

Review and Thoughts over the Relationship between China and the Middle East

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***Abstract:** The friendly intercourse between China and the Middle East countries, which could be traced back to over 2000 years, may be divided roughly into two periods since the founding of the People's Republic of China. For the former 30 years, the establishment of diplomatic relations was promoted primarily and actively, through the main means of cooperation and coordination in politics, and the minor means of economic exchanges, trade, business and social culture; while for the latter 30 years, cooperation in the political field mainly deepened, as well as economic exchanges and cooperation, trade and social culture. We should make a systematic strategy for the Middle East in terms of its important role in the world politics and economy. China's Middle East strategy is not to establish a rigid "model", but a "system of relatively open strategy". This article puts forward a few thoughts, from the perspectives of international politics, national security, economic and financial cooperation and the soft power enhancement.*

***Key Words:** China; Middle East Countries; Friendly Cooperation; Diplomatic Strategy*

China and the regions of West Asia and North Africa (i.e., the Middle East), where there are three of the four birthplaces of the world's civilizations, namely the Yellow River valley, the Mesopotamia and the Nile valley, are the birthplaces of human civilization. For this recognition, there was a long history of mutual influence and fusion in the process of historical development among these ancient and splendid civilizations, which may be dated back to over 2000 years.

In more modern times, with the rise of capitalism in Western Europe and the establishment of capitalist systems in the world, the vast areas of Asia and Africa were colonized or semi-colonized, the intercourse between China and the Middle East countries has been interfered with and affected seriously. However, before the founding of PRC, the ROC government had established diplomatic relations with most of the independent Middle East countries.

Since the founding of the PRC, which provided new opportunities of friendly exchanges and cooperation for China and Middle East countries, and opened a new chapter of history as well, China's overall diplomatic strategy has been "peaceful diplomacy". The Middle East (the region of West Asia and North Africa) is an important stage for China's diplomacy. The friendly exchange between China and Middle East countries, which can be traced back to over 2000 years ago, may be divided roughly into two periods since the founding of the People's Republic of China. For the former 30 years (from the founding of the PRC to the late 1970s), the establishment of diplomatic relations was promoted primarily and actively (in fact, this process lasted for more than 40 years), through the main means of cooperation and coordination in politics, and the minor means of economic exchanges, trade, business and social cultures; while, for the latter 30 years (30 years since the late 1970s or after the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up policy), cooperation in the political field was mainly deepened, as well as economic exchanges and cooperation, trade and social culture.

I. Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with Middle East Countries

Since the founding of the PRC, the Chinese government has been actively developing friendly and cooperative relations with Middle East countries, the process of which could be divided into five phases, lasting for 40 years, under the overall strategic framework for peaceful diplomacy.

A. The “Wait and See” Period for Mutual Understanding and Awareness (from the Late 1940s to the Middle 1950s)

After the founding of the PRC, China established diplomatic relations with groups of socialist countries in the first place, while for Middle East countries, there was a period of waiting and seeing for mutual understanding and awareness, which had close relationships with the social and historical conditions and international environment of Middle East countries. At that time, many Middle East countries were still the British or French colonies or semi-colonies, not yet having achieved national independence or liberation; and for the countries which had achieved it, they had established diplomatic relations with the Kuomintang government. The Chinese government has been adhering to the "one-China" principle when establishing diplomatic relations; therefore, "how to make a choice" was being faced. The Middle East countries (except Israel) are Islamic countries, where political and social lives are full of dense religious atmosphere. Under the media's misleading information, there had been pre-emptive refusals to "communist China". In attempts to strangle the nascent Red China in its cradle, Western imperialist forces even squeezed Red China politically, blockaded it economically and deterred it militarily. "Defending the country" was the paramount task of North Korea during the "Korean War" which broke out in 1950 and lasted for three years, which dragged China into a bitter war with half a million Chinese soldiers killed. It is within such a complex social history and international environment that a temporary "period of

waiting and seeing" formed, which provided a "preparation period" for the development of diplomatic relations between China and Middle East countries afterward.

