire of activities in the Middle East. Lind and Press analyze China's activities through the lens of energy mercantilism, observing that China's activities in the region to secure access to energy have included an active push to cultivate deeper ties and relationships with energy-exporting countries.²⁹ This is similar to the position taken by Fulton, Sun, and Al-Tamimi, who assert that China's initial interest in energy is pulling it into even deeper engagement with the region on multiple levels.³⁰ This theme includes a focus on Chinese infrastructure

²⁵ James M. Dorsey, "China and the Middle East: Venturing into the Maelstrom," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023322>; White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*.

²⁶ Hiim and Stenslie, 153.

²⁷ Wechsler, 38.

²⁸ Jon B. Alterman, "China, the United States, and the Middle East," in *The Red Star & the Crescent: China and the Middle East*, ed. James Reardon-Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 37–58.

²⁹ Lind and Press, 170–1.

³⁰ Jonathan Fulton, Degang Sun, and Naser Al-Tamimi, *China's Great Game in the Middle East*, ed. Camille Lons (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2019), https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/china_great_game_middle_east.pdf.

development, trade, and soft power, especially as it relates to assessments of China's BRI.³¹ Kamel observes that China is specifically using expanded engagement associated with the BRI in the Middle East to lock in access to energy.³² Zhang emphasizes the utility of China's "going out" policy, which aims to build bilateral ties with other Middle Eastern nations in order to gain access for its national oil companies (NOCs) and ensure access to energy.³³ Likewise, Salman and Geeraerts note a positive association between the growing amount of oil that China imports from the Middle East and the increasing levels of Sino-Middle Eastern trade. The authors argue that building trade ties to ensure access to vital resources is an integral element of China's "strategic hedging" regional strategy, which describes how a state rising in prominence can indirectly compete with a reigning hegemonic power (i.e., the U.S.).³⁴

Some scholars also examine China's growing activities outside of the economic realm. Yetiv and Lu emphasize not only China's regional economic presence, but also its expanding diplomatic and military arms sales efforts.³⁵ Gentry applies this logic in his case study of Sino-Iranian relations, arguing that China's oil-fueled interest in the Islamic Republic is related to its apparent arming of Iran and delivery of assistance in the nuclear realm.³⁶ Ji goes further with his prediction that China will ameliorate its perceived regional vulnerabilities through hard, military means.³⁷ From a wider perspective, Lanteigne asserts

³¹ Peter Ferdinand, "Westward Ho-The China Dream and 'One Belt, One Road': Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (July 2016): 941–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12660>; Qian and Fulton, "China-Gulf Economic Relationship under the 'Belt and Road' Initiative."

³² Maha S. Kamel, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications for the Middle East," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 76–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1480592>.

³³ ZhongXiang Zhang, "China's Energy Security, the Malacca Dilemma and Responses," *Energy Policy* 39, no. 12 (December 2011): 7614, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2011.09.033>.

³⁴ Mohammad Salman and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and China's Economic Policy in the Middle East," *China Report* 51, no. 2 (2015): 104.

³⁵ Steve A. Yetiv and Chunlong Lu, "China, Global Energy, and the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 199–218.

³⁶ J. Brandon Gentry, "The Dragon and the Magi: Burgeoning Sino-Iranian Relations in the 21st Century," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (2005): 111–12.

³⁷ You Ji, "Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma: China's Effort to Protect Its Energy Supply," *Strategic Analysis* 31, no. 3 (May 2007): 467–89.

that China will possibly apply multilateral diplomatic approaches to maintain stability in and ensure access to the region.³⁸ This is a dynamic that has also been noted in key Chinese policy documents,³⁹ although it stands in contrast to the public rhetoric of China's leadership. From this standpoint, China's most significant activities in the Middle East are those that involve more than the oft-cited subjects of oil and trade.

3. Consequences of China's Activities in the Middle East

The third prominent strand of research emphasizes the effects that China's activities have had on the Middle East. Economy and Levi assert that China's drive to secure energy and other necessary natural resources is transforming the regional order in the Middle East and may have significant effects on the international order.⁴⁰ They conclude, though, that the moderating forces of globalization and economic interdependence can help to ensure that China's resource quest is ultimately benign.⁴¹ Ziegler is even more sanguine, asserting that such forces have promoted international cooperation and will continue to do so in the future.⁴² Yetiv and Oskarsson argue that the balance in the region will remain unchanged, as China benefits the most by being a free-rider in the current system defined by American influence.⁴³

Conversely, Kurlantzick argues that China is actively using its soft power appeal to alter the regional order in the Middle East to match its preference of being viewed as the most powerful actor in the region.⁴⁴ Kamel likewise argues that China is using the appeal created by its BRI activities to reshape the existing regional and global orders and maintain

³⁸ Lanteigne, 1601.

³⁹ Jonathan Fulton, "China's Changing Role in the Middle East" (Atlantic Council, June 2019), 5.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth C. Economy and Michael Levi, *By All Means Necessary: How China's Resource Quest Is Changing the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Economy and Levi, 204.

⁴² Charles E. Ziegler, "The Energy Factor in China's Foreign Policy," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 1–23.

⁴³ Yetiv and Oskarsson, 182–7.

⁴⁴ Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 138–39.

its ascendance.⁴⁵ Garver notes that China has a growing ability to engage in diplomacy and affect regional events, as evidenced by its participation in the Iran nuclear negotiations between 2012 and 2015.⁴⁶ In his analysis, Wechsler asserts that the combination of deepening Chinese involvement and increasing American disengagement in the region can specifically result in the weakening of ties between the U.S. and its regional partners (the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Egypt).⁴⁷ With that being said, it should be noted that commentary concerning the ultimate effects resulting from the increase in Sino-Middle Eastern activity in spheres outside of those related to oil and trade tend to be more based more on predictions and assertions than observations of current circumstances. Additionally, few scholars focus primarily on the effects of Sino-Middle Eastern arms sales, security cooperation, and diplomatic initiatives.

A final element of this strand of literature examines the reactions of Middle Eastern governments to increased Chinese economic involvement in the region. It should be noted that this component of the literature is fairly small, especially in comparison to the others mentioned previously. This group of scholars generally finds that increased Chinese demand, especially for oil, creates a willingness among Middle Eastern governments to actively seek out stronger ties with the PRC.⁴⁸ Overall, increasing Chinese involvement has resulted in a growing perception among these Middle Eastern states that China's power in the region can counterbalance that of the U.S. This dynamic is further strengthened by these states' belief that there are fewer political "strings," including calls for governance reforms, attached to transactions with China compared to those with the U.S.⁴⁹

Some scholars have also observed that Middle Eastern governments demonstrate a propensity to make political compromises to ensure future economic dealings with

⁴⁵ Kamel, 90.

⁴⁶ John W. Garver, "China and the Iran Nuclear Negotiations: Beijing's Mediation Effort," in *The Red Star & the Crescent: China and the Middle East*, ed. James Reardon-Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 123–48.

⁴⁷ Wechsler, 37-8

⁴⁸ Ziegler, 23.

⁴⁹ Kurlantzick, 138–39.

China.⁵⁰ There are very few specific examples of this dynamic in the literature. One of the few is the collective response (or lack thereof) of Middle Eastern governments to the Chinese government's treatment of the Uyghurs, a mostly Muslim Turkic population native to western China. Friedrichs et al. note a relationship between economic interest and a lack of willingness of foreign governments to speak out about this apparent human rights violation.⁵¹ However, they fail to support this thesis with qualitative evidence. Dorsey continues this trend with a slightly more assertive analysis, arguing that Middle Eastern governments will remain silent on issues such as these out of economic interest.⁵²

In general, assessments of Middle Eastern governments' reactions to China's activities comprise the least-studied branch of scholarship in this area. As such, a significant gap exists in the English-language literature linking collective Middle Eastern political behavior with Chinese economic activity.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

According to the arguments presented in the literature, there are a number of potential ways in which Chinese economic activity affects Middle Eastern political behavior. This thesis evaluates the following hypothesis:

H1: *China's regional economic activities are causing Middle Eastern countries to support its political positions*

As some scholars have noted, China's economic entrance into the Middle East has been accompanied with an appeal that can potentially affect political outcomes and the regional order.⁵³ If this hypothesis is valid, one would expect to find evidence of Middle

⁵⁰ Kurlantzick, 138–39.

⁵¹ Jörg Friedrichs, "Explaining China's Popularity in the Middle East and Africa," *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 9 (2019): 1634–54; Olimat, *China and the Middle East: From Silk Road to Arab Spring*, 190–91; Fulton, Sun, and Al-Tamimi, *China's Great Game in the Middle East*.

⁵² James M. Dorsey, "China's Uyghurs: A Potential Time Bomb," in *The Red Star & the Crescent: China and the Middle East*, ed. James Reardon-Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 259.

⁵³ Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*; Kamel, "China's Belt and Road Initiative"; Economy and Levi, *By All Means Necessary: How China's Resource Quest Is Changing the World*.

Eastern countries changing their behavior in China's preferred direction in response to rising Chinese engagement.

Absence of such evidence will suggest the null hypothesis:

H0: China's regional activities are not causing Middle Eastern countries to support its political positions.

I will evaluate the validity of my main hypothesis by assessing three separate indicators of Chinese influence: first, the trends in responses by each state to China's human rights-related activities in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA); second, the response by each state to China's treatment of its Muslim Uyghur minority group; and third, the actions taken by each state to either strengthen or weaken its partnership with the U.S.

These indicators were selected based on their relevance to China's interests and their impacts on the contemporary international order. In terms of the United Nations (UN), China has been active in not only affirming those principles that it sees as vital to its own core interests (e.g., sovereignty), but also in using its influence to either prevent the introduction of and/or voting on resolutions that represent views inimical to those of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁵⁴ Given the global nature of the UN and China's assertiveness in international institutions like it,⁵⁵ it would be logical for China to expand its network of potential constituent states to include those authoritarian regimes beyond those in its immediate regional neighborhood.

The international reaction to China's treatment of the Uyghur minority group represents another metric by which to measure changes in perceptions of China's government on the international stage. Since the PRC's annexation of Xinjiang in the late 1880s, the region has become increasingly important to the CCP for reasons related to

⁵⁴ Christopher B. Primiano and Jun Xiang, "Voting in the UN: A Second Image of China's Human Rights," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 21, no. 3 (September 2016): 301–19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-016-9399-x>.

⁵⁵ Rosemary Foot, "'Doing Some Things' in the Xi Jinping Era: The United Nations as China's Venue of Choice," *International Affairs* 90, no. 5 (September 2014): 1085–1100, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12158>.

energy and security.⁵⁶ Tensions in the area have been steadily rising, though, as the Uyghur minority that inhabits the region seeks to maximize its autonomy from the central government in Beijing. The CCP's actions to contain and control this group (which reportedly include mass incarcerations in prisons and concentration camps, forced sterilizations, the destruction of shrines and mosques, and other forms of cultural genocide⁵⁷) have engendered criticism of the PRC on the international stage. This criticism has not been universal, however, and proposing explanations as to, first, why certain governments have varied in their responses, and, second, whether and how China effectuates instruments of national power to limit criticism remain topics of scholarly debate. As such, it is germane to assess the degree to which China's external economic and political influence may supersede other factors of domestic political identity in this specific case.

Lastly, as noted previously, a significant number of scholars have postulated that China is dissatisfied with its position in the contemporary liberal international order. If China truly seeks to immediately remake the global order, then it stands to reason that it would encourage, explicitly or implicitly, the weakening of partnerships between certain countries and the United States. Indeed, it would have an interest in "peeling off" American allies in order to elevate its own relative position in the region and world.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis will use a comparative case study method to examine the effects of Chinese involvement on the political behavior of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan in the period between 1993 and the present. China transitioned from a net energy exporter to importer in 1993, which is also when its presence in the Middle East became pronounced.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Raphael Israeli, "China's Uyghur Problem," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 4, no. 1 (January 2010): 90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2010.11446403>.

⁵⁷ Lindsay Maizland, "China's Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>; Bahram K. Sintash, *Demolishing Faith: The Destruction and Desecration of Uyghur Mosques and Shrines* (Washington, D.C: Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2019).

⁵⁸ Mnochehr Dorraj and James English, "The Dragon Nests: China's Energy Engagement of the Middle East," *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013): 43.

This period also encompasses China's initiation of major infrastructure development plans around the world and in the Middle East, including the BRI; in this regard, there will be a particular focus on the period between 2013 (when BRI was first announced) and the present day. The analysis of this period will assess the effects of China's engagement in the region in the form of changing political positions amongst Middle Eastern government on issues that concern China.

The cases of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan were chosen in order to capture variation in how China engages with the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is a major crude oil supplier for China, so the case captures China's initiatives on countries that it relies on for petroleum. Egypt is one of the few regional powers to have officially signed onto China's Belt and Road Initiative, so its case illuminates the effects of China's infrastructure development initiatives. Jordan has relatively few energy or infrastructure development ties with China, so it represents a control case: a centralized, Sunni Arab-led state, with historically strong ties to the United States, which does not currently engage extensively with China.

Each case study has a similar structure. I begin by describing China's economic activities in the country. I then identify and analyze the actions that each country has taken in the United Nations in response to Chinese-led initiatives related to human rights; the reactions, within each state, to China's treatment of its Uyghur minority, as well as the actions that each has taken in the UN; and the trend in each country's diplomatic and political relations with the United States in terms of the frequency of diplomatic visits and levels of arms sales, a commonly-recognized indicator of political influence.⁵⁹

The analysis of these relationships relies primarily on qualitative data collected from think-tank reports and UN voting records to analyze actions taken in the UN (i.e., how each country voted on specific resolutions sponsored by China). Potential difficulties do exist with this approach in that some individual votes are undertaken as formalities. However, this should be alleviated by analyses of voting patterns, rather than just of single

⁵⁹ "U.S. Arms Transfer Policy: Shaping the Way Ahead" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180808_U.S._Arms_Transfer_Policy.pdf.

instances. My data sources also include scholarly books, news articles, think tank reports, and other secondary sources; these provide useful data such as public statements made by government, religious, and social leaders that reflect the domestic positions of each country on the subject issues (especially that which concerns the Uyghurs). Sources also include quantitative data from organizations such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that measure the amounts of and trends in foreign military sales. Finally, this thesis uses economics datasets, such as those from the Observatory of Economic Complexity, the United Nations International Trade Statistics Database (UNCOMTRADE), and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), in order to assess the degree to which China is engaged with each country economically, both in terms of petroleum sales and infrastructure development.

By using the collected qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the cases that involve Chinese energy and infrastructure investment (Saudi Arabia and Egypt) and comparing the results with the control case (Jordan), I will be able to determine whether or not the aforementioned variables are factors in each country's UN voting behavior, domestic reactions, and relationship with the U.S.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis is structured into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the topic and highlights its significance. It addresses the relevant literature, lays out my main argument, and identifies other potential hypotheses.

Chapters II, III, and IV, address the cases of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, respectively. Each chapter identifies China's activities and degree of economic engagement in the subject country. It then analyzes the subject's votes concerning Chinese-led human rights initiatives in the UN, responses to China's treatment of the Uyghurs, and change in its political and security relationship with the U.S. Lastly, Chapter V summarizes the findings of my research, identifies implications for U.S. foreign policy, and recommends areas for future study.

II. CHINA AND SAUDI ARABIA

China's economic activities in the Middle East are by no means inconspicuous and are integrally tied to the Chinese government's conceptions of stability and legitimacy. It is in Saudi Arabia in particular that China's involvement is most apparent in terms of energy security. In short, the single most important factor underpinning China's economic relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is China's demand for petroleum resources to fuel and sustain its domestic economic growth. This dynamic, along with the Saudi Arabian regime's inherent needs in maintaining its rentier state model, has contributed to building what is perhaps China's most important relationship in the Middle East.⁶⁰ With that being said, evidence suggests that, whether it is by design or impotence, China's burgeoning economic might and the accompanying engagement to secure energy resources have not altered Saudi Arabia's political behavior with regard to its voting in the UN or its relationship with the United States. It has, however, influenced the Saudi government's response to the Uyghur situation. This evidence suggests, therefore, that China's economic engagement with Saudi Arabia has produced limited levels of influence.

