



## Influence of the United States and China on Middle East Politics of Oil: The Devil in Detail

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### ABSTRACT

*The discourse of present and past evinces that the Middle East due to the bounty of natural resources has been an apple of discord for the world's so-called superpowers as the discovery of oil and gas reserves in the Middle East not only turned its fate but also encountered it with the enslavement of imperia ranking the United States at first. However, employing the 'Power is Power' game, China also stepped forward to play a role in controlling the order of this land and to construct its influential image. China's recent negotiations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) are an important development to pinpoint. Thereby, the debate of this article circulates to inspect the influence of the US and its counterpart China on the Middle East. The article scrutinizes the policies of the US and China towards the Middle East. The scope of this study explores the rivalry between KSA and Iran and highlights the role and discloses the interest of China in setting an unobstructed bridge between these two states.*



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## INTRODUCTION

The phrase "politics of oil" is used to refer Middle Eastern oil relations and politics, which depends on the region's oil-rich resources. In light of the significant influence that these energy resources have on the capitalist contemporary industry, major powers attempt to sway this region based on its energy resources. Through its deceptively friendly relations with the region's rulers or by ostensibly supporting the agendatization of revolutionary schemes and revolutionary agents of these states, the US attempted to take control of this region through a variety of tactics and policies to alter the power dynamics of this region. The Middle East's major rivalries are examined in this research study, along with the US's role in the region essentially concentrates on the conflict between Iran and the KSA. This Article covers China's participation in Middle

Eastern affairs and highlights the significance of Iran for China. This argument critically examines whether China's engagement has impacted the influence of the US in the region after considering other major areas.

### **Iran-Saudi rivalry**

Regional and sectoral hegemony are the foundation of the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

As Saudi Arabia's ties with the US changed and Iran left the US bloc, tensions between these two powers increased. Iran is now isolated from the modern world and governed by clerics as a result of the 1979 revolution (Olimat, 2013). This led to the incorporation of religious clerics in Iran's political system. These two religious nations later came under the thumb of the religious elite, which had the consequence of dividing them along sectoral lines. Subsequently, different blocs begin to exert influence over both of these states (Haider, 2020).

The world's major countries attempted to exert control on one actor in the region, which later became a problem of regional power balance. Saudi Arabia attempted to preserve its power in the Middle East with the help of the United States, and in that case, Russia acquired control over Iran and wanted it to protect its interests in the region with its full support. The aforementioned issues drew the Middle East into various challenges, which, together with Saudi-Iran relations, had an impact on the region (Kerr, 2019).

These two major Middle Eastern powers blame each other on their respective grounds and those of foreign actors in the region. The two major Middle Eastern powers affected each other on different fronts and fought a proxy war. This rivalry engulfed the entire region, from Syria to Yemen (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017). They blacked out the region's various minor actors in order to promote their interests and destabilise each other in a variety of domains, ranging from defence to economic destabilisation of another actor (Goldthau, 2019). One actor attempted to disrupt the peace by destabilising defence and national security, while another tried to isolate his adversary from other lands and place it in an awkward situation of economic default. These kinds of proxy battles in the Middle East have harmed the region's stability and growth. The biggest impact of this instability in the Middle East is the global community's oil price problem and the whole world is facing an upsurge in commodity inflation. Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of acting as a representative of the American lobby in the region and defending American interests by pursuing a hostile policy towards Iran. These disputes increase security problems.

### **Declining US Influence in the Middle East**

After Britain's declining influence in the entire world, the US has maintained its influence in the Middle East for a significant portion of its history. The US took an internationalist attitude. The US absorbed the areas under the tutelage of Britain into its own influence, including the Middle East and particularly the Palestine-Israel conflict. Over time, they remained friendly with all of the key actors in the region, notably Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia (Liu, 2020).

It had a close relationship with Iran and the Shah of Iran protected most of its interests in the area. Iran served as the US's stand-in state in the region when the Shah of Iran was in power. The US even took part in the overthrow of the Iranian Shah and is held responsible for it. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, when the religious elite took the leadership of Iran, relations between

the two nations were hostile. Later, the state that served as a proxy for the US turned against it in the region (Al-Shboul, 2020).