B. The Climax of Establishing Diplomatic Relations with Middle East Countries (from the Middle 1950s to Late 1950s)

In April 1955, the Bandung Conference profoundly promoted the development of the whole world movements against imperialism, colonialism and the causes of national independence and liberation, and provided an opportunity for China to show its peaceful diplomatic strategy to the world. In this way, the Afro-Asian countries were fully aware that China was part of a general assembly of solidarity and victory of Afro-Asian People. China launched a wide range of contacts with representatives from Afro-Asian countries under the principle of "seeking common ground while reserving differences", The "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" (put forward first in 1953 by Premier Zhou Enlai) were embraced by the Afro-Asian countries and eventually became one of the modern basic norms governing international relations. The Chinese government clearly expressed its support for Egypt's recovery of its sovereignty over the Suez Canal, Iran's fight on the recovery of oil sovereignty, national independence and liberation in the Middle East and struggles for the national rights of the Palestinian people. There were 12 Middle East countries at the Conference, accounting for a third of the participating Afro-Asian countries. China's sincerity in dealing with relationships in common grounds, and its firm position on opposing imperialism and colonialism and supporting the oppressed people fighting for national independence and liberation, won the general praise of Asian and African countries. What followed was the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Middle East countries, leading to the first peak period. Afghanistan was the first Middle East country to establish diplomatic relations with China. Since then, soon after, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, and

Sudan established diplomatic relations with China. Five years later, eight more Middle East countries established diplomatic relations with China for a good start.

C. The Low Ebb of Establishing Diplomatic Relations with Middle East Countries (from the Early 1960s to Early 1970s)

Although this period was 11 years long, the international environment, China's domestic issues and other factors affected the development of establishing diplomatic relations. Under the circumstances of the East and West blocs during the Cold War, the split of Sino-Soviet bilateral relations in the 1960s, to some extent, affected the relationships between China and Middle East countries. From the end of 1963 to early 1964, when Premier Zhou Enlai proposed five principles for Sino-Arab relations and five principles for Sino-African relations in the Arab Union (the federal composition of Egypt and Syria) and Algeria respectively, Premier Zhou Enlai visited 10 countries in the Middle East and Africa, during which he also put forward eight principles of China's foreign economic aid, with equality and mutual benefit, without any condition, and not any special privilege for China as the main content, which was a continuation and extension of the spirit of the Bandung Conference. However, the Chinese domestic situation experienced major changes from 1966 to 1970 due to the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", which not only brought a serious impact on normal political and economic order, but also inevitably interfered with China's diplomatic activities. All Chinese ambassadors to the Middle East were recalled except the one to Egypt; there were no high-level mutual official visits between China and Middle East countries from the beginning of the GPCR to 1970. It was not until the late 1960s that China's diplomatic work gradually restored to its normal track (Han, 1987: 93). Although in this period, only Tunisia, Mauritania, Democratic Yemen (South Yemen), as Middle East countries, established diplomatic relations with China, which accumulated strength for further development of

diplomatic relations.

D. The Second Climax of Establishing Diplomatic Relations with Middle East Countries (from the Early 1970s to Late 1970s)

At the beginning of this period, China was still able to overcome much interference and brought about the second climax of establishing diplomatic relations with Middle East countries in spite of the ongoing Cultural Revolution. The reasons for this lay in wide human resources accumulated from the former diplomatic work, and the PRC's restoration of permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, which, itself, was a new outcome of China's diplomatic practice as well. The 26th United Nations General Assembly adopted 23 States' proposal on the restoration of PRC's legitimate rights, among which eight countries, accounting for a third, were from the Middle East and Arab countries, including Algeria, Iraq, Mauritania, Democratic Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and most of the Middle East countries supported the proposal when voting (with 15 Middle East countries voting in favor). Somalia established diplomatic relations with China in 1960 as one of the members of the League of Arab States, but not as a Middle East country. Since the split of the Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s, China's foreign policies gradually got rid of the ideological factors confronting the eastern and western blocs; in the meantime, China focused on the development of relations with the pro-Western countries as well, such as Iran, which was a strategic pillar of the United States in the Gulf region, ruled by the Shah, and Turkey, the only NATO member in this region. During this period, eight countries established diplomatic relations with China, with five in 1971, Kuwait, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon and Cyprus, and three followed, Jordan, Oman, and Libya.

E. The Period of Establishing Diplomatic Relations with the Rest of the Middle East Countries (from the Late 1970s to Early 1990s)

Since the implementation of Reform and Opening-up policy in

1978 and 1979, China took pragmatic and flexible measures to deal with its national relations with the Middle East countries, based on adhering to the principles of overall diplomatic strategy. In this period, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the Palestine Liberation Organization, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Israel established diplomatic relations with China, signaling that China has established normal diplomatic relations with all of the Middle East countries.

