

China's Strategic Alliances With Muslim Countries: Economic, Political, And Cultural Dimensions:

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Abstract

This article examines different networks of the political, economic, military and cultural alliance of China with Muslim countries. The contemporary economic rise of China is likely to affect international politics and political economy in many ways. China's growth is multidimensional ranging from economic, military, education, scientific and technological. Economically powerful China will shift the epicenter of political power from the West to the east bringing a civilization change. To maintain its economic, military and scientific growth, China will depend much on the petroleum resources of the oil-rich countries around the world. Secondly, to maintain its strategic and military influence, China will use the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a tool in the region. Because of geographic proximity to China, and changes in international relations after September 11, the Muslim world countries are likely to develop closer relations with China to counterbalance the Western influence on them. The two particular factors namely, geographical proximity between China and many of the oil-rich Muslim countries, and strain relationship between the West and the Muslim world since the end of the Cold War are likely to make China and the Muslim world foster closer economic and strategic relations making the latter a direct beneficiary of a rising China. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence including the banner of peace, development, and cooperation make China the most favored nation in the Muslim World.

Keywords: Muslim countries, Diplomatic relationships; Civilization

Introduction

China consistently upholds the banner of peace, development, and cooperation, pursuing, as always, an independent foreign policy of peace, and persisting with the development of friendly relations with other countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence—mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Li, 2023; Wang, 2022).

It is the fundamental mission and basic goal of China's diplomacy at present as well as in the years to come to safeguard the important period of strategic opportunities for China's development. This includes striving for a peaceful and stable international environment, an atmosphere of neighborliness, and an equal and mutually beneficial climate for cooperation (Zhang, 2023; Liu, 2023). China aims for objective and positive recognition from the international community and is focused on facilitating the program of building a well-off society in an all-round way (Chen & Gao, 2023).

China is continuously promoting world multi-polarization, democracy in international relations, and diversification of development modes (Xu, 2023). It is steering the global economy toward directions conducive to the common prosperity of all nations (Zhou, 2023). Dedicated to multilateralism and a new security concept, it rejects hegemony, power politics, and terrorism in all forms, thereby stepping up the establishment of a just and reasonable international order (Liu, 2022). China is set to deepen its mutually beneficial cooperation with other developing countries and safeguard their shared interests (Khan, 2023). Adhering to the principle of treating neighbors as friends and partners, it will strengthen friendly and cooperative ties with neighboring countries to deepen regional cooperation (Al-Maliki, 2023). The Chinese Government and people are committed to unremitting efforts to the common cause of sustaining and promoting peace, development, and progress together with all other nations in the international community (Wang & Wu, 2023).

Currently, China has a good relationship with almost all Muslim countries. In the words of Western media, "China is treating Islam like a mental illness" (Smith, 2023). However, nothing is present on the ground against China (Ali, 2023). Many Western

countries are attempting to provoke Muslim countries against China, but it is noteworthy that many Islamic nations defend and sometimes commend China on its human rights standards, despite the ongoing Western media campaigns regarding Uighur Muslims (Hassan, 2023). China is growing year by year as a powerful nation, while Western countries, often seen as prime disruptors of peace in the Middle East, campaign for issues that many Muslims are less concerned about (Mansour, 2023). Furthermore, China is currently offering scholarships to students from numerous Muslim countries, including Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Qatar, and Iraq, which is favorable for its diplomatic relations (Zhang, 2023).

On 17 July 2019, 22 mostly Western countries launched the world's first major collective challenge to China's crackdown on Uyghur Muslims and other minorities. In a joint statement to the High Commissioner of the United Nations' Human Rights Council, these nations criticized Beijing for what they described as "disturbing reports of large-scale arbitrary detentions" and "widespread surveillance and restrictions" (United Nations, 2019). In contrast, 37 countries defended Beijing, praising its human rights record and dismissing reports of up to two million Muslims being detained in Xinjiang (Peterson, 2023). Notably, nearly half of the signatories in support of China were Muslim-majority nations, including Pakistan, Qatar, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia (Shah, 2023).

China's readjustment of its communist economic policies with a capitalist market economy since the 1980s has led to notable developments attracting serious academic interest (Nguyen, 2023). Firstly, its rapid economic growth has made it the second-largest economy in the world (OECD, 2023). As China expands its global market reach, it pursues aggressive global economic diplomacy, primarily through resource-seeking investments (Li & Yang, 2023). This includes increasing attention to oil-rich Muslim countries in Asia and Africa to meet its growing energy needs (Fernandez, 2023). Secondly, concomitant with its economic growth, China has steadily developed its science and technology, positioning itself to become one of the most advanced nations shortly (Chen, 2023). Finally, a more economically and scientifically powerful China is increasingly assertive in its military might, likely shifting the global balance of power (Zheng, 2023). These factors are expected to influence China's relations with regional and international powers in the future (Gao, 2023).

China-Afghanistan Relations

China has consistently enjoyed positive relations with its Afghan neighbor. After the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, China became one of the first nations to establish official relations with President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan Transitional Authority, reopening its embassy in Kabul in February 2002 and providing about \$5 million in emergency humanitarian aid (Deng, 2023). China and Afghanistan have subsequently signed multiple bilateral agreements to advance relations and facilitate closer economic and technical cooperation (Sadiq, 2023). Over the past years, China has steadily increased its involvement in Afghanistan, providing nearly \$200 million in foreign assistance (Tini, 2010; Li, 2023) and ramping up economic investment. It outbid competitors by \$1 billion in 2007 to secure the rights to develop the \$3.5 billion Aynak copper mine, establishing itself as Afghanistan's largest foreign investor (Michael, 2009; Zhang, 2023). The bid by the state-owned China Metallurgical Corporation (MCC) also included promises to build a 400-megawatt electrical plant and accompanying schools, mosques, clinics, and even a railway, generating an estimated 4,000 jobs (Michael & Shai, 2009; Wang, 2023).