A. BACKGROUND

Understanding the history of the Sino-Saudi relationship and its basis in mutual economic benefits is fundamental to any conceptualization of the contemporary environment. In short, this relationship can best be characterized as episodic, but close. From the beginning of a period that stretches back centuries, this relationship has been centered on economic growth and the development of trade opportunities. The earliest contacts between China and the territory that is now Saudi Arabia can be traced back to the very beginnings of the Silk Road, the ancient system of trade networks that connected Europe and Asia.⁶¹ These trade-based links were later amplified by the voyages of Chinese

⁶⁰ Jonathan Fulton, *China's Relations with the Gulf Monarchies* (New York: Routledge, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315142678>.

⁶¹ "About the Silk Roads," UNESCO, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/about-silk-roads>.

admiral Zheng He, the Muslim eunuch who is seen as the initiator China's relationship with Saudi Arabia in the 15th century.⁶² These ties, though, did not prove to be enduring. It was not until 1949 that relations between the two countries became sustained, and even then, it was the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) that Saudi Arabia recognized. The Saudis continued that relationship for more than four decades, diplomatically shunning the PRC because of the fundamental ideological differences between conservative Islam and revolutionary Marxist-Leninism.⁶³

In 1990, the status quo shifted; Saudi Arabia broke relations with Taiwan and became one of the last major countries to recognize the PRC and initiate formal diplomatic relations with the mainland government in Beijing.⁶⁴ While there are a number of factors that contributed to this decision, one of the most significant was China's decision to sell its domestically produced DF-3 intermediate-range ballistic missiles to the Saudi kingdom in the 1988,⁶⁵ a resource that the Saudis felt necessary for confronting the growing threat posed by the recently-reconstituted Islamic Republic of Iran. Up until that point, the Saudis had been prevented from acquiring such advanced weaponry from their chief partner, the U.S., due to Israeli opposition, mainly based on the fact that such missiles were capable of hitting targets throughout the region, including Israel. The transaction with China therefore allowed the Saudis to circumvent obstructions created by its primary great power patron and take steps to ensure its own security. Additionally, it allowed China to earn substantial financial compensation, and perhaps more importantly, expand its presence and influence the political decision-making in the capital of one of the United States' main Middle Eastern partners.⁶⁶ Thus, the terms of a relationship based on economic, political, and security quid pro quo were set.

⁶² Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (New York: Vintage, 2015), 191.

⁶³ Olimat, 132.

⁶⁴ Olimat, 131.

⁶⁵ Andrew Scobell and Alireza Nader, *China in the Middle East: The Wary Dragon* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 25.

⁶⁶ John W. Lewis, Hua Di, and Xue Litai, "Beijing's Defense Establishment: Solving the Arms-Export Enigma," *International Security* 15, no. 4 (1991): 96, 104–5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539012>.

B. CONTEMPORARY SINO–SAUDI ECONOMIC RELATIONS: OIL, TRADE, AND INVESTMENT

In China, Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of “opening up” the country to the outside world in the 1970s, along with other significant foreign and domestic policy reforms, contributed to rapid economic growth.⁶⁷ This in turn led to a dramatic increase in China’s thirst for energy resources. By 1993, China’s demand for oil had outstripped its domestic production capacity and led to China’s entrance into the global economy as a net importer of oil (see Figure 1).

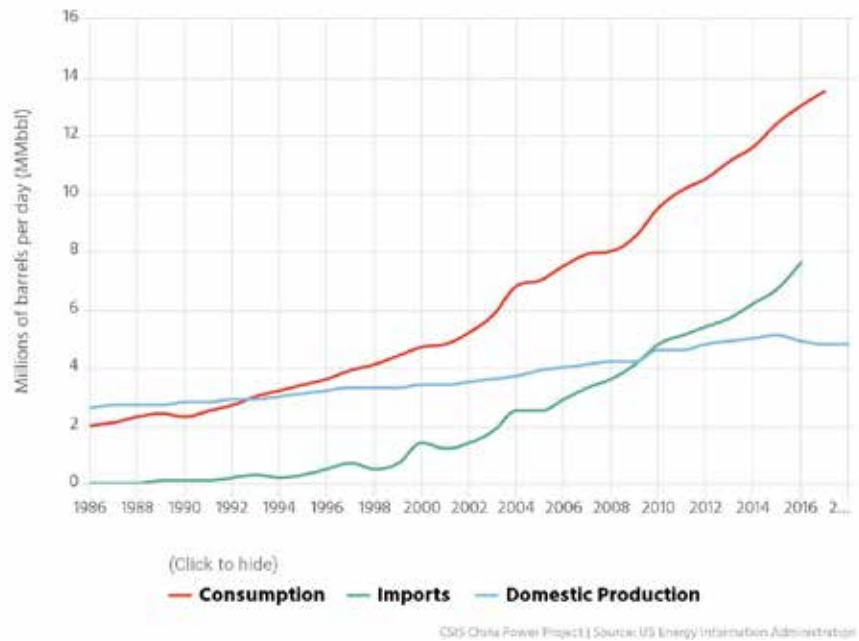


Figure 1. Chinese Oil Consumption, Imports, and Domestic Production, 1986–2018⁶⁸

The increasing demand for petroleum naturally led to increased Chinese engagement with the Middle East, a region that is well-known for its oil wealth. Since 1993, the Middle East has been the consistent source of more than 50 percent of China’s

⁶⁷ Fulton, *China’s Relations with the Gulf Monarchies*, 26–27.

⁶⁸ Source: “How Is China’s Energy Footprint Changing?,” CSIS ChinaPower Project, February 15, 2016, <http://chinapower.csis.org/energy-footprint/>.

imported petroleum resources.⁶⁹ This demand is substantial; China's imports of crude oil grew by more than 9 percent between 2013 and 2014 alone, which represented more than 43 percent of global demand growth for that year.⁷⁰ When one takes into account the fact that 2014 was marked by rather modest growth for the Chinese economy (gross domestic product [GDP] grew that year by "only" 8 percent instead of by double-digits, as in the years preceding it⁷¹), it becomes easy to see just how influential Chinese demand is on Middle Eastern and global oil markets in general.

Saudi Arabia's current prominence in the global and Chinese domestic energy markets lies in the fact that the Kingdom sits atop the largest proved petroleum reserves in the world. As of 2019, Saudi Arabia lays claim to an estimated 298 billion barrels, which represents more than 17% of the world's total reserves.⁷² Additionally, Saudi Arabia is one of the world's largest oil producers, generating more than 12 million barrels per day (BPD), or 12% of the global total in 2020.⁷³ These figures (which are more than double those of the next-highest regional producer, Iraq⁷⁴) define the Saudi kingdom as the largest petroleum producer in the Middle East and frame its geopolitical significance to interested great powers.

In this sense, Saudi Arabia's value to Chinese economic and political systems cannot be overstated. Indeed, in the competitive world that is the global petroleum market, Saudi Arabia currently sits in the prominent position of being China's top oil supplier.⁷⁵ It must further be appreciated that this relationship is not static; it has only deepened over recent decades, and is on pace to continue to do so (see Figure 2).

⁶⁹ Alterman, 42.

⁷⁰ Energy Information Administration, *China: International Energy Data and Analysis* (Washington, DC: Energy Information Administration, 2015), https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/China/china.pdf.

⁷¹ "GDP Growth (Annual %)," World Bank, accessed July 25, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>.

⁷² BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy 2020*, 69th ed. (London: BP, 2020), 14.

⁷³ BP, 16.

⁷⁴ BP, 16.

⁷⁵ "China – Oil and Gas," Export.gov, July 30, 2019, <https://www.export.gov/apex/article2?id=China-Oil-and-Gas>.

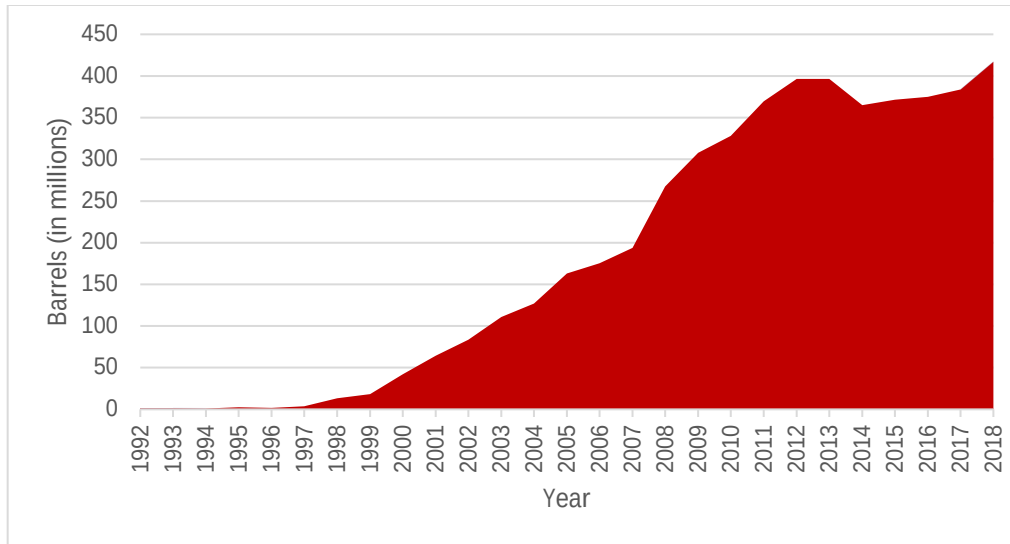


Figure 2. Chinese Oil Imports from Saudi Arabia, 1992–2018⁷⁶

Even in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, China’s demand for and imports of oil and other petroleum-based resources have remained high; it imported its highest-ever total volume of crude in May 2020,⁷⁷ and Chinese imports from Saudi Arabia alone nearly doubled those of the previous year, growing 95% to reach 2.16 million bpd.⁷⁸

Between 1993 and the present day, general Sino-Saudi economic ties, undergirded by the oil trade, have only strengthened. Saudi Arabia is China’s largest trading partner in the Middle East, and China is Saudi Arabia’s largest global trading partner.⁷⁹ Petroleum is the basis for contemporary Sino-Saudi ties, but it is only one component of a larger relationship.

⁷⁶ Adapted from “Trade Data,” United Nations International Trade Statistics Database, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

⁷⁷ Charles Kennedy, “China’s Oil Imports from Saudi Arabia Jump to Record High,” OilPrice.com, accessed July 22, 2020, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Chinas-Oil-Imports-From-Saudi-Arabia-Jump-To-Record-High.html>.

⁷⁸ Muyu Xu and Chen Aizhu, “China’s Saudi Oil Imports Surge in May to All-Time High – Customs,” Reuters, June 25, 2020, <https://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL4N2DW0YB>.

⁷⁹ Dongmei Chen and Wenke Han, *Deepening Cooperation Between Saudi Arabia and China* (Riyadh: King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center, 2019), 10, <https://doi.org/10.30573/KS--2019-DP53>.

As the Sino-Saudi trading relationship strengthens, it should be noted that it has become increasingly one-sided. Put simply, as time goes on, Saudi Arabia has become more dependent on China in terms of overall trade than China is Saudi Arabia. This becomes readily apparent when viewed through the lens of trade interdependence, a metric that refers to the share of a country's international trade (imports and exports) that is conducted with a specific trading partner.⁸⁰ The degree to which this share of trade changes between two countries can be seen as a general reflection of how important specific intra-country trade is relative to total external trade dependence. As Figure 3 shows, the trade dependence of Saudi Arabia on China has gradually moved in a positive direction over time, whereas the levels of dependence of China on Saudi Arabia has remained relatively low, a result of China's global trade diversification initiatives.⁸¹

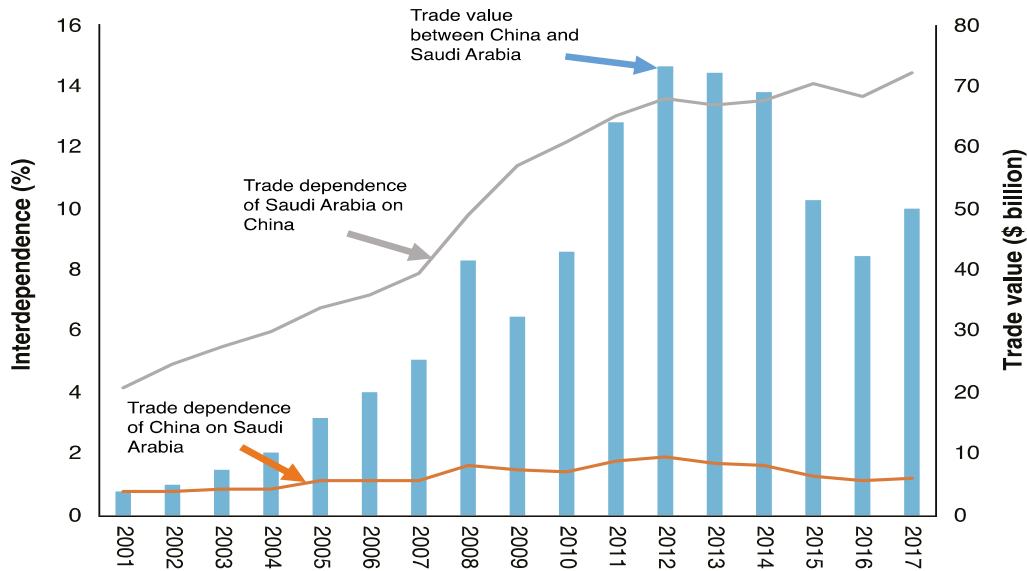


Figure 3. Trade Interdependence between China and Saudi Arabia, 2001–2017⁸²

⁸⁰ Chen and Han, 10.

⁸¹ Chen and Han, 10.

⁸² Source: Chen and Han, 10.

Indeed, while the most recent value of Saudi dependence on China stands at 7.4% (2018), which is lower than those seen throughout this past decade, it still represents a more than eight-fold increase from the 0.96% that it stood at in 1993. This shows that China is an extremely important trading partner for Saudi Arabia, whereas Saudi Arabia is relatively less important to China in terms of overall trade.

The apparent imbalance of trade between China and Saudi Arabia is unsurprising when viewed through the lens of China's global outlook. As some scholars have observed, "Asymmetry is the first and most enduring characteristic of [China's] relations with developing countries."⁸³ As China's economic and geopolitical power has grown, it has striven to create relationships and institutions to maximize its influence and agenda-setting power. Ensuring that other countries are more dependent on it for economic growth and political development is but one impactful method to accomplish this goal.

Additionally, the aforementioned data suggest that China's economic motivations for courting the Saudis do not reside in Saudi Arabia's overall trade benefits to the Chinese economy as an export market. Rather, China's interest in Saudi Arabia is primarily centered on a need to secure oil. China has developed a strong relationship with the kingdom to ensure the steady supply of this needed resource, a circumstance which in turn introduces a potential for China to cultivate its geopolitical clout in the region overall.

1. Chinese Investment in Saudi Arabia

Chinese economic initiatives have been furthered by Xi Jinping, the current president of the PRC. Since his ascension to leadership in 2012, China, as David Shambaugh notes, "has exhibited increased confidence and proactiveness on the world stage."⁸⁴ Xi and the current Chinese leadership have continued to build upon the foundations of Deng's initiatives, going out even more actively and stressing the benefits

⁸³ Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham, "China's Relations with Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East," in *China & the World*, ed. David Shambaugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 294.

⁸⁴ David Shambaugh, "China's Long March to Global Power," in *China & the World*, ed. David Shambaugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17.

Chinese investment opportunities with partner nations.⁸⁵ This dynamic marks contemporary relations with Saudi Arabia. An active China, in seeking to strengthen relations with the countries that provide it with the resources needed to ensure economic growth and preserve the rule of the CCP, has a strong interest in furthering engagement and investments with the Saudi kingdom.