On November 15th, 1988, the Palestine National Council, partly on the basis of UN General Assembly Resolution 181, adopted the "Declaration of Independence," and Chairman Yasser Arafat announced in Algiers the establishment of a Palestinian state. Five days later, China announced recognition of Palestinian state, followed by upgrading the Palestinian agent to an embassy, which fully demonstrated China's firm position on supporting the Palestinian cause of national liberation. The Palestinian National Authority did not claim sovereignty over any territory at that time and therefore was not the government of the State of Palestine proclaimed by Arafat in 1988. However, the proclamation was considered to be a major step on the path to Israel's recognition by the Palestinian Authority. Israel was the last one to establish diplomatic relations with China in the Middle East. It has gone through 42 years from Israel's recognition of China in 1950 to their eventual normalization of the diplomatic relationship. After Israel's recognition of China, the negotiations on Sino-Israeli diplomatic relations began, while, because of the outbreak of the Korean War, Israel, under pressure from the US, suspended the negotiations (Sufott, 2000: 1-2). Later, both the Chinese government and people strongly opposed the Suez War, involved by Israel, the United Kingdom and France jointly in 1956, and the "6·5 War" (Six Day War) in 1967. It was not until the late 1980s that two countries contacted each other and eventually established diplomatic relations in January 1992.

The Middle East region, a mixture of contradictions, is one of the world's hottest spots. The establishment of diplomatic relations with all countries in this region enabled China to play a greater role in this area.

The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and the Middle East Countries

States	Date	States	Date
Afghanistan	Jan 20 th , 1955	Iran	Aug 16 th , 1971
Egypt	May 30 th , 1956	Lebanon	Nov 9 th , 1971
Syria	Aug 1 st , 1956	Cyprus	Dec 14 th , 1971
Yemen	Sep 24 th , 1956	Jordan	April 7 th , 1977
Iraq	Aug 25 th , 1958	Oman	May 25 th , 1978
Morocco	Nov 1 st , 1958	Libya	Aug 9 th , 1978
Algeria	Dec 20 th , 1958	United Arab Emirates	Nov 1 st , 1984
Sudan	Feb 4 th , 1959	Qatar	July 9 th , 1988
Tunisia	Jan 10 th , 1964	Palestine	Nov 20 th , 1988
Mauritania	July 19 th , 1965	Bahrain	April 18 th , 1989
Kuwait	Mar 22 nd , 1971	Saudi Arabia	July 21 st , 1990
Turkey	Aug 4 th , 1971	Israel	Jan 24 th , 1992

Main source: Zhao Guozhong (Ed.) (2000) *The Concise Encyclopedia of West Asia and North Africa*. Beijing: Chinese Social Science Press; refer to <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn>; Hammond Atlas of the Middle East, Hammond Incorporated Maplewood, New Jersey, 1991. Beside, Somalia, the Comoros and Djibouti, which are not Middle East countries, despite their memberships in the Arab League, established diplomatic relations with China in 1960, 1975 and 1979 respectively.

II. The Development of Friendly and Cooperative Relations with the Middle East

From the 1980s, along with the adjustments of China's domestic policies, stability and development has become its priority, and China's foreign policies toward the Middle East have also experienced significant changes, but not as some scholars claimed, the so-called "overall transition". It should be noted that, despite the changes of specific foreign policies in different historical periods according to the changing international environment, China's overall diplomatic strategy "peaceful diplomacy" has not been changed. After the

implementation of the Reform and Opening-up policy, China adopted more pragmatic measures to deal with relations with Middle East countries. These were in line with the trends of world development, not only for the purpose of meeting the domestic needs of its own economic development, but also adding concrete content for mutual relationships, so as to promote economic development in the Middle East. In the new historical period, there were some new characteristics in the relations between China and the Middle East: strengthening mutual political trust, deepening political coordination and collaboration; expanding economic and trade cooperation, exploring new areas of cooperation constantly; and actively developing social and cultural exchanges and communication.

A. Strengthening Mutual Political Trust, Deepening Political Coordination and Cooperation

On the whole, China and the Middle East countries have always been able to treat each other equally and support and cooperate mutually in terms of the struggle for safeguarding national independence and state sovereignty, or the process of promoting socio-economic development. There are some traditional practices and formal innovations as well when China has strengthened its relations with the Middle East countries.

a). Frequent high-level visits between two sides. Chinese leaders have visited all the countries in the Middle East region, while heads from Middle East countries have visited China for many times. For example, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat visited China for fourteen times, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak visited China for nine times. High-level visits and talks among the leaders will undoubtedly narrow the distance between two sides, promote mutual political trust, and also promote visits by officials of other departments to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen bilateral cooperation in politics, economy, science, culture, education, health and sports.