With the exception of the Arab-Israel War, in which the US sided with Israel, relations between Saudi Arabia and the US were largely cordial and Saudi Arabia's reprisal in the form of an oil crisis for the US and the rest of the West was the result. The relationship of trust between the two countries has been ever more powerful since the Iranian revelation in 1979. The US's principal ally in the region was Saudi Arabia. There have been numerous agreements between these states in the fields of energy and defense (Zange, 2016).

Saudi Arabia supplied the US with a significant amount of its oil requirements, and in exchange, the US assisted Saudi Arabia in strengthening its defensive capabilities. Saudi Arabia was an important contributor to the US defense industry and the biggest consumer of US military hardware. On the other side, the US offered Saudi Arabia security against its adversaries in Yemen and Iran. Strong bilateral ties have existed between the two nations (Gause, 2019).

### **Jamal Khashoggi's assassination**

The recent major stalemate in relations between the two nations after the murder of a Saudi journalist with US citizenship in Turkey. The grisly murder of a journalist grabbed greater attention and made news in the US and other western nations (Leonard Binder, 1980).

Following this homicide, the US was forced to act due to pressure from the local and international media. President Joe Biden of the Democratic Party promised his people and human rights activists that the CIA report on the murder of Saudi journalists would be made public. After President Biden assumed the oath of office, he released this report, and relations between the two nations deteriorated as a result of the discovery that the Saudi De Facto ruler had a hand in the killing of Jamal in Turkey for making damaging remarks about the Saudi ruling elite (Khuri, 2015).

### **China's Middle Eastern involvement**

Like all industrialized nations, China needed energy from the Middle East to fulfill its needs. China established friendly and warm relationships with the Middle Eastern nations. China and Arabia have had trading relations dating back to the ancient era until the modern period (Ahreri, 2001).

Following Iranian relations in 1979, there was a major shift in China's relationships with the Middle East. Raza Pehlawi was ousted from power and the state was taken over by the clergy leader Khomeini. Iran's diplomatic ties were severed by the United States and its allies in the West. In an effort to establish diplomatic ties with Iran, China evolved into a significant power (Tsourapas, 2020).

China signed substantial trade agreements with Iran and started using a significant amount of Iranian oil for its energy needs. By keeping its links with Iran while gradually building up its trading and economic ties with Saudi Arabia, China was able to rescue Iran from both diplomatic and economic isolation. The key driving force behind Saudi Arabia's partnership with China was the latter's need for all the energy required to meet its intersecting energy demands. Saudi Arabia

never thought China as a political or strategic ally like the US; instead, it focused primarily on maintaining its tight political and strategic ties with the US (Arham, 2019).

### **Iranian-Chinese relations**

The diplomatic relations between China and Iran were first established in 1971, when both countries boasted close relations with the US. After the Iranian revolution, which was orchestrated by the religious establishment, was sanctioned by the US and cut off politically and economically from the rest of the world, those links received a significant boost. This provided China with a chance to establish its influence in Iran (Iqbal, 2019).

When Beijing made major investments in its economic structure, it established links with Iran. At a crucial juncture, China perceived a chance to bolster its ties with Iran and gave them a major boost in the form of trade (Olimat, 2016).

While Chairman Mao led the country's transformation following the Communist revolution in 1949. China was fighting for diplomatic recognition in the prevailing international system. After the communist revolution, it fought for acceptance in several global entities (SU, 2020). In the hypothetical situation, Iran was seeking new trading partners and diplomatic friends to replace the US and its western allies after the fundamentalists seized power. The two revolutionary powers collaborated for the sake of their mutual interests. China evolved and became an important partner for Iran by safeguarding its economic and strategic interests. For the sake of advancing their respective interests, the two states engaged in multiple trade and commercial deals. (Halliday, 2019).

### **How Iran and China relied on one another**

China was Iran's main source of assistance in overcoming its grave crisis. It intended to carry on along the "Silk route" into the Strait of Hormuz. Iran emerged as a key player in China's historical policy of linking itself to western Europe. Iran received a significant boost from China, which enabled Iran to break out of its isolation and become a friend in need. Iran, on the other hand, needs significant foreign trade and investment partners to maintain its economic sustainability at this vital juncture in its history.