The Chinese oil industry is dominated by three major NOCs – the China National Petroleum Corporation, the China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec), and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation.⁸⁶ While these companies (which are among the largest in the world) are not directly run by the CCP, they are majority-owned by the government.⁸⁷ As such, it is reasonable to presume that many of the ventures that they undertake are consonant with the strategic goals of the central government in Beijing. Their overseas investment and cooperation activities with Saudi entities are particularly noticeable. The Yanbu Aramco Sinopec Refining Company, a joint venture between Saudi Aramco, the Kingdom’s massive state-owned petroleum and natural gas company, and Sinopec was established in 2010 and it, alone, is able to process upwards of 400,000 BPD of Saudi heavy crude oil.⁸⁸ In 2019, Sinopec and its subsidiaries have signed multiple deals with Saudi Aramco, including an \$18 billion contract to boost the capacities of two of Saudi Arabia’s major oil fields.⁸⁹ This move expands both the ability of Saudi Arabia to supply crude oil to markets and Chinese access to meet its growing demand. China is proactive and effective in partnering with foreign nations to address its own energy security requirements, a dynamic that results in concrete dividends for those partner nations.

⁸⁵ Economy and Levi, 52–53.

⁸⁶ Steven W. Lewis, *Chinese NOCs and World Energy Markets: CNPC, Sinopec, and CNOOC* (Houston, TX: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, 2007), 1, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/files/3896/>.

⁸⁷ Julie Jiang and Jonathan Sinton, *Overseas Investments by Chinese National Oil Companies: Assessing the Drivers and Impacts* (Paris: International Energy Agency, 2011), 7, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5kgglrwdrvvd-en.pdf?expires=1598463550&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=CF5284F2DE1EFEFB3C518B4EA3FD0BC3>.

⁸⁸ “Yasref Overview,” Yasref, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.yasref.com/en-us/Pages/About.aspx>.

⁸⁹ “China’s Sinopec Signs Pipeline Contract with Saudi Aramco for Marjan Oilfield,” *Reuters*, July 11, 2019, <https://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFL4N24C0RC>.

One of the most notable instances of this dynamic was the attempt to put forward an international initial public offering (IPO) of a portion of Saudi Aramco. While this IPO ultimately turned out not to be international, it should be appreciated that, when it was originally planned to be, Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) intended to invest between \$5 and \$10 billion.⁹⁰ Even though these values represent only .25-.5% of the IPO's target valuation, this was seen by many analysts as an attempt by Chinese officials to further endear themselves to the Saudi monarchy.⁹¹ This demonstrates that China's involvement in Saudi Arabia's economic development is deep, and regardless of the direction that the Saudi leadership chooses to take with regards to its energy resources and future economic diversification, China will more likely than not be heavily involved.

2. Saudi Motivations and Chinese Oil Demand

Saudi Arabia's motive for selling oil to China and maintaining Chinese demand resides in the structure of the Saudi social contract. Put simply, because 87% the government's income comes from the sale of petroleum and its derivatives,⁹² Saudi Arabia is a classic example of what many social scientists refer to as a rentier state.⁹³ Rather than "earning" income by way of domestic taxation, the Saudi leadership relies on income earned from the sale of its natural resources to provide revenue and provide for the needs of its citizens. This, in turn, lessens civic involvement, staves off popular unrest, and preserves the regime's stability.⁹⁴ These stultifying effects have also been summed up as the resource curse,⁹⁵ whereby "countries whose economies are heavily reliant on natural

⁹⁰ "China Considers Up to \$10 Billion Stake in Saudi State Oil Giant's IPO," *Bloomberg News*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-06/china-said-to-discuss-at-least-5-billion-aramco-ipo-investment>.

⁹¹ Lydia Moynihan and Charles Gasparino, "With Aramco IPO Approval, China Cozies Up to Saudis," *FOX Business*, November 2, 2019, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/markets/with-aramco-ipo-on-tap-china-cozies-up-to-saudis>.

⁹² "Middle East: Saudi Arabia," *CIA World Factbook*, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>.

⁹³ Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 383–98.

⁹⁴ Beblawi, 393–4.

⁹⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, "The First Law of Petropolitics," *Foreign Policy*, no. 154 (2006): 28–36.

resources tend to be...less democratic than those whose economies are not.”⁹⁶ In effect, the Saudi leadership uses economic tools to maintain political power. These tools are dependent on the uninterrupted flow of revenue from foreign buyers and stable oil prices. Thus, just as China depends on a steady petroleum supply from Saudi Arabia to ensure the survival of its regime, Saudi depends on the preservation of Chinese petroleum demand for both its economic and political stability.

It should be noted, though, that the current Saudi leadership, led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), appears to be aware of these challenges and vulnerabilities. This realization has motivated Saudi leadership to attempt to diversify the country’s economic base with the stated hope of eliminating Saudi Arabia’s dependence on oil by 2030. These initiatives are broadly grouped under the umbrella of Saudi Vision 2030.⁹⁷ To date, however, Saudi Arabia has been unable to escape the intractable forces of the resource curse. Instead, much of the new domestic investment and FDI inflows have been oriented towards oil-based petrochemicals and other energy-intensive industries,⁹⁸ which signals that the Saudi leadership has thus far been unable to create a nonoil sector that operates independently.

a. Declining U.S. Demand

All of the aforementioned dynamics have taken place in an environment of declining American demand for foreign petroleum resources and interest in the Middle East in general. America’s involvement in the Middle East to address its energy security concerns is deep and longstanding. Building on goodwill created by earlier American investment and expertise in the Saudi kingdom during the 1930s, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and Saudi King Abdulaziz Al Saud reached an agreement in 1945 in which the U.S. guaranteed Saudi security in exchange for an unimpeded flow of oil to global

⁹⁶ Meghan O’Sullivan, *Windfall: How the New Energy Abundance Upends Global Politics and Strengthens America’s Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 264.

⁹⁷ “The Vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2030,” Vision 2030, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://vision2030.gov.sa/ar/vision/crown-message>.

⁹⁸ Sean Foley, “When Oil Is Not Enough: Sino-Saudi Relations and Vision 2030,” *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2017): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023296>.

markets.⁹⁹ Since the mid-2000s, however, American interest in the region has declined, and an increasing number of policymakers and academics have advocated for less U.S. involvement in the Middle East. Part of this is due to a generalized war-weariness and a desire to avoid fomenting/participating in conflicts in the region.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps even more impactful, though, are the recent, dramatic increases in American domestic petroleum production that have resulted from the utilization of new and innovative technologies to release so-called “tight oil” from shale rock formations (especially by hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking”). As the U.S. progressively imports less oil (see Figure 4) and becomes a major producer in its own right, oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia are increasingly pushing for other foreign customers.¹⁰¹

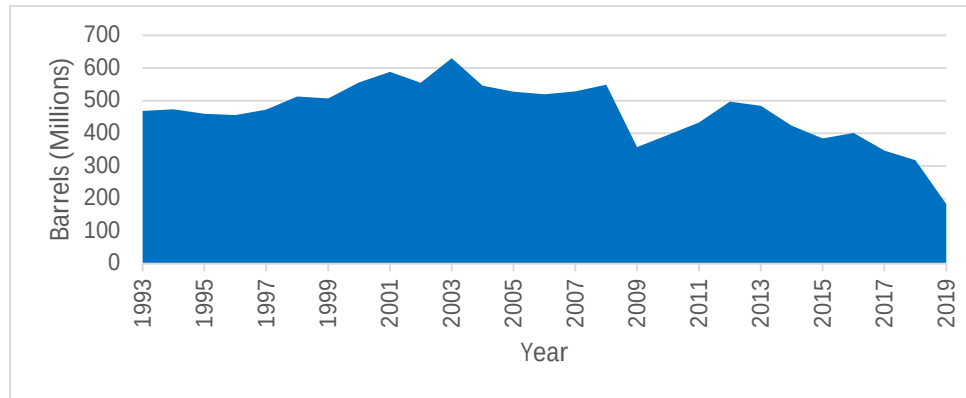


Figure 4. U.S. Oil Imports from Saudi Arabia, 1993–2019¹⁰²

It is in these dynamics that the reciprocal Sino-Saudi interests reside. The longevity of Saudi Arabia’s monarchy has been integrally connected to the prospect of developing relations with one of the world’s most dynamic rising powers.¹⁰³ Conversely, China has

⁹⁹ O’Sullivan, 252–53.

¹⁰⁰ Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes, “Americas Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 88–100.

¹⁰¹ O’Sullivan, 29–30.

¹⁰² Adapted from “Petroleum & Other Liquids,” U.S. Energy Information Administration, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.eia.gov/petroleum/index.php>.

¹⁰³ Scobell and Nader, 25–26.

expanded the efforts that it initiated in the 1980s and grew in the 1990s to build stronger political ties with countries that can provide needed natural resources and, when necessary, diplomatic support and credibility. Considering that, as Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham observe, “Beijing’s political and economic goals are inseparable,”¹⁰⁴ and that Saudi Arabia is heavily dependent on continued Chinese involvement in its economy, it is only reasonable for one to assess the impact that China’s economic activity has had on Saudi political decision-making in response to China’s actions in multilateral and bilateral arenas.

C. SAUDI POLITICAL RESPONSES

1. United Nations Voting

The data analyzed here consists of UNGA votes that have been categorized under the general “Human Rights” label. This data has been further disaggregated into two separate categories: votes that address general human rights principles and votes that respond to regional- or country-specific situations. General votes typically address principles such as the supposed “right to food,” “right to development,” and right to an “equitable geographical distribution in the membership of the human rights treaty bodies.” As one can see, these already unenforceable resolutions address issues that are themselves difficult to define, but they can still serve important functions in terms of messaging and posturing on the international stage. Situational votes, on the other hand, address specific happenings in certain countries and regions, such as those in Iran, North Korea, and other troubled areas and states in the world. Although unenforceable, they can be seen as a normative and more direct critique, which countries do take seriously.¹⁰⁵

With regards to the general votes, it is readily apparent that there is a high degree of voting overlap between Saudi Arabia and China. Of the 183 resolutions voted on between 1997 and 2018 that address general human rights principles, Saudi Arabia voted

¹⁰⁴ Eisenman and Heginbotham, 295.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher B. Primiano and Jun Xiang, “Voting in the UN: A Second Image of China’s Human Rights,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 21, no. 3 (September 2016): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-016-9399-x>.

“Yes” 160 times, which equates to 87.4% of the time. This is virtually identical to China’s record during this period, which translates into 159 “Yes” votes, and this degree of alignment has generally been consistent over time. This voting proportion is the reverse of the U.S. “Yes” proportion, which stands at 10.9% for the same time period. What is most interesting, however, is the Saudi response to those specific resolutions whose sponsorship includes China. To date, China has specifically sponsored or co-sponsored 72 resolutions in this category, which mostly address principles of noninterference and state sovereignty.¹⁰⁶ Of these, the Saudi delegation voted “Yes” 70 times (with absences counting for the other two occurrences), or 97% of the time. There is no measurable change in the frequency of these “Yes” votes. Instead, Saudi support for Chinese resolutions has been near-constant since the beginning of recorded sponsorship. This dynamic is indicative of a degree of overlap between Chinese and Saudi interests related to general issues such as the preservation of state sovereignty or Saudi Arabia’s willingness to align its votes with Chinese preferences.

If Saudi Arabia is following China’s lead and acting to preserve China’s economic influence, then it would be expected that these vote proportions would match those related to situational human rights resolutions. In other words, one would expect that Saudi votes increasingly move in a direction that promotes noninterference at the expense of condemnations of specific situations in which human rights abuses have been observed. It is clear, however, that this is not exactly the case. Of the 78 total resolutions sponsored by the U.S. in this category, Saudi Arabia has voted in the affirmative 40 times, or 51.3% of the time. While this does not demonstrate total consensus with U.S. interests, it is significantly different from China’s votes, of which zero were cast in support of U.S.-led initiatives. This evidence suggests that Saudi Arabia is generally less opposed to specific interventions in certain human rights cases, and that it is also less inclined to respond negatively to U.S.-led human rights efforts.

¹⁰⁶ Resolutions sponsored at the behest of voting blocs (such as the Non-Aligned Movement) were not included in this measure.

Indeed, further disaggregation of the data reveals that over time, Saudi support for certain issues has actually increased in the face of continued Chinese opposition to those same issues. As an example, the UNGA has approved resolutions condemning the human rights situation in Iran, one of China's key economic and diplomatic partners,¹⁰⁷ virtually every year since 1996; all of these have been co-sponsored by the U.S. In the decade between 1997 and 2007, the Saudi delegation consistently voted "No," refusing opportunities to condemn an otherwise bitter regional rival. Interestingly enough, however, this opposition to the U.S.-led effort transitioned to abstentions between 1998 and 2015, and, in the four years since 2015, to "Yes" votes. This pattern mirrors that which describes the Saudi reaction to the resolutions concerning the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar between 2006 and 2019; over time, abstentions have changed to affirmative votes. Additionally, Saudi support for U.S.-led resolutions between 2005 and 2015 condemning North Korea, another of China's key partners, for its human rights violations remained virtually unchanged. While China has consistently opposed all of these resolutions, Saudi Arabia has instead increasingly voted with the U.S. and moved toward a relatively more active position in condemning human rights violations. Thus, China was either unable or unwilling in these instances to marshal its influence and prevent official condemnation of partners and allies.

Between 1993 and the present day, China has sponsored numerous general resolutions affirming noninterference, but it has not sponsored a single resolution that addresses specific situations involving human rights abuses around the world. While this may be in accordance with China's preference to use its role in global governance to rhetorically uphold principles of sovereignty, it does run counter to the interests of the Saudi Arabian government, which actively intervenes in some areas (e.g., Yemen), and has demonstrated interest in others (e.g., Syria). Taken together, the stark differences in voting behavior suggest that both active U.S. involvement in these multilateral processes and Saudi Arabia's own regional and domestic interests are significant factors in whether or not Saudi Arabia decides to go on record supporting Chinese initiatives. In other words,

¹⁰⁷ Olimat, 162.

this evidence implies that, while Chinese economic engagement, growing interdependence, and demand for petroleum may be factors in Saudi support for broader, overarching measures, they appear to be ineffective in altering Saudi positions on American initiatives or regional events in which the Saudi government determines it has a vested national interest.

2. The Uyghur Issue

The Uyghur situation in China's western Xinjiang province and the Saudi reaction to it presents an interesting case study in this regard. To date, there has been little Saudi condemnation of the persecution of this group. In some ways this is surprising, for China's actions, which have largely been motivated by an explicit desire to reduce the social and religious impacts that Islam has on this native population,¹⁰⁸ are becoming more conspicuous over time on the international stage.

An informed observer might expect the Saudi leadership to react in a strong fashion, for the monarchy has traditionally been seen and sees itself as the primary guardian of Islam. Indeed, the current monarch, King Salman, is referred to not only as the political leader of a state, but also as the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," a reference to the king's role the symbolic protector of two of the holiest Islamic sites in Mecca and Medina.¹⁰⁹ While it should be noted that Saudi Arabia has gained notoriety for its own persecution of domestic minority groups (especially Christians and Shiite Muslims),¹¹⁰ its traditional place as the heart of Sunni Islam has led it to advocate for the plights of several disadvantaged Muslim groups around the world; these include the Palestinian populations

¹⁰⁸ Xiaodong Zhang, "China's Interests in the Middle East: Present and Future," *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 3 (February 1999): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.1999.tb00332.x>.

¹⁰⁹ "Islam," The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.saudiembassy.net/islam#Guardian%20of%20The%20Holy%20Places>.

¹¹⁰ Jennifer Hansler, "US Condemns Saudi Arabia Over Religious Freedom Abuses," CNN, accessed August 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/21/politics/international-religious-freedom-report/index.html>.

in the West Bank and Gaza¹¹¹ and the Rohingya minority group of Myanmar.¹¹² There is certainly a precedent for the Saudi leadership to comment on and criticize the domestic practices of other nations as they concern Muslim minorities.

Instead of criticizing China, though, Saudi Arabia has gone on the record, supporting China's actions in Xinjiang. This was made most apparent in July 2019, when Saudi Arabia joined thirty-seven other countries in signing an official letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).¹¹³ This letter, which was a response to the earlier one that condemned the actions in question,¹¹⁴ instead commended "China's remarkable achievements in the field of human rights" and "call [ed] on relevant countries to refrain from employing unfounded charges against China based on unconfirmed information before they visit Xinjiang."¹¹⁵ Additionally, MBS (while on a visit to China to sign trade deals) defended the PRC's "right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremization work for its national security."¹¹⁶ Since 1990, as Mohammed al-Sudairi

¹¹¹ "Saudi Foreign Minister Reiterates Kingdom's Support for Palestine," The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.saudiembassy.net/press-release/saudi-foreign-minister-reiterates-kingdom%E2%80%99s-support-palestine>.