b). The establishment of a political consultative system. At

present, China has established political consultative systems with more than 20 Middle East countries among the ministries of foreign affairs. For example, in 1997, China conducted political consultative with 11 countries, such as Turkey, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Algeria, among the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (An W. 1998: 58). It would be helpful to enhance mutual understanding, reach consensus, and promote mutual cooperation and settle of major regional issues by institutionalizing political consultative and launching consultative on major regional issues or matters with mutual concern.

c). Strategic and cooperative partnerships. China has established strategic cooperative partnerships with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria. Egypt, which was the first Arab country to establish diplomatic relations and maintain good relations with China for many years, established a strategic partnership with China in 1999, and signed the "Outline on Deepening Bilateral Strategic and Cooperative Relations between China and Egypt" in 2006. When President Jiang Zemin visited Saudi Arabia in 1999, both sides reiterated their willingness to improve their political and economic relations to a strategic level in the joint press communiqué (Sino-Saudia Arabia Joint Communiqué, 2009) and in 2006, the heads of both countries achieved consensus on the establishment of bilateral strategic friendship and partnership during exchanged visits; furthermore, in 2009, both of the heads expressed that Sino-Saudi strategic relations should be deepened widely and improved constantly to a new level (Talks between President Hu Jintao and King Abdullah, 2009). China and Algeria, with profound traditional friendship, established strategic cooperative relations, since that development, multiple cooperation on politics, economy, trade, energy development, and infrastructure construction have developed greatly, and how to promote their strategic cooperative relations continuously has been exploring.

d). China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. This is a new form of Sino-Arab cooperation. As early as in 1998, the resolution has been made to develop Sino-Arab relations in the 21st century by the League

of Arab States. In January 2004, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum was set up, and when meeting with the Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa and representatives from member countries, President Hu Jintao put forward four principles for the development of new partnerships between China and the Arab countries: enhance political relations, based on mutual respect, intensify economic and trade exchanges in order to achieve common development, expand cultural exchanges by learning from each other, and strengthen cooperation in international affairs for the purpose of safeguarding world peace and promoting common development. So far, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum has held six sessions of high-ranking officials and three ministerial-level sessions. In May 2008, China and the Arab countries signed the "Conference Communiqué" and "Action Plan for the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum from 2008 to 2010" at the 3rd ministerial-level meeting. The establishment of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the mark of a new type of Sino-Arab partnership, through which China could further the positive influence in the Middle East affairs, has been boosting Sino-Arab friendship and cooperation since its creation.

e). Appointing diplomatic envoys. In order to better play her role in the Middle East affairs and promote proper settlement of relevant issues, China set up diplomatic envoys. Since 2002, the Chinese government has appointed three "Middle East envoys", who have visited Middle East region for 10 times to publicize China's stand and actively promote the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Chinese government advocates that an important basis and guarantee for maintaining peace and achieving stability and protection lie in that conflicts and differences should be dealt with fairly and reasonably through political means; mutual differences should be treated with peaceful and tolerant attitudes among different civilizations; mutual respect should be advocated vigorously and the development of cooperation should be actively encouraged, which is to maintain peace and achieve stability (Hu J., 2006). On the Darfur issue, the Chinese government holds the opinion

of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sudan, adhering to dialogue and equal consultative to solve the issue by peaceful means, supporting constructive roles played by the African Union, and the United Nations and furthermore, in 2007, the Chinese government also appointed a special envoy for Darfur issue. At present, the special envoy has visited Sudan especially Darfur for many times, and has participated in relevant meetings on the Darfur issue in international relations to mediate actively in order to solve it. The African Union, the Arab League and other international organizations have conveyed their appreciation on China's position about the Darfur issue. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says that China is playing a "constructive role" in solving the Darfur issue.

B. Expanding Economic and Trade Cooperation, Exploring New Areas of Cooperation Constantly

China and Middle East countries, belonging to the Third World, had similar experiences in the past, and have domestic needs for socio-economic development and enriching people nowadays. There are more than 20 countries of different sizes in the Middle East, where economic development is uneven. Generally speaking, most of the Middle East countries do not have a complete national economic system yet; major factors for their economic growth are raw materials and primary products, especially oil production and export. With rich oil reserves, the Middle East region is known as the "world oil depot". Oil, minerals, and raw materials have dominated in the export structure of Arab countries, accounting for 74% in 1965, by 1990 still accounting for 75%, and in recent years, despite some improvement, the rate is still about 70%; However, textiles and other industrial products accounted for only a small portion, about 10%; and the proportions of transport and machinery are even more negligible (Kubursi).