China assisted Iran with strategic and political strength in the key areas of its life in exchange for Iran trading its natural energy resources. Therefore, in this situation, the two states maintained one another's interests in the global political setting of their respective political situations. The two countries have cooperated in a wide range of areas, including energy, technology sharing, and strategic aid in the event of an external threat or aggression against either of the countries (Gause, 2019).

The Middle East has evolved over time, taking on multiple important functions and changing the political landscape of the international system. The US initially lost an important partner in the region in 1979, and later, in more recent times, its unstable relations with Riyadh have weakened Washington's influence in the majority of the Middle East (Ramazani, 1999).

While expanding its economic and trade ties with Middle Eastern nations, China has emerged as the US's main political rival and trade competitor in the region. The US, an influential capitalist state, is facing a challenge from China as a major power that challenges its hegemony in

numerous parts of the world. China is playing an essential role in upholding the prevailing global order while limiting US hegemony across multiple areas.

China has never thrown up its opportunity to forge lasting relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia that it believes are worthy of their respective economic contributions. These variables never displayed any signs of aggression and experienced difficulties establishing these relationships. While China was not actively involved in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two growing powers of the region, retained close relations with China. The security and peace of this energy-rich region were not imminent danger by China (Liangxiang, 2005).

### **China as Mediator**

By fostering interdependence, which was the US policy following the Second World War by linking Western Europe with the US economy, China gained influence over Iran's important policy decisions. After the US, China emerged as the dominant force in the region. Saudi Arabia, the second-largest balancing and competing force after Iran, was another country with which China cultivated economic and trade links. This was the element that the US, an impartial force in the area, was missing following the Iranian revolution. The two dominant forces in the region maintained these friendly ties with China and never saw any actual threat to their existence (Norouzi, 2020).

The US's presence in the region lacked the ability to strike a balance among the major nations in the region. The US kept its ties with one of the rival parties and backed its stand against Iran. After King Reza Pehlovi, the US never made an effort to foster better relations with the established religious authority (Schihor, 1999).

Iran was forced to look for a greater competitor than the United States. Beijing and Moscow were the other possibilities available to Iran. Iran kept its strategic ties with Russia and concluded many defense agreements; however, it also found a new partner in the form of China as a massive consumer market for oil reserves (Fawcett, 2016).

On the other hand, China maintained its policy of free trade with all countries in the Middle East. It made use of its lack of meddling in the Middle East. Long-standing economic ties with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and China's influence over Iran have made it an effective force for ushering out peace in the Arab world. China served as a mediator for the antagonistic Arab world. This end to the Arab world's standstill served as an important boost for the execution of Chinese foreign policy (Tsourapas, 2013).

### **Chinese soft power initiatives**

China is adopting the United States' strategy to further its objectives of "Free Trade" across the globe. China is attempting to look into its commercial relations and its position of not interfering in international affairs. China's policy of tying nations together through the Belt and Road initiative has boosted the image of China around the world (Goldthau, 2019).

China is pursuing its objective of a world free from conflicts and open to international trade. The growth of an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is mediated through trade relations. This significant accomplishment in the Middle East has strengthened Chinese soft power and its successful diplomacy in the region (Kolstad, 2012).

Through its strong economy, China has provided the world with opportunities to engage with each other through its strong economy. With certain notable exceptions, China generally has good ties with most of the world. By integrating and linking the world together through the road and belt initiatives, China's standing in the world order has gotten better.

China has significantly influenced global stability, especially across the Middle East and Africa. Through enduring trade ties, the Chinese good offices have grown increasingly significant in all of the world's main disputes. China is considered by many as a significant player that has the power to either establish or break a cease-fire in the ongoing dispute between Russia and Ukraine (Moniruzzaman, 2013).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is looking for new members in a bid to compete alongside the US. In light of the assassination of a journalist, relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States have soured. A spark was ignited in the relationship by the American response to the murder of a journalist and the publication of the CIA evaluation that implicated the Saudi ruling elite in the murder. The relationship between many democratic states and Saudi Arabia has been questioned and soured (Farouk, 2019).