¹¹² "Kingdom Demands End to Government Discrimination Against Rohingya," The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.saudiembassy.net/news/kingdom-demands-end-government-discrimination-against-rohingya>.

¹¹³ Michelle Nichols, "Saudi Arabia Defends Letter Backing China's Xinjiang Policy," *Reuters*, July 18, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-rights-saudi-idUSKCN1UD36J>.

¹¹⁴ United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Letter Dated 8 July 2019 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations Office at Geneva Addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council*, A/HRC/41/G/11, 2019.

¹¹⁵ United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Letter Dated 12 July 2019 from the Representatives of Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Comoros, the Congo, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkmenistan, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the State of Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva Addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council*, A/HRC/41/G/17 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2019).

¹¹⁶ Josie Ensor, "Saudi Crown Prince Defends China's Right to Put Uighur Muslims in Concentration Camps," *The Telegraph*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/22/saudi-crown-prince-defends-chinas-right-put-uighur-muslims-concentration/>.

points out, “the Saudi state has actively sought to sideline the [Uyghur] issue from being an irritant to the development of cordial Sino-Saudi ties”¹¹⁷; the statements by MBS are consistent with this trend. A deepening relationship with China, predicated on strengthened economic ties and the absence of American presence,¹¹⁸ is correlated with deleterious attitudes toward persecution and certain other human rights issues.

It should be noted, however, that while the Saudi signature of the August 9 letter may be a conspicuous rhetorical blow to the global human rights regime, this specific Saudi position is neither new nor without precedent. While some of this silence may be caused by a desire for continued economic development, the Saudi position is also heavily influenced by a fear of political Islam and other related separatist movements.¹¹⁹ Indeed, when one views these instances through the lens of the attempted seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca in 1979,¹²⁰ it is easier for one to understand the Saudi monarchy’s reactions to dynamics which are generally perceived to pose a threat to continued state rule. In this sense, longstanding domestic sensitivities that naturally result from Saudi Arabia’s authoritarian regime type cannot be discounted in any analysis of the Saudi reaction to the Uyghur issue.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that, while the Saudi governmental reaction to atrocities against Uyghurs has been ambivalent at best, the popular reaction has been more decisive. In 2009, riots in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Province, and the PRC’s heavy-handed response to them, precipitated a significant shift in Saudi media coverage of China. Much as earlier situations in Bosnia and Chechnya has had done in the 1990s, the events in Xinjiang animated the Saudi public in noticeable ways. Articles in a number of popular

¹¹⁷ Mohammed Turki Al-Sudairi, “Hajjis, Refugees, Salafi Preachers, and a Myriad of Others: An Examination of Islamic Connectivities in the Sino-Saudi Relationship,” in *The Red Star & the Crescent: China and the Middle East*, ed. James Reardon-Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 236.

¹¹⁸ Colin Dwyer, “U.S. Announces Its Withdrawal from U.N. Human Rights Council,” NPR, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621435225/u-s-announces-its-withdrawal-from-u-n-s-human-rights-council>.

¹¹⁹ Haisam Hassanein, “Arab States Give China a Pass on Uyghur Crackdown,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 26, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/arab-states-give-china-a-pass-on-uyghur-crackdown>.

¹²⁰ William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 5th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2013), 403–4.

Saudi publications during that period, including Al-Eqtisadiyyah, Al-Madina, Al-Riyadh, Okaz, and Al-Watan criticized China's actions in unsparing terms and were generally sympathetic with the plight of a population with which many Saudis feel religious kinship. The juxtaposition between the responses of the government and the public does illustrate the effect of China's economic influence in this regard, but it is also reasonable to assert that these public sentiments will serve as a limiting factor in how far the Saudi monarchy goes in supporting China on this issue.¹²¹

Still, it should be appreciated that the Saudi government has acted in a way that conforms to CCP preferences regarding this issue. This fact suggests that China's economic influence in the form of its demand for energy has influenced the Saudi government's position on this specific topic.

3. Bilateral Relations with the U.S.

If the theory presented in the literature holds, then one would expect Saudi arms transactions and certain forms of diplomatic activity with the U.S. to be on a downward trend as a result of the country's growing economic relationship with China. The actual dynamics on the ground, however, do not necessarily correspond with the theoretical projections. To date, it appears that China's economic engagement has had little bearing on Saudi decisions to engage with the U.S. on security and political issues.

In terms of arms sales, the relationship between Washington and Riyadh is robust. One method of measuring this is by valuing arms transactions by their trend-indicator value (TIV). According to the SIPRI, the TIV is "is based on the known unit production costs of a core set of weapons and is intended to represent the transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer."¹²² Focusing on military capabilities allows for a more comprehensive analysis of weapons transactions than that which would come through

¹²¹ Mohammed Turki Al-Sudairi, *China in the Eyes of the Saudi Media*, GRC Gulf Papers (Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2013), 14–20.

¹²² "Sources and Methods," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, accessed August 3, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods/#TIV-tables>.

measuring financial values alone.¹²³ By this metric, Saudi-U.S. relations are strong (see Figure 5). During the almost three decades between 1993 and 2019, the value of arms transfers from the U.S. to Saudi Arabia has increased by more than 150%, with transfers in the decade between 2009 and 2019 alone increasing more than twelvefold. During the same time period, reported transfers from China to Saudi Arabia have been negligible; Sino-Saudi transactions between 2015 and 2019 represent barely 5% of those made from the U.S. in 2019. The U.S. security partnership with Saudi Arabia remains strong, even in the face of a conspicuous Chinese presence.

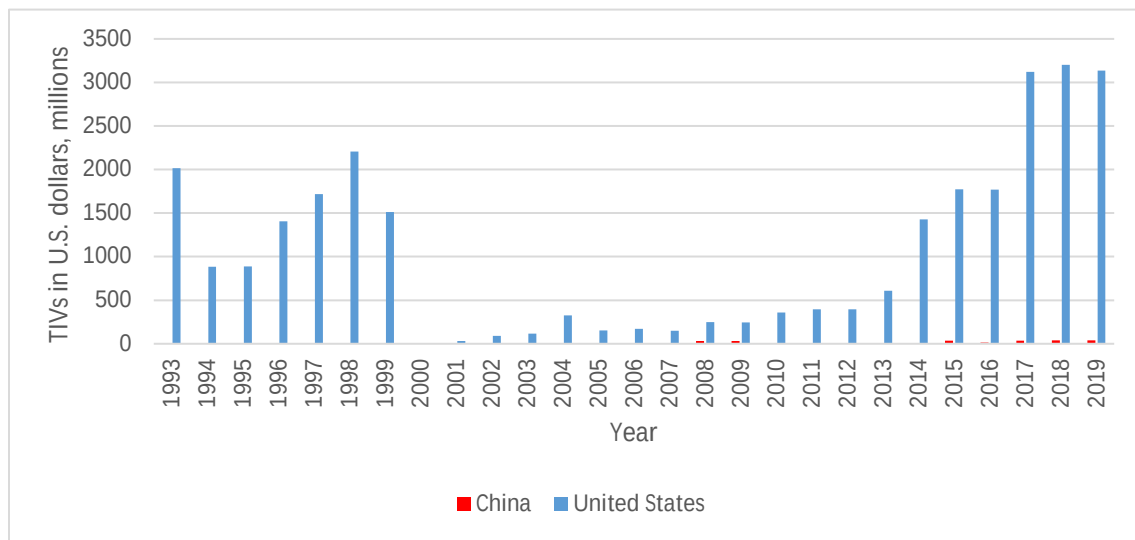


Figure 5. SIPRI TIVs of Official Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia, 1993–2019¹²⁴

The frequency and visibility of diplomatic visits between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia has likewise remained robust during the period between 1993 and the present. Saudi Arabia has received the U.S. Secretary of State at least once during every single year between

¹²³ Scobell and Nader, 43.

¹²⁴ Adapted from “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

1990 and 2020.¹²⁵ This trend has only strengthened in recent years; over the past decade, American delegations have been received an average of three times per year, with six visits in 2016 alone.¹²⁶ In comparison, while China’s president and senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials have conducted numerous phone calls during the same period, there have been far fewer official visits between the two countries.¹²⁷ This dynamic is representative of the growing relationship between the two countries, but to date it appears to have had little effect on the willingness of the Saudi leadership to meet with American leaders and continue the practical and symbolic solidification of the U.S.-Saudi partnership.

D. CONCLUSION

China’s economic presence in Saudi Arabia is deep and growing. China depends in no small part on Saudi energy resources to fuel its growing economy, while the Saudi monarchy is heavily dependent on continued Chinese demand and markets as an element of regime stability. With all of that being said, evidence suggests that China’s engagement, while significant, is not the sole element in the political calculus of the Saudi government in certain multilateral and bilateral arenas. The Saudi government has responded to the Uyghur situation in a way that is favorable to the CCP’s interests, but it has not shifted its UNGA voting or weakened its partnership with the U.S. As such, Chinese influence in Saudi Arabia appears to be limited in scope.

¹²⁵ “Saudi Arabia – Travels of the President,” United States Department of State – Office of the Historian, accessed September 7, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/secretary/saudi-arabia>.

¹²⁶ “Saudi Arabia – Travels of the President.”

¹²⁷ “Saudi Arabia Activities,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, accessed September 7, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2878_663746/2880_663750/default.shtml.

III. CHINA AND EGYPT

The most prominent element of the strengthening Sino-Egyptian relationship is China's BRI and other related infrastructure development efforts. Although China's levels of trade with Egypt are significant, they pale in comparison to the financial scale of China's trade with other regional states¹²⁸ and the potential domestic political impacts of development projects encompassed by the BRI. This fact, coupled with the BRI's prominence in the scholarly literature that addresses the global spread of China's influence, and Egypt's historically strong security relationship with the United States, warrants a deeper analysis of the implications of China's involvement with Egypt, focusing on BRI projects.

China's engagement with Egypt appears to be paying dividends for Beijing that extend beyond the economic sphere. Although Egypt's official behavior in international institutions such as the UNGA appears to be unaffected, its public relations and bureaucratic responses to controversial issues that China considers core interests (specifically, the Uyghur issue in Xinjiang) have changed to better align with the interests of the Chinese government. This dynamic, when combined with indicators that signal a weakening of the Egyptian reliance on American security and political power in the region, suggests that China's development-based economic engagement strategy may have broader geopolitical motivations and implications.

A. BACKGROUND

The origins of the contemporary Sino-Egyptian relationship can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century. Maoist China's support of Egypt during the early years of the Cold War, particularly as it pertains to Gamal Abdel Nasser's perceived anti-imperialist efforts in the face of British, French, and Israeli aggression in 1956.¹²⁹ The bilateral relations that were developed through this interaction contributed to Egypt becoming "the

¹²⁸ Jon B. Alterman, "Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 2 (June 2019): 133, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12427>.

¹²⁹ Olimat, 19.

first Arab and African country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.”¹³⁰ It also led to Egypt being one of the 76 countries that voted in favor of UN Resolution 2758, formally recognizing the PRC as “the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations.”¹³¹ These circumstances demonstrate that Egypt has been a prominent supporter of the PRC since its emergence as a power on the global stage.

The countries' historical relationship has only been strengthened by in contemporary times Egypt joining the multitude of bilateral and multilateral institutions that China has created in the region to enhance trade and investment with Arab and African countries.¹³² Key among these was China and Egypt's agreement to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that was signed in 2014, an act that placed Egypt in an exclusive group of only five MENA states that have such agreements with China.¹³³ As noted previously, although these agreements do not represent formal commitments, they do represent China's and partner states' interests in solidifying long-term, stable, and all-encompassing relations.¹³⁴ Further, as Fulton observes, Egypt's ascension to the uppermost rung of China's diplomatic hierarchy “indicates that Beijing perceives [it] as [one of] the most important regional states.”¹³⁵ Put simply, as time has gone on, relations between these two states have only strengthened as each recognizes the economic value of the other.

¹³⁰ “China and Egypt,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 10, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2813_663616/.

¹³¹ “General Assembly, 26th Session: 1976th Plenary Meeting” (New York: United Nations, October 25, 1971), <http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/735611>.

¹³² Olimat, 56–57.

¹³³ Fulton, 4.

¹³⁴ “Quick Guide to China's Diplomatic Levels,” *South China Morning Post*, January 20, 2016, sec. News, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1903455/quick-guide-chinas-diplomatic-levels>.

¹³⁵ Fulton, 4.

B. CONTEMPORARY SINO-EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

More than energy, trade, or other measures of economic output, the most prominent feature of contemporary Sino-Egyptian relations is Egypt's involvement in China's BRI. Cooperation on infrastructure development with countries such as Egypt is a key component of the larger "1+2+3" model that currently guides China's relations with partners in the MENA region. According to "China's Arab Policy Paper," the document that articulates the PRC's overarching approach in the Middle East, "infrastructure construction [and] investment facilitation" (2) comprise "two wings" that support other efforts related to energy cooperation (1) and technological development (3).¹³⁶ In this context, Egypt is a key node in China's approach to the region. Since Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and President Xi Jinping's reciprocal state visits in 2014 and 2016, respectively, and el-Sisi's subsequent signing of the requisite BRI Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), China has only fortified its reputation as a massive investor in both Egypt and the MENA region as a whole.¹³⁷

China's engagement with Egypt on these terms is by no means insubstantial or insignificant. While China has a history of investing in Egyptian infrastructure that predates the more recent developments spearheaded by Xi Jinping, the amounts of those investments have increased dramatically over the past half decade (see Figure 6).

¹³⁶ "China's Arab Policy Paper," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 13, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1331683.shtml.

¹³⁷ Anchi Hoh, "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia and the Middle East," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 2 (2019): 254, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12191>.

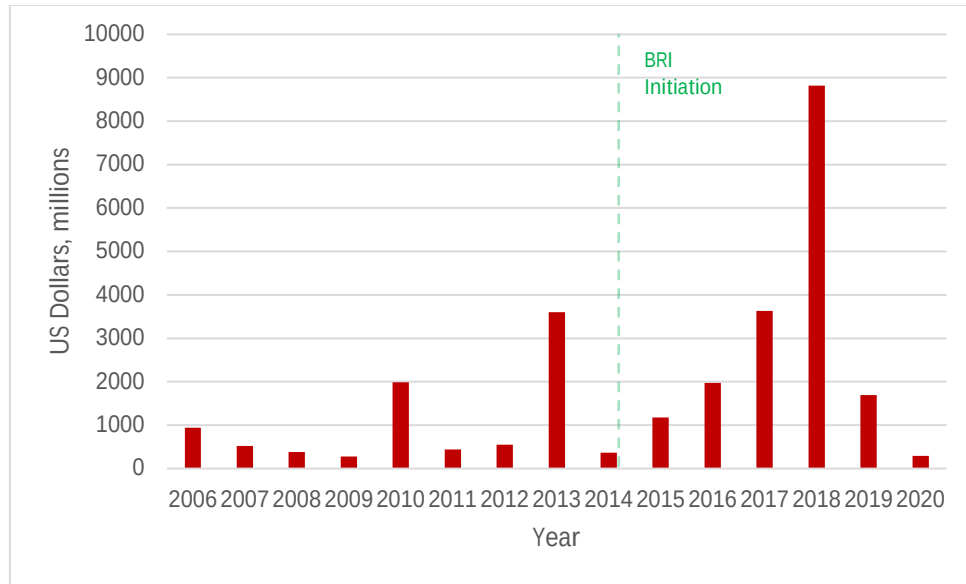


Figure 6. Combined Values of Chinese Investments and Construction Contracts in Egypt, 2006–2020¹³⁸

Between 2006 and 2014,¹³⁹ the year of el-Sisi’s first visit to Beijing and a significant Chinese investment agreement,¹⁴⁰ the average annual value Chinese investments and construction contracts in Egypt was roughly \$88 billion. In the six years between 2014 and 2020, however, this value grew to more than \$190 billion, more than doubling the average annual value of contracts during the preceding period. During the same period, FDI inflows as a percentage of Egyptian GDP more than doubled, increasing from 1.5 % in 2006 to nearly 3% by 2019.¹⁴¹ China’s demonstrable commitment to expanding its involvement in terms of infrastructure development highlights its importance to Egyptian national interests in those terms.