China, however, has successfully established a relatively complete modern industrial system, with various categories of traditional industries, like mining, metallurgy, power generation, oil extraction

equipment, high-precision machine tools, automobiles, ships, aircraft, and also new industries like the petroleum chemical industry, electronics, atomic energy, space exploration. By the end of 1990s, China has become acclaimed "world factory", with its No.1 production of steel, coal, garments, cement, TV sets, digital program-controlled switches, as well as grain, cotton, fruit, and meat. On the one hand, China could provide a variety of products of different categories and different scientific and technological content, from the daily consumer products to space technology, to meet the needs from different levels and different uses. On the other hand, China, with huge energy gap, has become a net importer of oil since 1993 (9.9257 million tons of crude oil), with 2003 (91.12 million tons of crude oil, 2006 (145.18 million tons of crude oil), and 2008 (178.88 million tons of crude oil (about 45% from the Middle East region).

There is a huge complementarity in the economic development of China and Middle East countries, which provides broad prospects for bilateral economic cooperation. At present, China has already signed economic, trade and technological cooperation agreements with most of the Middle East countries, established mixed economic and trade committees, and signed agreements on investment protection and avoidance of double taxation with many countries too, for example, 21 Arab countries, except Somalia, have signed bilateral economic and trade and technological cooperation agreements with China, and 16 Arab countries have signed investment protection agreements with China, so that significant progress has been made in economic and trade cooperation between China and the Middle East countries. In 1978, the trade volume between China and Middle East countries was only 1.084 billion US dollars, as for the early 1990s, there was only 20 billion US dollars, while in 2001, the volume reached 203.2445 million US dollars, and 1249.2198 million US dollars in 2007.

China and Middle East countries have made some important progress and fruits in mutual investment and projects participation, and have actively expanded new areas or new forms of cooperation, like the IT industry and urban construction, apart from traditional

areas, like finance, energy, construction, transportation, manufacturing and processing industries. According to statistics, by June 2007, China's various kinds of investment have reached more than 60 billion US dollars in Arab countries. The Haier Group invested in household appliances factories in Jordan, Tunisia, and Syria respectively, and ZTE's third-generation mobile communication technology has been put into use in many Arab countries. In 2007, Huawei Group constructed and completed HSPA network in the United Arab Emirates exclusively. The Middle East region is a major overseas market for cars from China. The Chery Automobile Company has set up automobile assembly production bases in Iran, Egypt, and Jordan, and entered the local markets as well. What is worth mentioning is the cooperation in oil and natural gas between China and Middle East countries. At present, China has participated in the oil and gas cooperation projects of Qatar, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Oman, Sudan, Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Libya. In June 2009, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation and British Petroleum Corporation jointly won the development projects of Iraq's largest oil field, "Rumaila field". And in January 2009, Chinese National Petroleum Corporation had signed the agreement about 1.76 billion US dollars on developing a large oil field, "North Azadegan oil field" with the Iranian National Oil Corporation. In 2007, Sinopec got the contract for about two billion US dollars in developing the Yadavaran oilfield. The oil cooperation programs between China and Sudan project are actually intended to help Sudan build an oil industry, covering a series of projects in the upstream and downstream areas, like oil exploration and development, ground construction, pipeline transportation, oil refining and petroleum chemical industry. Because of China's participation, in just a few years, almost without basis, the oil industry system, with integrated upstream and downstream facilities, advanced technology and matched scale, has been established, which enables Sudan to become a crude oil exporter from a crude oil importer. The rise of the oil industry, stimulating the growth of other industries, has brought new vitality to the Sudanese

economy.

At the same time, the Middle East countries are actively exploring development opportunities in China. By June 2007, the Arab countries' actual investment in China reached about one billion US dollars, mainly focusing on energy, finance, petrochemicals, light industry, building materials, and real estate. In 2007, Saudi Aramco, the US oil company Exxon Mobil and Sinopec Group, jointly signed a contract for the Fujian Province refinery expansion project in China. With a total investment of nearly 6 billion US dollars, Qingdao Lidong Chemical Co., Ltd, funding by Oman National Oil Company, Chinese and South Korea companies, has been officially put into production.