### **Alliance of Authoritarian States**

Western Europe demonstrated strong disapproval at the violent murder of a journalist. As a result of this problem, Saudi Arabia was seeking a new ally to replace the United States. The Kingdom attempted to challenge the US's hegemonic position in the area. China never refused to maintain diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia in response to the journalist-slaying controversy. Saudi Arabia decided to take a position as a result of China's rise as a dependable ally in the area with the capacity to displace the US. China was an ideal replacement for the United States as the de facto ruler of Riyadh since it had never had a problem with democracy or human rights (Halliday, 2005).

China is filling up the gaps left by the US in all parts of the world. Recent instances involve the Middle East, where the US left a big position open and China filled it. China was given the opportunity to fill the empty space left by the Biden administration's unfavorable relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There is debate about whether the US withdrawal from the region was caused by declining US interest or by shifts in Saudi Arabia's ruling class behavior (Houser, 2008).

### **Triangle politics**

China has replaced the US in the region's political triangle. China is securing one end of the triangle, while Saudi Arabia and Iran are securing the other two. Iran and Saudi Arabia's hostile relations posed a problem for this triangle (Goldthau, 2017). China provided assistance to this Middle Eastern political triangle. Before the Iranian revolution in 1979, the US was the hegemon in this triangle. After the US-Saudi Arabian alliance deteriorated, China started to play a significant role in this triangle's political dynamics. China has achieved a significant victory in this triangle by bringing together two of its allies (Jun, 2008).

### **Strategic partner**

China's present, when it is being led by President Xi, has witnessed Beijing emerge as a strategic partner. China has invested in bolstering its military in order to safeguard itself against any hostile effort to thwart its trade. China recently modified its stance on not interfering with global matters (Kolstad, 2012). It is working to create a peaceful environment for trade. Saudi Arabia picked China as its forthcoming strategic partner in place of the US due to China's geostrategic advantages. China's strategic strength and economic development have provided the globe with a US alternative. China seeks to surpass the United States of America as a major military and economic force (Erickson, 2007).

### **Muhammad Bin Salman Vision**

Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, the de facto head of state of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has an innovative proposal for the kingdom (Erickson, 2007). He intended for Saudi Arabia to evolve into a modern nation. MBS aimed to modernize his kingdom and make it viable. He believed that Saudi Arabia ought to be neither merely a religious state nor a state that is accepting of all religions. He desired a thriving tourist sector in Saudi Arabia, attracting visitors from all over the world. He is opening his state by doing away with all rules controlling religious conduct in order to accomplish this goal. So that there will be a pleasant climate for tourism, he wishes to create friendly relationships with all of the bordering states (Brooks, 2005).

He planned to divert funds from Saudi Arabia's defense spending to the hospitality and tourism sectors. Saudi Arabia might be in a stronger position to boost its economy if it had struck peace with its neighbors. Even Iran and Syria, which were opposed to US interests in the area, are on Saudi Arabia's list of nations it desires to make peace with. The only country that could support him during these peace talks was China (Cole, 2012).

### **CONCLUSION**

Through its decisions, the Middle East has shifted the nature of the world order. It served as a worldwide center of attraction. Its vast energy resources support an enormous industrial complex. China is taking over as the region's dominant power from the USA, which has diminished some of its influence among the key players. China was the main player and may be an alternative power to the USA because of its standing as a prominent player in the global order. Due to its good offices for the two governments, China played a crucial role in mediating the agreement between the KSA and Iran. China achieved its position as a result of strategic developments and steady economic expansion. China has had exactly the same level of friendly relations in the Middle East as no other significant state. It can actively contribute to the continued existence of these agreements and to healthy partnerships. Between them, China's main objective should be to maintain the durability of the agreement it mediated through its good offices. It will take time for the two states, which have a long history of conflict in the Middle East, to close the gap that has emerged through time. By fostering a cooperative attitude in the relations between the Middle Eastern governments and China, the US continues to profit from this development. US can get through this deal by establishing the working relation with the different actors of region.

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