¹³⁸ Adapted from “China Global Investment Tracker,” American Enterprise Institute, accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>.

¹³⁹ The projects initiated during the two years preceding Egypt’s BRI MOU signing have been retroactively included in official BRI tabulations. As such, the projects initiated from 2014 onward have been categorized in this thesis as BRI-related.

¹⁴⁰ Shannon Tiezzi, “The Belt and Road and Suez Canal: China-Egypt Relations Under Xi Jinping,” *Asia Dialogue*, February 16, 2016, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2016/02/16/87681/>.

¹⁴¹ “Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (% of GDP) – Egypt, Arab Repub.,” World Bank, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?end=2019&locations=EG&start=1993>.

1. China's Motivations and Activities

As noted previously, Egypt plays a significant role in Chinese planning and economic engagement with the rest of the world. Because Egypt maintains sovereignty over the Suez Canal, it is commonly viewed by Chinese thinkers, planners, and policymakers as a hub of the nautical components of BRI, the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Egypt, by way of the Suez, connects the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and provides the shortest maritime route between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁴² This is a critical factor for policymakers in Beijing, as 20% of global trade volume, or 70% of the world's trade value, passes through the Indian Ocean annually.¹⁴³ On a more specific and impactful level, ships transport more than 90% of China's international trade,¹⁴⁴ with roughly \$1 trillion worth of those goods transiting the Canal and Red Sea area every year.¹⁴⁵ When viewed through this lens, it is evident why the CCP leadership would be so attracted to building relations with Egyptian leaders. Continued economic growth in China, which undergirds the domestic legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), depends in no small part on the continued access to and development of strategic chokepoints and waterways. Put simply, the Suez is a key component not only of the MSR specifically, but also of China's larger global ambitions and its domestic political stability.

In terms of activities, the most significant of China's infrastructure investment efforts in Egypt can be bifurcated into two categories: those which are centered on the Suez Canal, and those which pertain to the growing Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone) that is located near the physical canal. In terms of the canal itself, substantial levels of Chinese investments have gone towards supporting the renovations of the two most important ports,

¹⁴² Hoh, 258.

¹⁴³ Hoh, 258.

¹⁴⁴ Sharon Li and Colin Ingram, *Maritime Law and Policy in China* (New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2002), 37.

¹⁴⁵ Robert D.A. Henderson, "China's Red Sea Ambitions," *Diplomat*, October 7, 2018, <https://diplomatonline.com/mag/2018/10/chinas-red-sea-ambitions/>.

Ismailia and Port Said.¹⁴⁶ Port Said's Suez Canal Container Terminal, the largest container terminal in that part of the world, stands out. In addition to owning a 20 percent share in the container facility on a 49-year concession, Chinese SOEs have also invested more than \$800 million in recent years for physical and logistical upgrades.¹⁴⁷ China's engagement on this issue has certainly paid dividends; recent enlargement operations funded in large part by Chinese firms have doubled the capacity and traffic flow between the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea.¹⁴⁸ This is part of a broader trend which describes efforts by China's SOEs to aggressively invest in ports and waterways from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, thereby ensuring reliable access to Western markets for Chinese firms.¹⁴⁹ China's Suez-related economic interests, while not novel developments, have resulted not only in increasing levels of efficiency in logistical nodes of global importance, but also a more visible Chinese presence throughout the region.

The enthusiasm which marks expansion of the Suez Canal can also be observed in the development of the SCZone. According to state media sources, the SCZone is promoted as "a world-class free zone and trade hub along the banks of the newly-expanded Suez Canal."¹⁵⁰ Although the Egyptian government did have tentative plans for a zone specifically set aside for economic innovation that predated the BRI by more than a decade, these ideas only became viable with the recent influx of Chinese investment capital.¹⁵¹ Since Egypt joined the BRI and el-Sisi's signed the \$18.3 billion in SCZone-specific

¹⁴⁶ "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Reshaping the Political Scenario of the Eastern Mediterranean?," Mediterranean Affairs, November 7, 2018, <https://www.mediterraneanaffairs.com/belt-road-initiative-bri-mediterranean/>; Reham M. Hafez and Ibrahim Madney, "Suez Canal Region as an Economic Hub in Egypt: Location Analysis for the Mass Real Estate Appraisal Process," *HBRC Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 64–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16874048.2020.1734347>.

¹⁴⁷ Mordechai Chaziza, "The Chinese Maritime Silk Road Initiative: The Role of the Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-6898099>; Emma Scott, "China's Silk Road Strategy: A Foothold in the Suez, But Looking to Israel," *China Brief* 14, no. 19 (2014), <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-silk-road-strategy-a-foothold-in-the-suez-but-looking-to-israel/>.

¹⁴⁸ Mordechai Chaziza, *China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative* (Tel-Aviv: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2018), 1–4.

¹⁴⁹ Chaziza, "The Chinese Maritime Silk Road Initiative: The Role of the Mediterranean," 64.

¹⁵⁰ "China, Egypt Join Hands to Write New Chapter of Suez Canal Development," *China Daily*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201911/18/WS5dd23667a310cf3e355781bf.html>.

¹⁵¹ Hoh, 258.

agreements with Chinese firms in 2018, plans have been drawn up for water pumping and storage facilities in Ataqa, electric train facilities, coal fired-plants in the port of Hamrawein, construction improvements in Ain Sokhna port, and various other megaprojects throughout the area.¹⁵²

Egypt's New Administrative Capital (NAC) is particularly prominent. Located far from downtown Cairo, the NAC is intended be Egypt's bureaucratic capital of the future, one that is relatively isolated from a restive population that has demonstrated a propensity to engage in mass protests.¹⁵³ The China State Construction Engineering Corporation has led the way in the development of the new Central Business District, an area of commercial and financial enterprises within the NAC that is projected as the future hub of Egyptian economic advancement.¹⁵⁴ Construction projects under the umbrella of these initiatives have continued unabated, even during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019–2021.¹⁵⁵ Although not all of the commitments have been actualized to date, it is evident that assurances of Chinese investment have been integral to Egypt's development plans, especially in challenging times.

Perhaps the most prominent example of Sino-Egyptian cooperation in this sphere is the China-Egypt Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area (TEDA) Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (SETC), “the gold intersection point of ‘the Belt and Road’ strategy of China and the ‘Suez Canal Corridor’ strategy of Egypt.”¹⁵⁶ In short, this area is a PRC-sponsored economic cooperation zone that is aimed at propelling cooperation between China and Egypt by providing land, labor and capital resources for

¹⁵² Hoh, 258.

¹⁵³ Mercy A. Kuo, “China in the Middle East: Influence and Investment,” *The Diplomat*, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/china-in-the-middle-east-influence-and-investment/>.

¹⁵⁴ John Galabrese, “Towering Ambitions: Egypt and China Building for the Future,” *Middle East Institute*, October 6, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/towering-ambitions-egypt-and-china-building-future>.

¹⁵⁵ Galabrese.

¹⁵⁶ “China-Egypt Strategy Intersection,” TEDA Suez, accessed December 6, 2021, <http://www.setc-zone.com/system/2017/04/26/011260606.shtml>.

Chinese manufacturing, trade, financial, and other economic initiatives.¹⁵⁷ To date, the 1.34 square kilometer zone contains more than 60 Chinese manufacturing and service enterprises.¹⁵⁸ Chinese and Egyptian leaders have designated an additional six square kilometers for construction in the near term, with 20 square kilometers planned for the long term.¹⁵⁹ The development of this zone is an example of the “win-win cooperation” that the Chinese government emphasizes; TEDA-SETC provides jobs and training opportunities for thousands of Egyptian workers, while Chinese industries have yet another area in which to spread and exploit inexpensive labor.¹⁶⁰

In broader terms, the TEDA-SETC is the physical manifestation of a major commitment by the Chinese government to utilize direct investment to directly facilitate Egyptian economic growth. From this perspective, major BRI projects like the TEDA-SETC are conspicuous examples of potential vectors of reliance of client states, like Egypt, on the PRC.

2. Egypt’s Motivations for Welcoming Chinese Investment

The Egypt Vision 2030 plan, which was first launch in February 2016, has led to an increasing need to attract foreign investment into the country and provides fertile ground for increased levels of foreign direct investment from Chinese sources. Like a number of other countries in the MENA region, the Egyptian government has embarked on a program of growth based on sustainable development and economic rejuvenation, targets that are epitomized through the development of critical infrastructure.¹⁶¹ Notable goals of Egypt Vision 2030 include the improvement of the “quality of life and standard of living of the

¹⁵⁷ “Historical Evolution,” TEDA Suez, accessed December 6, 2021, <http://www.setc-zone.com/system/2017/04/26/011260619.shtml>.

¹⁵⁸ Kamel, 88.

¹⁵⁹ Marwa Biltagy, *Suez Economic& Trade Cooperation Zone (SETC-ZONE)* (Cairo: Egypt State Information Service, 2017), 10, <https://sis.gov.eg/UP/%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA/6.pdf>.

¹⁶⁰ Kamel, 88–89.

¹⁶¹ “President El Sisi Unveils ‘Egypt Vision 2030’ Sustainable Development Strategy,” Embassy of Egypt, Washington DC, February 24, 2016, <http://www.egyptembassy.net/news/news/president-el-sisi-unveils-egypt-vision-2030-sustainable-development-strategy/>.

Egyptian citizens” and the “governance of state and community institutions.”¹⁶² As Egyptian leaders also openly acknowledge, however, another significant goal of this strategy and its calls for investment is to “strengthen Egyptian leadership.”¹⁶³ Regardless of whether Vision 2030 is aimed primarily at improving the lives of everyday Egyptians or maintaining the legitimacy of the government, it is clearly evident that the Egyptian leadership is incentivized to align significant components of its economic and political interests with China’s implementation of its BRI in the region, as the influx of economic resources is seen to have a bolstering effect on the rule of the domestic government and may help mitigate the destabilizing conditions that led to the Arab Spring revolutions.

It is in this sense, then, that one should assess the impacts that such forms of Chinese engagement have had on the political responses of the Egyptian government

C. EGYPTIAN POLITICAL RESPONSES

1. United Nations Voting

Egypt’s voting behavior in the UNGA is somewhat aligned with China’s. This fact suggests some compatibility between Chinese and Egyptian interests. The similarity in voting patterns, however, it is not generalized or comprehensive across all issues of interests to Egypt and China. In this sense, Egypt’s voting patterns do not signal that within the specific context of the UNGA, Egypt is a constituent state following in China’s lead.

In terms of China-sponsored UN resolutions that address general human rights situations, Egypt has voted “Yes” on all 72 resolutions, or 100% of the time. This is particularly noteworthy when juxtaposed against the fact that the United States has responded with a “No” vote to every single one of these resolutions. This voting pattern signals that on issues such as the “promotion of a democratic and equitable international order,” “globalization and its impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights,” and other principles that imply dissatisfaction with contemporary multilateral views and applications of liberalism, Chinese and Egyptian interests align. This dissatisfaction cannot be observed

¹⁶² “Egypt’s Vision 2030,” Egyptian Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://mped.gov.eg/EgyptVision?lang=en>.

¹⁶³ “Egypt’s Vision 2030.”

in the Egyptian responses to U.S.-sponsored initiatives, however. Of the 16 resolutions that the U.S. has sponsored between 2000 and 2018, Egypt cast voted “Yes” 14 times, “No” zero times, and abstained only twice. This number of “Yes” votes in response to U.S.-sponsored resolutions is significantly higher than either Saudi Arabia or China, who voted in the affirmative ten and eight times, respectively. When viewed alongside the fact that the two U.S. resolutions that Egypt abstained from voting on lacked historical precedents¹⁶⁴ and thus cannot be taken as a change in Egyptian voting behavior, it is apparent that China has not caused Egypt to turn away from the United States.

Egypt’s responses to resolutions that address human rights situations in specific countries and regions around the world likewise represent only a limited degree of overlap with and/or influence from the Chinese government. In response to the human rights situation in Iran, both Egypt and China have refused to cast “Yes” votes to condemn the Iranian regime every year since 1996. This trend parallels the one for resolutions condemning the North Korea regime, a situation in which Egypt has voted only once in the affirmative. In response to the situation in Syria, a country which shares deep historical ties with Egypt, the Egyptian delegation did shift from condemning the ruling regime of Bashar al-Assad outright to abstaining during the three most recent votes (2017, 2018, and 2019), a move which brought Egypt’s votes more into alignment with China’s. This, however, likely has more to do with a broader Egyptian interest in maintaining regional stability¹⁶⁵ and limiting the spread of post-Arab Spring radical Islamism¹⁶⁶ than it does bending to explicit Chinese influence or preferences. Put differently, while Egypt’s votes have

¹⁶⁴ General Assembly Resolutions 70/161, *Recognizing the role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection*, A/RES/70/161, (17 December 2015); and 73/173, *Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of association*, A/RES/73/173 (17 December 2018) were singular resolutions that were not derivatives of resolutions from earlier UNGA convenings, nor were they reintroduced in later convenings.

¹⁶⁵ “Egypt’s Vision Towards the Syrian Crisis,” Egypt State Information Service, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/7302/9409?lang=en-us>; Oren Kessler, “Egypt Picks Sides in the Syrian War: How Sisi Learned to Love Assad,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-02-12/egypt-picks-sides-syrian-war>.

¹⁶⁶ Mohamed Maher, “Egypt and Assad: Calculations, Pragmatism, and Morality,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypt-and-assad-calculations-pragmatism-and-morality>.

mirrored China's, there is little evidence that this reflects an increasing level of alignment between the interests of the two countries.

Perhaps the most noteworthy sequence of votes in this category, though, is that which has addressed the situation of the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Like the delegations from both Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the Egyptian delegation shifted their responses in 2011, from the six consecutive years of "No" votes on resolutions addressing the issue to "Yes" votes, condemning the actions of Myanmar government. This is significant, for it represents a shift against China's interest in limiting international criticism of Myanmar's ruling regime.¹⁶⁷ This change is especially notable because it occurred during the implementation of the BRI framework in 2014. In this specific case, China was either unable or unwilling to marshal enough influence with Egypt to prevent the international rebuke of a regional partner with which it seeks to deepen ties.¹⁶⁸

Overall, while Egypt's UNGA votes do align with China's in a number of instances, there is simply not enough evidence to support the assertion that China has influenced Egypt at a level high enough for Egypt to be considered a reliable constituent state within multilateral institutions that will consistently vote to support all issues that the Chinese leadership perceives as important.

2. The Uyghur Issue

While the relationship between China's influence and Egypt's UNGA voting behavior can be described as inconclusive, there is no ambiguity with regards to Egypt's response to the Chinese government's repression of its Uyghur minority. Simply put, Egyptian leaders have not only proffered rhetorical platitudes on the international stage, but have also actively assisted Beijing's efforts by deporting individual Uyghurs to China for internment. Evidence suggests, therefore, that China's influence, combined with other

¹⁶⁷ Charlotte Gao, "On Rohingya Issue, Both China and India Back Myanmar Government," *The Diplomat*, September 13, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/on-rohingya-issue-both-china-and-india-back-myanmar-government/>.

¹⁶⁸ Marvin C. Ott, "Myanmar in China's Embrace," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/01/myanmar-in-chinas-embrace/>.

internal motivators, has directly contributed to the Egyptian government's willingness to support and utilize repressive measures to directly support Chinese interests.