C. Developing Social and Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation

The development of political and economic cooperation is bound to promote bilateral cooperation in education, science, culture, health and many other fields. China has signed cultural cooperation agreements with most of the Middle East countries, and scientific and technological cooperation agreements with Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Israel to promote bilateral cooperation in these areas. In the present-day society, as the rapid development of science and technology occurs, it is particularly important for developing countries to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the field of science and technology.

Language, a tool and bond for communication, often has become an important basis for in-depth exchanges of both sides. China and the Middle East countries have a long history of learning from each other's languages. However, the past 30 years has developed faster. The number of exchanging students is growing, and China currently offers Egypt 50 candidates with scholarships every year. Many Chinese universities have opened main language curriculums in the Middle East region, like Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Hebrew. Upon graduation, these students often become important translators for Chinese government institutions, and enterprises in the Middle East.

The Middle East countries, like Egypt, Tunisia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Lebanon, and Afghanistan have also set up Chinese teaching courses or Confucius Institutes for the natives to study Chinese and spread Chinese culture. Very native Chinese could be heard from the Iranian Chinese translators when a high-level Iranian official delegation was visiting China. Ain Shams University of Egypt, with more than 400 students annually, which opened Chinese-learning courses as the first Chinese-teaching university in the Middle East region, has set up a "four-year undergraduate course" in the Chinese Department of Language School, and nurtured masters and Ph.D. graduates. In many other places, such as Egyptian delegations and tourist attractions, there are many Egyptians speaking fluent Chinese. Apart from Ain Shams University, Cairo University, Al-Azhar University, Egypt Suez Canal University and the University of Technology also have opened Chinese departments in recent years. Cairo University and Suez Canal University have even set up Confucius Institutes by cooperating with China. In 2009, China signed 13 cooperation agreements among universities with Saudi Arabia, including assistance of building three Chinese language departments for Saudi Arabia universities.

With the development of information technology, China and Middle East countries have also strengthened communication among their media. China has set up branches or correspondent news agency stations in the Middle East region, and reporters have travelled to almost every corner in this region; likewise, correspondents from Middle East countries in China have also reported timely changes and development of China for the Middle East people. The well-known "Middle East News Agency" and "Al-Jazeera," have set up branches in China. Likewise, China has opened broadcasting by primary languages of the Middle East for decades, and recently opened the Arabic television channel, with which people in the Middle East could understand China more agilely and intuitively.

Forty-six years ago, Chinese medical teams for foreign aid began to work in more than 60 countries in the world, in which Middle East

and African countries were primary recipients, mainly including Algeria, Yemen, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Kuwait from the Middle East region. China has offered "persistent free help" which the rest of the countries in the world cannot do. Despite hard conditions, Chinese doctors, with the humanitarian spirit of "healing the sick and saving the dying", dedicated themselves to serve the local people, which not only won deep love and friendship of the local people, but also accumulated human resources for long-term and healthy development of relations between China and Middle East countries.

People in the Middle East region also have been very concerned about Chinese people's economic development and social life. In 2008, many Middle East countries donated money for the Sichuan earthquake, and Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates contributed far more than the western developed countries, with 100 million US dollars respectively (mostly for charity, and some seismic materials as well), which manifests friendship between both peoples, and reflects a lofty humanitarian spirit.

III. Some Thoughts on the Chinese Strategy toward the Middle East

Considering the important position of the Middle East in world politics, economy, military, and China's important interests in the Middle East, we should make a systematic strategy toward it, which is not to establish a rigid "model", but rather a "system of relatively open strategy", namely the strategy system which may be properly adjusted and revised according to changes of world patterns and situations after the establishment of the basic strategic aim, which would enable our Middle East policies to adapt and meet the practical needs of domestic and foreign development, but also serve long-time strategic planning. The following are some thoughts from the perspectives of international politics, national security, economic and financial cooperation and soft power enhancement.

A. The Perspective of International Politics

a). The development of relations with Middle East countries is conducive to the peaceful international environment that China requires. It is an indisputable fact that the external environment for the rise of China (political and economic) is not optimistic, in fact, it is very challenging. The United States and other Western countries, even Russia, still contain and boycott China by claiming the "China threat theory" on almost every issue (from the aspects of ideological conflict, secure strategy interest, potential influence of world pattern, the labor force, immigration, trade, and oil). Since the Middle East region is the extension of China's neighboring region, the development of friendly relations with Middle East countries, to some extent, will be able to eliminate the negative impact brought by the United States and other Western countries. China and Middle East countries share similar historical experiences; a good cooperative relationship has been established during the fight for national independence and liberation, and mutual support and cooperation of socio-economic development have been set up between China and Middle East countries, which is important political assets for both sides, after World War II.