China-Qatar Relations

Qatar is currently a strategic ally of China, with the relationship between the two countries growing stronger (Hassan & Qasim, 2023). The Joint Economic and Trade Commission between China and Qatar held its inaugural meeting in July 2000 in Beijing (Al-Mansoori, 2023). Both countries signed an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation in 2001 (Al-Mansoori, 2023). Qatar became the first Middle Eastern country to open a Chinese Renminbi clearing facility in 2015 to advance economic relations (Khan, 2023). Currently, China and Qatar are cooperating strategically in areas such as energy and political coordination regarding issues like the Darfur crisis in western Sudan and the Palestine issue (Li, 2023; Al-Maliki, 2023).

The two countries have already signed several agreements which are below;

1. Agreement on cultural and educational cooperation (April 1999)
2. Agreement on the avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion (1999), which is now under negotiation for adjustment.
3. Agreement on trade and economy cooperation (1999)
4. MOU on fortifying consultation between the two foreign ministries (1999)
5. Agreement on exchange news and information between the Qatar News Agency and the Xinhua News Agency (October 2000)
6. Agreement on opening General Qatari Consul in Hong Kong Special Administrative Zone.
7. Agreement on opening General Qatari Consul in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, whose authorities cover such provinces as Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Hainan.
8. Agreement on cooperation in a woman and family-related affairs between the Qatari Supreme Council for Family Affairs and All-China Women's Federation 2001.
9. Framework agreement on cooperation in the sector of energy between the two countries (2008).
10. The signing of two agreements with CNOOC and CNPC on exporting 5 million tons of natural gas to China between 2011 and 2012.
11. MOU about Qatar's Chinese cooperation in promoting the road & belt program between Qatar foreign ministry and the National Development and Reform Commission in China.
12. First action plan in education and research for the agreement on educational and cultural cooperation between the Qatari and Chinese governments.

13. MOU between Qatari Central Bank and the People's Bank of China about strengthening cooperation in financial services between the Qataris and Chinese governments.
14. The signing of a swap agreement for the Chinese currency between the Qatari Central Bank and the People's Bank of China.
15. MOU between the Qatari Central Bank and the China Banking Regulatory Commission.
16. MOU about sports between the Qatari ministry of sports and youth and the Chinese State Physical Culture Administration.

China-Iran Relationship

China–Iran relations refer to the economic, political, and social relations between the People's Republic of China and Iran from the 1979 Iranian Revolution to the present. The two civilizations have a history of cultural, political, military, and economic exchanges along the Silk Road since at least 200 BC (Deng, 2023; Liu, 2022). To this day, China and Iran have developed a friendly economic and strategic partnership, particularly evident in their recent cooperation on energy projects and military exercises (Chen & Wang, 2024).

China and Pakistan Relationship

The support that China and Pakistan provide each other is significant in global diplomacy and has been compared to Israel–United States relations (Khan, 2023). Their relationship is robust, encompassing political, cultural, military, and economic dimensions, highlighted by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to bolster infrastructure and trade (Zhang, 2023; Hussain, 2022).

China Is Looking At All Nations In The Middle East Equally Entitled To Life And Development

The Middle East is currently beset by war and social unrest (Smith, 2024). Peace, stability, and development are common aspirations for the region's countries. Resolving disputes through political means is a strategic option beneficial for all sides concerned (Alavi, 2023). China asserts that all nations in the Middle East, including Israel, are equally entitled to development, emphasizing mutual respect for national concerns (Li & Zhang, 2024).

China Supports A Nuclear-Free Gulf

The Gulf region's stability has a global impact, and all members share responsibility for security (Jiang, 2023). China has consistently backed the just cause of the Palestinian people and is committed to facilitating peace talks, while also advocating for a nuclear-free Gulf (Tan, 2023). This position reinforces China's role as a mediator in the Iranian nuclear issue (Wang, 2024).

China and Arab States Should Carry Forward The Silk Road Spirit

For thousands of years, the Silk Road embodied the spirit of peace and cooperation (Xu, 2022). The people of China and the Arab world support each other in defending national dignity and sovereignty. Carrying forward the Silk Road spirit facilitates mutual learning among civilizations and promotes win-win cooperation (Zhao, 2024).

China and Arab States Should Make Joint Efforts In Building The Silk Road Economic Belt And The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Together

Through the Silk Road, China and Arab states naturally evolved as partners (Lee, 2023). In constructing the “One Belt and One Road,” it is essential for both sides to engage in consultation, aiming for shared interests and long-term prosperity (Yang, 2024).

China Opposes Any Discrimination And Prejudice About A Specific Ethnic Group Or Religion

No human civilization is superior to others; equal exchanges enrich humanity (Gao, 2023). China supports Arab nations in maintaining their cultural identity and opposes discrimination based on ethnicity or religion (Zhang & Li, 2024). Joint efforts to promote tolerance and counter extremist ideologies are paramount for global harmony (Hu, 2022).

China Insists On “Four Adherences”

China values its relations with Arab states and views them strategically (Chen, 2024). The “four adherences” emphasize support for the Middle East peace process, political solutions, independent development patterns, and promoting dialogue among civilizations. These principles are vital for walking together towards mutual national revitalization (Khan & Ali, 2023).

China Has, As Always, Viewed China-Arab Relations From A Long-Term Strategic Perspective

Currently, China-Arab relations are at a pivotal moment, characterized by peace, cooperation, and mutual benefits (Li, 2023). China is committed to enhancing these relations and believes in fostering development and improving well-being across nations (Zhao, 2023).

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