A survey of popular media sources and government documents shows that prior to China's formal initiation of the BRI in Egypt in 2014, there were few journalistic mentions of or governmental actions taken against Muslim Uyghurs residing in Egypt. This situation changed, however, after Beijing's crackdown began in mainland China in 2014. By July 2017, the Egyptian government had initiated a months-long campaign that resulted in the deportation of 22 Uyghurs to China and indefinite detention of more than 200 others.¹⁶⁹ Most of these individuals had been in Cairo studying at the well-known Islamic scholarly institution, Al-Azhar.¹⁷⁰ In addition to deporting and detaining these individuals, who were labeled "terrorists," Egyptian authorities also conducted interrogations at the behest of the Chinese government.¹⁷¹ Many of these encounters were described as harsh and intrusive.¹⁷² This is direct evidence that Egyptian leaders have acted at the behest of the Chinese government on this particular issue.

These actions are demonstrative of Egypt's rhetorical support for China's actions in international arenas. Indeed, when one takes into account the Egyptian government's aforementioned activities, it is unsurprising that, in the divide between the dueling letters that were submitted to the president of the UNHRC in July 2019, Egypt came down firmly

¹⁶⁹ Nour Youssef, "Egyptian Police Detain Uighurs and Deport Them to China," *The New York Times*, July 6, 2017, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/world/asia/egypt-muslims-uighurs-deportations-xinjiang-china.html>.

¹⁷⁰ "Item 4 Oral Statement Regarding Detained Uyghur Students in Egypt," World Uyghur Congress, September 21, 2017, <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/item-4-oral-statement-regarding-detained-uyghur-students-in-egypt/>.

¹⁷¹ Areeb Ullah, "Egypt Aided Chinese Officials to Detain and 'Interrogate' Uighur Students," *Middle East Eye*, August 18, 2019, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-aided-chinese-officials-detain-and-interrogate-uighur-students-report>.

¹⁷² "Nearly 20 Uyghur Students Unaccounted for Four Months After Egypt Raids," Radio Free Asia, accessed July 31, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/students-10302017162612.html>.

on the side that supported Beijing's actions in Xinjiang.¹⁷³ The sentiments and motivations behind this support appear to be lasting, as Egypt repeated its actions by refusing to join the 39 other countries that once again condemned China over this issue in October 2020.¹⁷⁴ Instead, the Egyptian delegation united with 44 other countries in releasing a statement that praised China for its "openness and transparency" as it seeks to "protect human rights" and "safeguard the human rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang."¹⁷⁵

It must be noted that some scholars have highlighted a number of domestic factors that would motivate the Egyptian national leadership to lean towards being permissive or supportive of Uyghur oppression. These include the regionally-widespread fear of political Islam (to which Egypt is especially sensitive to in the wake of the Arab Spring), a desire to limit the spread of separatist movements, and a general concurrence with China on upholding principles of noninterference within national borders.¹⁷⁶ Overall, though, China's significance to the Egyptian government's desire for economic growth and development cannot be overlooked in any analysis of Cairo's responses to the Uyghur issue. It stands to reason, then, that China's economic involvement has induced a shift in Egyptian political behavior.

¹⁷³ United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Letter Dated 12 July 2019 from the Representatives of Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Comoros, the Congo, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkmenistan, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the State of Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva Addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council.*

¹⁷⁴ "Statement by Ambassador Christoph Heusgen on Behalf of 39 Countries in the Third Committee General Debate, October 6, 2020," Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations, October 6, 2020, <https://new-york-un.diplo.de/un-en/news-corner/201006-heusgen-china/2402648>.

¹⁷⁵ "Third Committee, 3rd Meeting – General Assembly, 75th Session," United Nations Web TV, accessed November 28, 2020, <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/general-assembly/main-committees/3rd-committee/watch/third-committee-3rd-meeting-general-assembly-75th-session/6198110488001/?term=>; Catherine Putz, "2020 Edition: Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?," accessed November 28, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>.

¹⁷⁶ Hassanein.

3. Bilateral Relations with the United States

According to the central hypothesis of this thesis, one of the indicators of the effects of China's engagement with the countries that it is economically involved with is a reduced reliance on the United States, which is perceived to be in relative decline. If this assertion holds, then one would expect to see an observable degradation in the security relationship between the U.S. and Egypt. Put differently, is Egypt building ties with one power at the expense of another?

Evidence from arms sales data suggests that Egypt is indeed weakening its security relationship with the U.S. The value of arms sales and transfers between the two countries have been steadily declining since their peak in the early 1990s (see Figure 7).

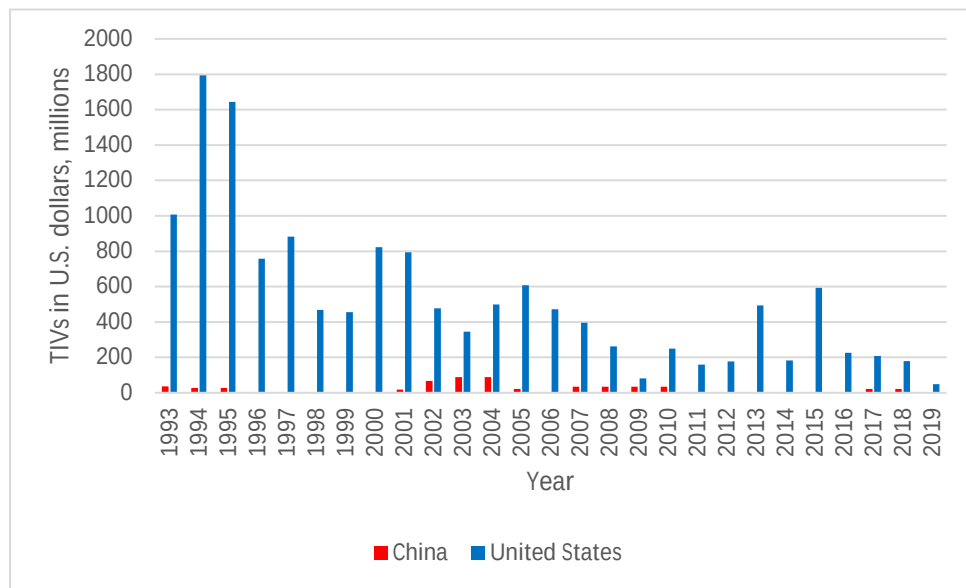


Figure 7. SIPRI TIVs of Official Arms Exports to Egypt, 1993–2019¹⁷⁷

During the period between 1993 and 2000, the annual value of arms transactions between the two countries averaged \$979 million. This value decreased to \$418.5 million per year during the decade between 2001 and 2010, and sank even further to \$251.9 million per year during the decade between 2011 and 2020. Although nominal, these figures

¹⁷⁷ Adapted from “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.”

nonetheless represent a negative direction in terms of transactions. U.S. policy initiatives resulting from American criticism of Egypt's democratization and human rights record partly explain this trend.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps more impactful, though, is the increasing willingness in Egypt's leadership to seek out alternative sources for arms in its own right. This dynamic is especially apparent as it relates to Russia and France over the past decade (see Figure 8).

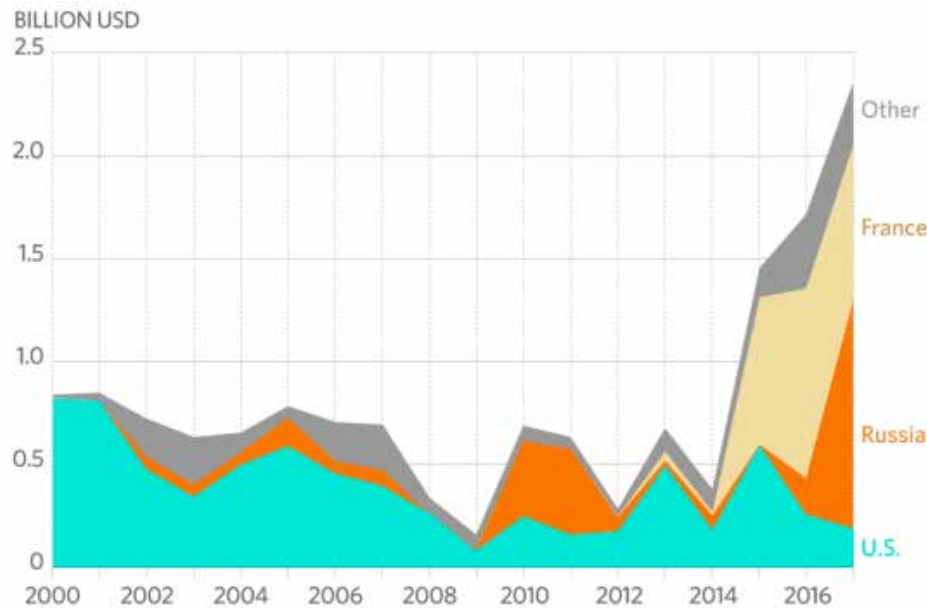


Figure 8. Sources of Egyptian Arms Purchases, 2000–2016¹⁷⁹

Overall, it should be appreciated that Egypt is diversifying its sources of arms. This phenomenon may not be caused by any one country in particular, but it does signal that Egypt is generally moving away from the U.S. and towards other powers that are viewed as more willing to satisfy Egyptian needs. One area in which Egypt has expanded relations with China is purchases of unmanned aerial vehicles,¹⁸⁰ an area in which China faces little

¹⁷⁸ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33003 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 24.

¹⁷⁹ Source: Sharp, 19.

¹⁸⁰ Phillip C. Saunders, "China's Global Military-Security Interactions," in *China & the World*, ed. David Shambaugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 200–201.

competition due to treaty restrictions in other countries.¹⁸¹ In a broader sense, Egypt's increasing reliance on other states for arms can be interpreted as a logical response to growing perceptions of American withdrawal from the region. These dynamics, combined with increased Chinese engagement in other spheres, generally do not bode well for the advancement of U.S. interests in the future if those interests are perceived by partner states as antithetical to those of a more active and involved PRC.

Changes in the frequency of diplomatic visits between the Egyptian head of state and American senior leaders also signal the fact that the U.S.-Egypt relationship may be weakening. During the period between 1993 and 2013, the president of Egypt averaged .83 visits to Washington, D.C., per year. This figure dropped to .57 visits per year during period between 2014 and 2020.¹⁸² Of the latter set of visits, only one visit was with the sitting U.S. president.¹⁸³ The number of visits by American officials to Cairo have declined correspondingly. The U.S. secretary of state averaged 2.38 visits per year between 1993 and 2013, but only 1.42 visits between 2014 and 2020.¹⁸⁴ The president of the United States, meanwhile, averaged .38 visits per year between 1993 and 2013, but travelled to Cairo zero times between 2014 and 2020.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, an American president has not made a visit to the Egyptian capital since President Obama's visit early in his first term in 2009.¹⁸⁶ By contrast, the Chinese president or premier has met with the Egyptian head of state at least once every year over the same time period.¹⁸⁷ While Egypt's political

¹⁸¹ Department of Defense, *Assessment on U.S. Defense Implications of China's Expanding Global Access* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/14/2002079292/-1/-1/1/expanding-global-access-report-final.pdf>.

¹⁸² "Visits by Foreign Leaders of Egypt," United States Department of State – Office of the Historian, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/visits/egypt>.

¹⁸³ "Visits by Foreign Leaders of Egypt."

¹⁸⁴ "Travels of the Secretary of State – Egypt," United States Department of State – Office of the Historian, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/secretary/egypt>.

¹⁸⁵ "Travels of the President – Egypt," United States Department of State – Office of the Historian, accessed January 8, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/egypt>.

¹⁸⁶ "Travels of the President – Egypt."

¹⁸⁷ "Activities (Egypt)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed January 8, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2813_663616/2815_663620/default.shtml.

relationship with the U.S. has been on a downward trend, its diplomatic relations with the PRC appear to have only improved. Evidence suggests that these stronger ties are undergirded Egypt's BRI participation and China's broader engagement with the Arab Republic.

D. CONCLUSION

The case of Egypt demonstrates the geopolitical potential inherent in China's Belt and Road Initiative. While the BRI has not induced a wholesale transformation in Egyptian political behavior in certain multilateral arenas (specifically as it relates to other issues that interest China), it has served as a basis of influence for shaping perceptions of and reactions to China's actions both inside and outside the bounds of institutions. It is also apparent that this influence is correlated with a weakening of the contemporary U.S.-Egypt relationship.

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IV. CHINA AND JORDAN

The People's Republic of China's strategic and economic ties with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan can best be characterized as being friendly and growing, but still relatively weak. While there have been numerous pronouncements that have hailed the "fruitful results" of Chinese-Jordanian cooperation,¹⁸⁸ these developments have been less significant than those that define China's relations with other countries in the Middle East, to include Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Jordan, in turn, has historically been more dependent on partners other than China to help ensure its economic and military security. It is thus unsurprising that the collective Jordanian response to Chinese political and diplomatic initiatives has been mixed, at best, and does not wholly conform to Chinese aims. In this case, evidence suggests that lower levels of Chinese economic activity in terms of trade, infrastructure investment, or oil demand result in a less robust diplomatic response from partner countries.

A. BACKGROUND

Established by European colonial powers in the aftermath of World War I, Jordan is a small state whose identity has traditionally been defined by a combination of the British-imposed Hashemite monarchy, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the ensuing migrations and integration of the Palestinian peoples into the Jordanian population and economy.¹⁸⁹ The effects of this history has unsurprisingly resulted in a foreign policy outlook that is centered on the events that arise from the Palestinian issue and other sources of potential instability in the Levant (e.g., the Arab Spring). While Jordan does have strong relations with the great powers (the most notable of these being its relationship with the United States), relationships with states that lay farther afield and have had little involvement in the Middle East peace processes or security environment have been of lesser importance. It is thus unsurprising that, with the exception of Jordan's diplomatic

¹⁸⁸ "Chinese Ambassador Hails China-Jordan Ties, Expects More Cooperation," *Xinhua*, September 29, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/26/c_138425587.htm.

¹⁸⁹ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33546 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 2.

recognition of the People's Republic in 1977,¹⁹⁰ the historical relationship between China and Jordan lacks much substance. Indeed, from a methodological perspective, little scholarly research and analysis that concern contemporary Sino-Jordanian ties exist. The analyses that are present in the scholarly literature are usually only components of broader studies that focus on the Middle East as a whole or the Levant (Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria) in particular. This indicates that these relations are relatively insubstantial in the broader Sino-Middle Eastern hierarchy of relationships.

In terms of overall ties, Jordan signed a strategic partnership agreement with China in 2015. While on the surface this may appear substantial, it should be appreciated that such agreements codify little more than an intention to “coordinate more closely on regional and international affairs”¹⁹¹; they do not signal membership in China's BRI or any other related framework. Additionally, China has committed to either a Strategic Partnership or a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with virtually every country in the Arab world (the only expectations being the war-torn countries of Yemen and Syria).¹⁹² In this sense, then, Jordanian intentions to enhance cooperation with the PRC are not unique, and have thus far not proven to be significant in any observable sense.

In the contemporary context, hard data shows that even though Jordan remains a small country with few natural resources and a multitude of ethnic and demographic challenges, it has not taken steps to increase its reliance on China. It is instead still heavily dependent on aid from outside Western and Arab sources, with support from the United States and Saudi Arabia being most conspicuous.¹⁹³ Jordan's challenges lead it to seek development and trade with the rest of the world, dynamics that its leaders hope will help grow the Jordanian economy, which is all the more important in the aftermath of an

¹⁹⁰ “China, Jordan Mark 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Ties,” *Xinhua*, April 3, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/03/c_136179069.htm.

¹⁹¹ Fulton, 3.

¹⁹² Fulton, 18.

¹⁹³ Sharp, *Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations*, 1.

extended period of slow GDP growth.¹⁹⁴ In spite of this, Jordan’s economic relationship with China, while growing, does not appear to be a catalyzing factor in Middle East relations.

B. TRADE RELATIONSHIPS

It should be noted from the outset that Jordan’s economic relationship with China is not nonexistent. Observable levels of trade between China and Jordan exist, and this means of association has been important to Jordan’s economy for a number of years. During the period between 1995 and 2018, China accounted for 9.78% of Jordan’s \$328 billion of imports, which made China Jordan’s second largest trading partner in terms of imports. As of 2018,¹⁹⁵ China still represents the second-largest source of Jordan’s roughly \$22.3 billion of annual imports. This value is reflective of the growing levels of Jordanian imports from China overall; between 1995 and 2018, imports from China as a percentage of Jordan’s total imports increased more than fivefold (see Figure 9).