b). The Middle East region is a stage for China to expand its influence and demonstrate its power. China is a big, but weak country, and mainly influenced by the outside world in the years after the Opium War. Since the middle of the 20th century (after the founding of the PRC), this situation has been slowly changed. In the late 20th century, especially in the 21st century, China's passive position in international relations has changed rapidly, even completely. Thus, China could influence the surrounding countries, and the world at large, with a more and more pro-active profile. The Middle East region is an important stage for China to expand its international influence and show the profile of a big country. The world needs China, and she should also play a greater role in the world, particularly the model provided by China according to its own development for the developing countries that are seeking hard for

their own developing way. Although to learn this model may be difficult for them for the reasons from social history and politics, providing it is a contribution for the development of the world.

c). Relations with the Middle East are also the regulated means for the relations with great powers. Though the relations between China and Western countries, led by the United States, have greatly improved after the Cold War, the wariness and containment toward China are still difficult to eliminate in the foreseeable future. Former US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick once expressed that "China is a stakeholder". However, the US government thought further indicating that "China is not a responsible stakeholder." In early August 2006, "whether China is a responsible stakeholders or not?", in which Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christensen pointed out that "China is not the responsible one among the relevant stakeholders", was held by the Commission on Reviewing US-China Economy and Security of the Congress. In fact, these are not any new arguments for further understanding, and the United States policies toward China will still adhere to "4 Cs": cooperation, competition, containment and control in a long period of time. Therefore, major issues in the Middle East region, as well as influential hot-spot issues, should be important places for China to coordinate relations with great powers, which also need China to play a role there; hence relations with the Middle East are also the regulated means for the relations with great powers. Direct confrontation is likely to face considerable pressure and risk, while the Middle East could be the buffer zone for China to perform its influence and adjust relations with great powers. Actually, the US think tanks have been looking for "the basis and integration points" for Sino-US cooperation.

d). To play a greater role on major issues in the Middle East. Political and diplomatic resources are different from other resources, which will not decrease, but increase and appreciate, if properly utilized. However, they will lose and depreciate, if utilized improperly or not in due time. For a long time, China has maintained good relations with the

Middle East countries, and we should say that we have abundant political and diplomatic resources. China should play a greater role on major issues, such as the settlement of the Arabian-Israeli conflict, the Iraq issue, Iran nuclear issue, and Afghanistan issue. It is necessary to keep a low profile, but also make a difference. If the political and diplomatic resources could not be effectively used, they will lose, and the goal of "making a difference" will be further and further away. China has its own interests in the Middle East, therefore, it will be better to coordinate relations with Middle East countries and further expand diplomatic resources for the domestic economic development. Obviously, China will face obstacles and resistance set by the United States-led Western countries when playing its role in the Middle East, but the diplomatic efforts may produce higher "input-output ratio", compared with the "direct conflict" with United States in other areas.

B. The Perspective of National Security

a). Support from Middle East countries on the Taiwan issue are needed. In recent years, pro-Taiwan secession forces have taken various measures to achieve their so-called independent goal, from "de jure Taiwan independence", "dollar diplomacy" to "de-Chinese movements", which have repeatedly brought tensions across the Taiwan Straits and have seriously hurt the feelings of the Chinese people and national interests. The issue of Taiwan secession has been the largest security risk for China. The vast majority of countries in the world support "one China" position, including the Western powers (engaging in some tricks to contain China's foreign policy and restrict China's socio-economic development at the same time). Middle East countries, a steady force on supporting "one China" position, share common historical experiences with China in the past, and will have similar common interests and development opportunities in the new period of time.

b). Opposing the "three evil forces" (religious extremism, national separatism, international terrorism) to ensure China's security interests. The Middle East societies are in a turbulent

transitional period, from traditional to modern, from backward to advanced, from traditional agriculture to modern industry and modern post-industry, which is a relatively long and turbulent period of concentrated contradiction; Islam in the transitional period will complete religious reform or revolution in the end, however, religious extremism and national separatism, which have even become the "spiritual power" for China's domestic "three evil forces", are still influential in the Middle East region in the long run. Terrorism, like the spread of a malignant tumor, has posed a "threat" to the security interests of our country. The threats mentioned above may have not caused a seriously dangerous atmosphere or "facts", but as the security risks and uncertainties, particularly the direct and indirect negative effects brought by terrorism, they should be treated seriously.