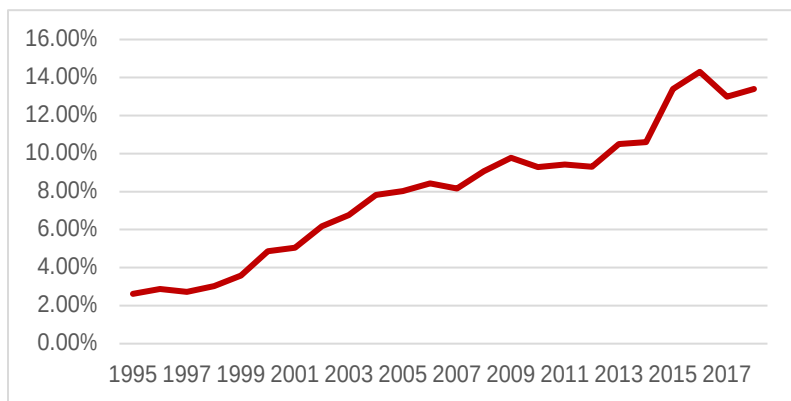


Figure 9. Percentage of Jordanian Imports Originating in China, 1995–2017¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ “Jordan GDP Annual Growth Rate (1993-2020 Data),” Trading Economics, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/jordan/gdp-growth-annual>; “Jordan Overview,” World Bank, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>.

¹⁹⁵ 2018 is the most recent year for which this trade data was available at the time of writing.

¹⁹⁶ Adapted from “Trade Data.”

With that being said, it should be appreciated that, while Jordan’s imports from China have increased over time, these increases have been at a rate roughly consonant with the growth of Jordan’s imports from other states, especially Saudi Arabia. This suggests that in terms of sources of imports as a component of economic stability and growth, Jordan’s primary reliance is on regional partners (rather than outside powers). Evidence of this dynamic can be observed in the case of the Jordanian reaction to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. After the American-led coalition deposed Saddam Hussein’s regime and the economy of Iraq (which up until that point had been Jordan’s primary trading partner¹⁹⁷) subsequently collapsed, Jordan responded by significantly increasing trade with Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the rate of growth in trade with China remained relatively unchanged from that which preceded 2003 (see Figure 10).

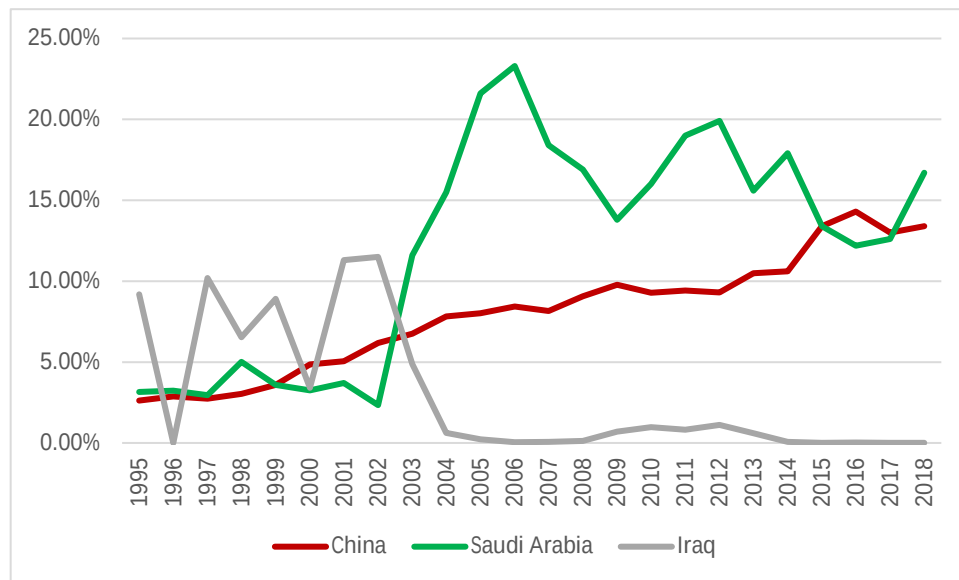


Figure 10. Percentage of Jordanian Imports Originating in China, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, 1995–2018¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ David Schenker, *Dancing with Saddam: The Strategic Tango of Jordanian-Iraqi Relations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 29–31.

¹⁹⁸ Adapted from “Trade Data.”

The apparent disparity between trade with China and trade with other powers can also be observed in an analysis of Jordan's export relationships. In these terms, China can be seen as a minor destination for Jordanian exports. Indeed, in comparison to Jordan's four largest partners in this category (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, India, and the United States), China lags far behind. Since 1995, there has not been a single year in which exports to China exceeded 5% of Jordan's total exports, whereas the other aforementioned partners have received an average of 9%, 13%, 11%, and 20% of Jordan's exports, respectively (see Figure 11).¹⁹⁹ Accordingly, China's resources and demand do play roles in Jordan's economic growth, but they are not as prevalent or influential as those of other Jordanian partners.

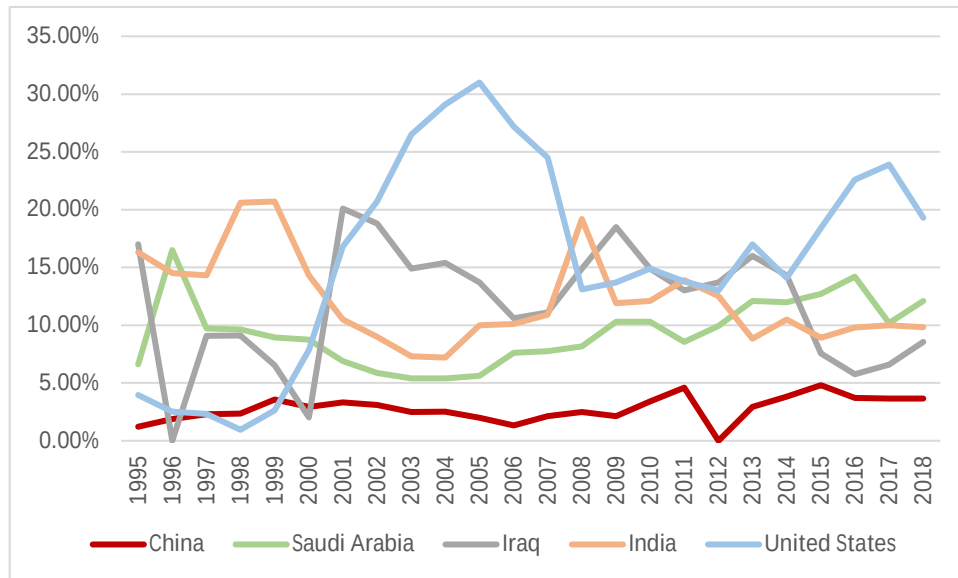


Figure 11. Percentage of Total Jordanian Exports Based on Destination, 1995–2018²⁰⁰

From a wider perspective, Jordan's relatively low levels of trade with China are consistently with a broader trend: the declining role of trade in the Jordanian economy.

¹⁹⁹ "International Trade Statistics Database," United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://comtrade.un.org/>.

²⁰⁰ Adapted from "Trade Data."

Trade as a percentage of Jordanian GDP declined from 130.5% in 1993 to 86.3% by 2019.²⁰¹ As trade has become less integral to Jordan's economy, there is less space for Chinese engagement and influence on these terms.

Part of the explanation for the aforementioned dynamics is the fact that Jordan has few natural resources (e.g., petroleum). Indeed, according to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, there have not been any reportable levels of crude petroleum exports that originated from Jordan within the past three decades.²⁰² This means that Jordan is less susceptible to the negative forces of the "resource curse" that appear to afflict other countries in the MENA region. Correspondingly, Jordan's lack of petroleum resources means that relations with Jordan are less important to Chinese leaders, who have thus far prized economic ties with resource-rich states.²⁰³ It is evident, then, that neither trade with or resource demand from China is a significant factor in the Jordanian economic environment.

C. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

In addition to trade, leaders from both China and Jordan have expressed interest in having the Hashemite Kingdom sign on to China's expansive BRI. Imad Fakhoury, Jordan's Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, has proclaimed that "Jordan will greatly benefit from the [Belt and Road Initiative] due to the kingdom's strategic location in the region connecting three continents."²⁰⁴ Chinese leaders have mirrored this optimism, with Pan Weifang, the Chinese ambassador to Jordan, noting in 2017 that "China is highly interested in boosting relations with Jordan and [these] ties are witnessing a

²⁰¹ "Trade (% of GDP) – Jordan," World Bank, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?end=2019&locations=JO&start=1993>.

²⁰² "International Trade Statistics Database."

²⁰³ Economy and Levi.

²⁰⁴ "China's B&R Initiative Brings Promising Opportunities to Jordan: Minister," *Xinhua*, May 17, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/17/c_137184315.htm.

growing progress on all fronts.”²⁰⁵ This language has been echoed more recently by Xie Yuan, the vice president of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, who asserts that China is “seeking to strengthen [its] ties with Jordan” through initiatives such as the BRI.²⁰⁶ This statement is particularly noteworthy, for it is unlikely that the leader of the CCP-sponsored organization tasked with cultivating foreign partnerships to enhance China’s image on the international stage would communicate in ways that contradict the Party.²⁰⁷ In terms of rhetoric, bilateral support for China’s engagement with Jordan and the greater Middle East as a provider of infrastructure development and investment funding is strong, even if ambiguously worded.

In some senses, this is not surprising, for Jordan, like other countries in the region, has placed an emphasis on national economic regeneration. This is evidenced by the Kingdom’s Jordan 2025 plan.²⁰⁸ Similar to Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 initiative, Jordan 2025 seeks develop a new comprehensive framework that, according to its guiding documents, improves governance, spurs economic and social innovation, and more generally “[provides] opportunities for all.”²⁰⁹ One of the biggest components of this is “enhancing the Kingdom’s energy, water, and food security” and its “position as a hub for regional commerce” by investing in “long-term infrastructure mega-projects.”²¹⁰ From this perspective, then, the rhetorical enthusiasm for Chinese investment and Jordan’s inclusion in the framework of the BRI is not surprising. For the Jordanian leadership,

²⁰⁵ Mohammad Ghazal, “China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative to Benefit Jordan — Ambassador,” *Jordan Times*, November 13, 2017, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/china%E2%80%99s-one-belt-one-road-initiative-benefit-jordan-%E2%80%94-ambassador>.

²⁰⁶ Mohammad Ghazal, “China Keen on Increasing Ties, Partnerships with Jordan,” *Jordan Times*, April 15, 2019, <http://jordantimes.com/news/local/china-keen-increasing-ties-partnerships-jordan-%E2%80%94-association>.

²⁰⁷ “Remarks by Our President,” Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, accessed January 30, 2021, https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/xiehui_list/cate/11/lang/2.html.

²⁰⁸ Arhama Siddiq, “The Rise of the Middle Kingdom in the Middle East: China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” *Middle East Monitor*, August 7, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200807-the-rise-of-the-middle-kingdom-in-the-middle-east-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

²⁰⁹ “Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy” (Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, April 9, 2018), 13, <http://jordanembassyus.org/sites/default/files/jo2025part1.pdf>.

²¹⁰ “Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy,” 44.

China's economic involvement can potentially bolster the ruling regime's legitimacy and ensure domestic stability.

With that being said, it must be appreciated that, to date, there have not been any projects that fall under the official umbrella of the BRI initiated within Jordan's borders.²¹¹ Unlike in other countries (such as Egypt), the BRI has thus far been observable only in the rhetoric that surrounds it. Indeed, analysis of the BRI's primary informational web page reveals that Jordan is conspicuously absent from the growing list of countries that have actually signed MOUs, agreements that are widely seen as serving to "substantiate the legitimacy of the initiative."²¹² While the words of high-ranking officials may signal that Jordan will have a significant place in a future Sino-centric order in the Middle East, the actions (or lack thereof) appear to suggest otherwise.

Outside the scope of the BRI, Chinese investments and construction contracts in Jordan represent a fairly insignificant portion of total Chinese investment in the region. According to the AEI's China Global Investment Tracker, the combined value of all ten of the investment and construction contracts agreed to between 2005 and 2020 is \$6.34 billion. While this sum is noticeable, it represents only 0.3% of the total value of the 440 contracts agreed to between China and countries in the MENA region during the same time period.²¹³ Indeed, the value of Chinese investments, specifically, during this period, \$1.8 billion, represents barely 6% of Jordan's \$29.3 billion total inward FDI during this period.²¹⁴ This relatively low level of FDI is representative of a broader trend in Jordan,

²¹¹ John Hurley, Scott Morris, and Gailyn Portelance, "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective," *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 3, no. 1 (June 28, 2019): 12, <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v3i1.1123>.

²¹² "Memorandum of Understanding MoU Under the Belt and Road Initiative," Belt and Road Initiative, November 18, 2018, <https://www.beltroad-initiative.com/memorandum-of-understanding-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

²¹³ "China Global Investment Tracker."

²¹⁴ "Foreign Direct Investment: Inward and Outward Flows and Stock, Annual," United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, accessed January 1, 2021, <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableView/tableView.aspx>.

where total FDI inflows have steadily declined from their high of 25.54% of GDP in 2006 to just 1.86% by 2019.²¹⁵

Another point that highlights the apparent mismatch between words and actions in the Sino-Jordanian relationship is the fact that Jordan and China do not have an active bilateral investment treaty (BIT). While it is true that a BIT between the two countries was signed in 2001, that treaty has never been put into force.²¹⁶ This is particularly noteworthy when one considers the fact that with the exception of Jordan and Iraq, “China has [active] bilateral investment treaties in force with every country in the [Middle East].”²¹⁷ The lack of such a document translates to fewer potential pools of Chinese funding for Jordanian development, as BITs are key sources of securing FDI for developing nations.²¹⁸

In terms of trade and infrastructure, the economic ties between China and Jordan are weak. Still, in the context of China’s engagement with other countries in the region, it is only logical to assess whether China exerts any observable influence on the Jordan’s diplomatic decision-making.

D. JORDANIAN POLITICAL RESPONSES

1. United Nations Voting

The relationship between Jordan’s and China’s voting behaviors on UNGA human rights resolutions provides clues as to whether China has influenced Jordan in the diplomatic arena. In general, there appears to be alignment between the two countries’ votes in specific issues, but this alignment cannot be classified as generalized across the

²¹⁵ “Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (% of GDP) – Jordan,” World Bank, accessed January 30, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?end=2019&locations=JO&start=2005>.

²¹⁶ “International Investment Agreements Navigator: Jordan,” United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment-agreements/countries/106/jordan>.

²¹⁷ Andrew Scobell et al., *At the Dawn of Belt and Road: China in the Developing World* (RAND Corporation, 2018), 160, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2273>.

²¹⁸ Eric Neumayer and Laura Spess, “Do Bilateral Investment Treaties Increase Foreign Direct Investment to Developing Countries?,” *World Development* 33, no. 10 (October 2005): 1567–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.07.001>.

board. As such, this evidence suggests that, in the diplomatic arena, Jordanian support is not a component of a Sino-centric constituency.

With regards to UN votes that address general human rights principles, Jordan has voted “Yes” on resolutions sponsored by China 98% of the time. Moreover, every single one of these resolutions has been opposed by the United States. In this sense, it is evident that a significant degree of overlap exists between Jordan and China with regard to a desire by developing and formerly developing countries to affirm specific ideological principles (such as a “right to food” and the “promotion of a democratic and equitable international order”) that these countries see as being useful. A salient point that must also be considered, though, is the fact that, in response to the sixteen American-sponsored resolutions in this category, Jordan has voted with the U.S. 100% of the time. This fact is notable, for it represents the highest degree of voting alignment between the U.S. and any of the subject countries of this thesis. In these terms, China, even when supported by Jordan in its own resolutions, has thus far not affected Jordan’s response to U.S.-led initiatives.