c). Clearing national security interests, and setting a necessary "safety red line." China should make its national interests and particularly core interests clear for the friendly Middle East countries and the world, and set distinct "red lines" where necessary, to stress that its national interests and particularly core interests are inviolable. To make it clear is not only important for the governments of friendly countries, but for their think tanks through various ways, such as declaration of foreign policies, communication of diplomatic channels, and speeches or comments by Chinese scholars. The remedial action after happening should be changed for proactive prevention. On the basis of understanding the security interests of China clearly, we may ask the friendly countries in the Middle East for their cooperation for combating, or at least opposition for their domestic "three evil forces".

d). Adjusting energy structure to achieve energy security. China's current energy structure is not entirely reasonable for its large dependence on oil abroad, and the small proportion of nuclear power (clean energy) (less than 1%, as for the utilization of nuclear energy in developed countries, accounting for 30% generally, and more than 80% in some small countries in Eastern Europe). China's energy structure should be adjusted gradually to reduce the dependence on oil consumption abroad. In the meantime, the idea of "mutual need

and interdependence" should be publicized more, which means that China needs oil from the Middle East region, but also the countries there should be aware of the fact that long-term, stable, and substantial revenue for their benefits only lies in the proper price of oil and long-term customers so as to pave a way for China's stable energy supplies.

C. The Perspectives of Economic and Financial Cooperation

a). Developing a "win-win" economic cooperation model.

China's science and technology should be enhanced when expanding to overseas markets to lay the foundation of transformation on economic development, upgrading industrial technology, but also benefiting cooperation parts and bringing tangible benefits for their economic development, so as to consolidate China's political influence in the Middle East region. The complementary character between economic and trade cooperation, formed by the different economic development levels and industrial structures, is the type of mutual need from each other. Such objective existence is an important condition for China to further develop mutually beneficial and "win-win" economic cooperation with Middle East countries, so that both have very broad prospects in economic and trade cooperation. Under the circumstances of strict market barriers in Western developed countries, the Middle East market is "rare" for China.

b). Attracting investment from Middle East countries. Arabian foreign assets, of which about 80% of its investors are from the Gulf States, are estimated at about 1.3 trillion US dollars. After 9/11 terrorist attack, the relationships between the US and Arab countries experienced subtle changes, which have made some of the Arabian foreign assets leave the US market (estimated at nearly 200 billion US dollars) to look for better and safer places of investment. China's Western Development Strategy is an opportunity, but also a huge market for Middle East investors. Northwest China, of similar geographical environment with Middle East countries, where Chinese Muslims are clustered, and there are traditional communication and

contacts between China and the Middle East countries in history, provides unique conditions for countries involved in the development and construction of the western region and a "win-win" cooperation.

IV. Soft Power Enhancement

A. Publicizing China through Various Forms to Increase Its Influence

China could take advantages of the opportunities so that many countries will recognize, receive, learn and follow the "Chinese model". Therefore, the "Chinese model" should be further publicized in a timely manner, accurately and effectively, as well as in Confucius Institutes around the world, the rise of Chinese medicine, catering culture, and the appeal of martial arts in the Middle East region and Africa, so as to enhance China's "soft power". Adhering to "independent diplomacy" further, China should keep a distance from the "hegemonic" moves from the US-led Western countries. On major issues in the Middle East, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Iraq issue, and Iran nuclear issue, China, as one of the big powers, should be more independent and responsible. The Arabic TV channel launched recently in China offer a good platform to expand communication with Middle East countries, and spread Chinese culture, diplomacy and political ideas. Meanwhile, we should also pay attention to improving the "performing techniques" to become a set of programs people in the Middle East region like to watch, and avoid a "rigid propaganda model."

B. Strengthening Self-discipline and Establishing a Good International Image and Credibility

China should strengthen self-management and self-discipline when going global, and she should not only pay attention to the immediate practical interests in foreign economic and trade activities, but also design long-term strategic objectives, and not "take eggs by killing hen, catch fishes by drying up the lake". For example, the

lessons learned from the Sino-Russian (formerly Soviet Union) border trade (unscrupulous businessmen sold shoddy jackets in reselling feather jackets, which has tarnished the reputation of Chinese business trade and made Chinese goods as the synonym of inferior goods once). To rehabilitate the discredited reputation costs higher, including losing important market economically, losing long-term interests, but also undermining China's international image. In view of this, China should enact regulations even laws, to build an effective monitoring system and mechanism so as to protect the legitimate and long-term interests of the law-abiding companies and maintain China's positive image in the international arena.

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