Jordan’s record of voting on resolutions that pertain to the human rights situations in specific countries is likewise reflective of a relatively low degree of overlap with China’s general positions. Of the four human rights situations that have been consistently voted on in the UNGA since 1996 (Myanmar, Iran, Syria, and North Korea), Jordan has voted in a fashion that mirrors China’s on only one, which is the situation in Iran. In this series of votes, though, it should be noted that Jordan has abstained or not voted 17 of 22 times; its number of “No” votes (four) is significantly less than the 22 “No” votes that China has cast during voting on the same resolutions. Even though Jordan’s votes regarding this issue do not collectively reflect the apparent preference of the U.S. (which voted “Yes” to condemn Iran 22 times), its position cannot be seen as being equivalent to China’s.

Responses to the other aforementioned situations also highlight differences between Jordanian and Chinese voting behavior. Of the four resolutions that address the situation in Syria, Jordan has voted “Yes” four times, while China has consistently voted “No.” The differences in the responses to the resolutions addressing the situations in North Korea and Myanmar are even more telling; while Jordan’s votes were evenly split between abstentions and “Yes” votes up until 2010, their responses in the years afterward were

consecutive “Yes” votes. China, on the other hand, consistently voted “No.” On these specific issues that address situations in states that neighbor China, Jordan has increasingly moved away from the PRC’s stated positions, rather than following China’s lead.

Overall, Jordan has voted the same way as China only nine times of the 78 total resolutions that address specific human rights situations. While a degree of voting similarity does exist, it is apparent in a more general sense that Jordan does not follow China’s lead in the UN. When one considers the relatively low levels of Chinese economic engagement in Jordan, this is not surprising.

2. The Uyghur Issue

The Jordanian response to the Uyghur issue can be characterized as muted, at best. The Jordanian government has typically not taken a strong position on China’s treatment of its Uyghur minority, with a few of the instances in which the Jordanian government has chosen to remain silent and refused to either support or condemn China’s actions being more conspicuous than others. Evidence from both past reactions and more recent developments suggest that, while the Jordanian leadership cannot be counted on to rebuke China’s actions, it also cannot be seen as being outright supportive of the PRC’s handling of Xinjiang.

Jordan is notable in that there have been observable levels of governmental and popular sympathy with the plight of Uyghurs. In 2009, forty Jordanian members of parliament, as Raphael Israeli notes, “submitted a letter to the speaker of the Jordanian Parliament, calling on the government to condemn the events in Xinjiang.”²¹⁹ In this letter, the Islamist party in power requested that the government speak out against “practices against Muslims in Germany and China,” although no official government statement resulted from this.²²⁰ These sentiments extend to more recent times; as recently as 2019, a significant protest was staged in front of the Chinese embassy in Amman to forcefully

²¹⁹ Israeli, 95.

²²⁰ Israeli, 95–96.

speak out against the situation in Xinjiang.²²¹ These happenings suggest that the Jordanian response of China's actions should not be viewed in terms of monolithic support.

Perhaps the most notable of Jordan's actions, however, concerns the response of Jordan's UN delegation to the dueling letters that were submitted to the president of the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019. While Jordan did not sign the initial July 8th letter, which condemned China's practices in Xinjiang,²²² it also apparently declined the opportunity to join the 50 signatories of the second letter, dated July 12th, a document which openly condoned China's actions.²²³ This point is noteworthy, for Jordan is the only majority Arab country in the Middle East whose signature is absent from that document. This piece of evidence demonstrates that Jordan is less willing than other Arab states to openly support China on this issue.

Recent developments appear to confirm this dynamic. Chinese state media reported that, at the ninth China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in July 2020, China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, thanked the foreign ministers of both Saudi Arabia and Jordan for Arab support regarding China's "core-interest issues" (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang).²²⁴ What is most telling, though, is that there are no mentions of these comments being made

²²¹ "Jordan Holds Solidarity Rally with China's Uyghurs," Middle East Monitor, January 2, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200102-jordan-holds-solidarity-rally-with-chinas-uyghurs/>.

²²² United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Letter Dated 8 July 2019 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations Office at Geneva Addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council*.

²²³ United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Letter Dated 12 July 2019 from the Representatives of Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Comoros, the Congo, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkmenistan, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the State of Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva Addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council*.

²²⁴ "China Thanks Jordan, Saudi Arabia for Support on Core-Interests Issues," CGTN, July 5, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-07-05/China-thanks-Jordan-Saudi-Arabia-for-support-on-critical-issues--RRUmWZaklq/index.html>; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020), 353.

specifically to Jordan's foreign minister, as they apparently had been to the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia. Further, there is no record in either Chinese or Jordanian media of the Jordanian foreign minister's response to this praise. The fact that such a significant development cannot be independently verified through means other than those sponsored by the Chinese government undermines the legitimacy of this claimed source of Arab support.

The lack of open praise for China is notable, especially when juxtaposed against the collective support and enthusiasm of other Arab nations on this issue. While this evidence does not indicate that Jordan will forcefully speak out against China in the near term, it does suggest that Jordanian leaders are less motivated than leaders of the countries that have more substantial Chinese economic involvement to speak out in active support of China on this issue.

3. Bilateral Relations with the U.S.

If the central argument of this thesis holds, then China's limited involvement is not expected to have negatively impacted the bilateral relationship between Jordan and the United States. Indeed, as the data gathered from Jordanian arms transactions and certain forms of diplomatic activity with the U.S. between 1993 and 2019 demonstrate, U.S.-Jordanian ties are on anything but downward trends.

Arms sales show that the relationship between Washington and Amman remains relatively strong. In terms of SIPRI-calculated TIVs, the annual value of sales originating in the U.S. between 1993 and 2019 have averaged roughly \$50 million. This is almost six times the value of arms sales between Jordan and China during the same time period. It is evident that the U.S. has been and is Jordan's primary partner; while roughly 17% of Jordan's arms deals during this period came from the U.S, less than 1% was with China. Indeed, in both relative and absolute terms, this trend has only strengthened over time (See Figure 12).

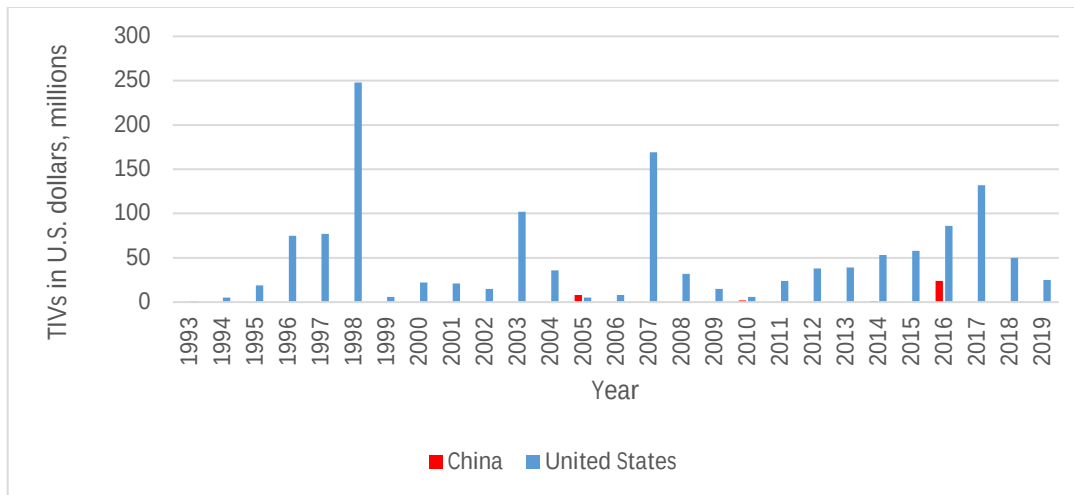


Figure 12. SIPRI TIVs of Official Arms Exports to Jordan, 1993–2019²²⁵

The value of U.S.-Jordan transactions, which averaged roughly \$56 million per year between 1993 and 2000, grew to more than \$150 between 2001 and 2010, and further increased to \$202 million during the most recent period between 2011 and 2019. Even as China’s economic presence in the broader Middle East grows, Jordan continues to strengthen its relationship with its primary security partner, the United States.

The frequency of diplomatic visits has also remained high. According to the United States Department of State, the two kings of Jordan during this time period, Hussein and Abdullah II, visited the U.S. for working visits with the U.S. president an average of twice per year; this trend has remained constant over time.²²⁶ Visits by U.S. secretaries of state to Jordan have likewise been consistent, with the average number of visits per year standing at 1.75, 1.4 and, and 1.77 for the periods of 1993–2000, 2001–2010, and 2011–2019, respectively.²²⁷ As expected, this evidence suggests that Jordan has taken few, if any, steps to minimize its diplomatic relationship with the U.S.

²²⁵ Adapted from “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.”

²²⁶ “Visits by Foreign Leaders of Jordan,” United States Department of State – Office of the Historian, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/visits/jordan>.

²²⁷ “Visits by Secretaries of State to Jordan,” United States Department of State – Office of the Historian, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/secretary/jordan>.

E. CONCLUSION

As expected in this control case, China's lack of economic engagement with of Jordan is correlated with relatively weak diplomatic ties and a lack of outright support for the PRC's actions in Xinjiang. Additionally, even as China's influence has grown in the Middle East between 1993 and the present day, Jordan has taken few discernible steps to weaken its partnership with the United States. In sum, China's influence has had little effect on Jordan's political actions.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the political and diplomatic ramifications of China's drive to expand its economic footprint in the MENA region. It began with a discussion of the significance of this dynamic, primarily as it relates to the increasing significance of great power competition in the scholarly and policymaking communities. A review of the related academic literature identified foci on, first, the possible motivations for China's economic expansion into the MENA regions, including a desire to alter or transform certain elements the contemporary international order; second, the forms of China's economic activity in the region; and, third, the effects of this activity on the political behavior of China's economic partner states.

In order to answer the research question, I employed a comparative case study method, examining three MENA states with differing economic relationships with the PRC. The first case was Saudi Arabia, whose economic relationship with China is primarily based on the latter's petroleum demand and energy security concerns. The second case was Egypt, whose contemporary relations with China are defined by infrastructure development and BRI investment. The third case was Jordan; as a state with relatively weak economic ties with China, it served as the control in my analysis.

For each case, I outlined the forms and extent of China's economic activities in the given country since 1993, the year of China's emergence as a net energy importer. I then analyzed each country's voting history related to UNGA resolutions concerning human rights, governmental perceptions of and responses to the Chinese government's actions in Xinjiang, and relative changes in its strategic and diplomatic partnership with the United States during the period between 1993 and the present.

A. FINDINGS

Based on the evidence gathered through the aforementioned analyses, this thesis finds support for the main hypothesis; that is, that China has been successful in using its influence and the forms of economic engagement that undergird it to build political support for specific actions (see Table 1). However, these effects are not universal.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

	Increasing alignment with China's voting on UNGA human rights resolutions	Favorable response to China's repression of Uyghurs	Weakened security and political partnership with the U.S.
Saudi Arabia		ü	
Egypt		ü	ü
Jordan			

An analysis of the selected MENA states' voting patterns in relation to UNGA resolutions that address human rights reveals that there have been no discernible shifts in voting behavior to better align with the PRC's preferences, in any of the three cases. As such, this thesis finds little evidence indicating that partner states are bandwagoning with China to create constituencies that universally or consistently support the CCP's positions on human rights situations that occur outside of China's borders.

This thesis does, however, find strong evidence that China's economic engagement has influenced certain MENA states' responses to the CCP's treatment of its Uyghur minority in Xinjiang Province. The governments of Arab, majority-Muslim states that have had high levels of engagement with China on the basis of the petroleum trade or infrastructure development and investment are more likely to display behaviors that align with China's visions of human rights within its borders. Not only do these states proffer rhetorical platitudes supporting China's oppressive actions against another population of Sunni Muslims that have thus far posed little threat to the stability of MENA regimes, but they also bolster China's credibility on the international stage, and, in Egypt's case, actively assist China with implementing initiatives ways that contravene human rights norms within the liberal international order. This phenomenon stands in stark contrast to the relative lack of supporting actions from Jordan, a MENA state with a lighter Chinese economic footprint. The variation between the responses of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, on the one hand, and Jordan, on the other, suggests that economic engagement is linked with political responses for this indicator.

On a broader scale, this evidence indicates that the amplification of domestic factors in certain MENA states that contribute toward a more permissive environment for authoritarianism, such as the Egyptian regime's concern with internal stability, serves some of China's key interests. While Beijing has been unable to or uninterested in influencing partners to consistently support international initiatives that address human rights situations outside of China, it has been effective in building support for a prominent action of *its* regime specifically.

The third indicator, the trend in each state's security and political partnership with the U.S, provides some evidence that China's economic engagement is increasing its influence in the region. The thesis finds little evidence that either Saudi Arabia or Jordan are weakening their reliance on the U.S., the great power that has exerted the most significant influence in the MENA region over the past several decades. The Egypt case, however, demonstrates that the rising levels of Chinese investments and commitments embodied by the BRI are correlated with decreasing arms sales from the U.S. and declining frequency of visits between high-level American and Egyptian diplomatic officials. This finding suggests that the form of China's regional engagement may matter. The PRC's involvement with partners states on the basis of the BRI has broader effects on partner states' behavior than engagement based primarily on energy purchases.

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The end of the Cold War and the ensuing unipolar moment were marked by the apparent triumph of liberal institutions, the global defense of human rights, and U.S. primacy in many areas of the world, including the Middle East. Key aspects of this era, however, appear to be changing as other great powers gain influence both inside and outside of the institutional framework that defines the contemporary global order. In light of these developments, and this thesis's findings, it would be beneficial to consider the following policy recommendations:

Shift the narrative on American engagement in the Middle East

Traditionally, the United States' involvement in the Middle East has occurred through the sharper edges of hard power. This is best seen in the enduring military presence

that the U.S maintains in the region and the so-called “endless wars”²²⁸ that have ensued in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. The resulting fatigue among the American public has reduced the collective will to engage with partners in the region, in any fashion. Adding to this fatigue is the United States’ reduced reliance on foreign petroleum resources. However, signaling by U.S. officials that either public fatigue or U.S. energy independence presages a withdrawal from the Middle East creates conditions in which other powers, like China, can fill perceived or actual vacuums of influence.

While military tools are a critical part of the American policy toolkit, U.S. policymakers and scholars should place greater emphasis on regional geoeconomics. As China’s BRI demonstrates, governmental leaders in states across the region are enthusiastic about securing commitments for the foreign investment that could improve living conditions within their borders and potentially create the conditions necessary for regime stability. In a similar sense, China’s increasing demand for petroleum resources has encouraged oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia to partner with China, as the revenues from the PRC are integral to their own economic growth. In both cases, the PRC’s interests receive more prominent consideration in the political calculations of these states. A renewed focus on U.S. economic engagement in the MENA region, in the forms of both facilitating infrastructure development and assisting with the transition away from rentierism, would provide the U.S. government with a credible means of countering the influence of other great powers.

Be proactive in defending against human rights abuses

The responses (or lack thereof) from Arab states with strong economic relationships with the PRC to the apparent genocide of Chinese Uyghurs demonstrates that a more active approach may be beneficial in addressing human rights issues in international arenas. Rather than passively waiting for Arab regimes to respond to the situation in Xinjiang on the basis of shared religious and cultural identities in a way that aligns with U.S. interests, the U.S. should instead proactively assume leadership on this issue and those like it,

²²⁸ Andrew J. Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016).

influencing others in the multilateral arenas in which it still has sway. The dueling letters in the UNHRC that addressed the Uyghur situation were notable not only because of the presence of the Arab states who supported China's actions, but also because of the absence of American participation. The low levels of conformity between the voting patterns of these same states and China suggest that gaps still exist between the interests and values of the PRC and those states that it partners with. It is these gaps that American leaders should exploit, using their own tools of economic attraction to promote ideals complementary to American interests in the global arena.

C. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis contributed to the body of academic literature that addresses how great powers may be using regional influence to achieve outcomes with global significance. There are other areas, however, in which this study could be broadened. One area that demands further research is the behavior of partner states in other multilateral venues. How have states reacted to Chinese-led initiatives in other key bodies of the international order, such as the World Health Organization or World Trade Organization? This research could also be further expanded to analyze the behavior of other MENA states, as well as those states that lay outside the Middle East. It would be instructive to assess how China's economic activities impact relations with a variety of nations, as China's rise will have global effects.

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