

AN ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST'S CHANGING POSITION IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

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**تحليل التطورات الإقليمية في الموقف المتغير للشرق الأوسط في السياسة
الخارجية الصينية**

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Abstract:-

In light of the Arab Spring, China is trying to follow a policy of non-interference in its internal affairs and to adhere to the factor by which China earns the confidence of the countries of the region, and seeks to have Beijing's role as a guide that supports the paths of peace, not to play the role of hegemony and the extension of influence and control. It helps raise. Therefore, we find it plays a role in the social and economic level of the region's countries. In light of the radical changes that the Arab region is witnessing in the political arena, it is working to raise the capabilities of diplomatic mediation, expand participation in resolving hot issues in the Middle East, and play a constructive role in supporting calm and peace, and protecting security and stability. The Middle East has become an increasingly crucial region for Chinese foreign policy, with 48 % of global oil reserves and 38 % natural gas reserves. The Middle East's growing strategic relevance for China has prompted international academic research of the country's foreign policy in the region. The diplomatic posture of China in the Middle East is analyzed and explored in this paper in terms of its place within the overall framework of Chinese foreign policy. As a result, the study's primary point is that China's Middle East policy is shaped by a paradigm that mirrors Chinese political philosophy and Confucian principles throughout the imperial period. According to the conclusions of the study, the Middle East's strategic relevance in Chinese diplomacy has increased, but this growing importance does not compel Beijing to act like old hegemon.

Keywords: Political change, China Policy, Middle East, oil reserves, economic policy.

المخلص:-

في ظل الربيع العربي، تحاول الصين اتباع سياسة عدم التدخل في الشؤون الداخلية والالتزام بالعامل الذي من خلاله تكسب الصين ثقة دول المنطقة، وتسعى إلى أن يكون دور بكين بصفتها. مرشد يدعم السلام، وليس للعب دور الهيمنة وبسط النفوذ والسيطرة. يساعد ذلك على ان يكون للصين دوراً على الصعيد الاجتماعي والاقتصادي لدول المنطقة. في ظل التحولات الجذرية التي تشهدها المنطقة العربية على الساحة السياسية، فهي تعمل على رفع قدرات الوساطة الدبلوماسية، وتوسيع نطاق المشاركة في حل القضايا الساخنة في الشرق الأوسط، والقيام بدور بناء في دعم الهدوء والسلام، وحماية الأمن والاستقرار. أصبح الشرق الأوسط منطقة حاسمة بشكل متزايد للسياسة الخارجية الصينية، مع ٤٨٪ من احتياطيات النفط العالمية و ٣٨٪ من احتياطيات الغاز الطبيعي. شجعت الأهمية الاستراتيجية المتنامية للشرق الأوسط بالنسبة للصين. كان الهدف بحث السياسة الخارجية للصين في المنطقة. تم تحليل الموقف الدبلوماسي للصين في الشرق الأوسط واستكشافه في هذه الورقة من حيث مكانتها ضمن الإطار العام للسياسة الخارجية الصينية. ونتيجة لذلك، فإن النقطة الأساسية للدراسة هي أن سياسة الصين في الشرق الأوسط تتشكل من خلال نموذج يعكس الفلسفة السياسية الصينية والمبادئ الكونفوشيوسية طوال فترة الإمبراطورية. وفقاً لاستنتاجات الدراسة، ازدادت الأهمية الاستراتيجية للشرق الأوسط في الدبلوماسية الصينية، لكن هذه الأهمية المتزايدة لا تجبر بكين على التصرف وفرض الهيمنة القديمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغيير السياسي، سياسة الصين، الشرق الأوسط، احتياطيات النفط، السياسة الاقتصادية.

Introduction

In light of the Arab Spring, China is trying to follow a policy of non-interference in its internal affairs and to adhere to the factor by which China earns the confidence of the countries of the region, and seeks to have Beijing's role [1] as a guide that supports the paths of peace, not to play the role of hegemony and the extension of influence and control. Therefore, we find it playing a role that helps raise the social and economic level of the countries in the region. In light of the radical changes that the Arab region is witnessing in the political arena, it is working to raise the capabilities of diplomatic mediation, expand participation in resolving hot issues in the Middle East, and play a constructive role in supporting calm and peace, and protecting security and stability. It can be said that the problems raised by China during its dealings with the changes in the situation in the Arab region are mainly limited to a degree of negativity that characterized its positions. The authors [2] of this approach believe that the behaviour of the state, and then predicting the future of its international relations, is defined by realizing China's national interests, given that these interests are the real motive for its activity and behaviour towards the international environment. And the concepts of the national interests of international actors, it is not possible in any way to ignore the national interest as a real motive for the behaviour of states, but what is worth noting here is that the main cause of conflict in international interactions is the clash of national interests of states, and the interpretation of national interest. The identification of the state changes with the limits of the political decision-makers understanding and their awareness of the interests of their country. The curriculum lies in the fact that political leaders often explain their mistakes in their international relations by saying that their behaviour was only aimed at achieving the national interest.[3] From here, we find that China's interest in the Arab countries lies in relying on Arab oil and gas, opening the way for cultural exchange between China and the Arabs, expanding the circle of participation in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects, and activating its future role in international relations with a clear vision against distortion attempts that It is carried out by some Western countries, by giving the wrong impression to Chinese leaders and thinkers about the Middle East, especially the Arab

countries, and pushing them to stay away from delving into their policies, because it is the region of terrorism in the world, whether fundamentalist or radical terrorism, and that China cannot influence the region. In this case, the Chinese influence in the international policies of the Arab countries has weakened, which limits its influence in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The social movements called the Arab Spring, [4] which started in Tunisia in 2010 and ended with the collapse of the four Arab dictatorships in Egypt, Libya and Yemen, initiated an important transformation process that increased uncertainty and instability in the political structure of the Middle East. This transformation in the political geography of the Middle East has made it necessary for regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia to compete for regional leadership [5], as well as global powers such as the USA and Russia, to re-determine their foreign policies towards the region. One of the countries that faced opportunities and threats in the face of the latest developments in the Middle East, where regional and global actors reposition themselves, was the People's Republic of China (after this referred to as 'China'). In the face of these opportunities and threats, China has taken important steps to define a new vision for the Middle East within the scope of general foreign policy principles. With the steps taken in this context, the Middle East policy has gained strategic importance in which China's regional and global goals can be analyzed. Understanding the main components and determining dynamics of China's policy in the Middle East has become an undeniable element for interpreting Chinese foreign policy as a whole. In this context, the traditional course of Chinese foreign policy in the Middle East has undergone a significant transformation after the 2000s. Until the 1990s, China's Middle East policy was determined by the opposition between communist ideology and Islamic governments, while after 1990, China's increasing energy needs became the main determining factor. However, due to the regional and global developments that have taken place in the last twenty years, China's relations with the Middle East have gone beyond ideological or commercial concerns. They have gained a quality that includes strategic security elements. One of the most important of these strategic security elements for the Beijing administration has been the Muslim minority living in China with a population of 20 million. Because the Muslim population in the country resides in the strategic border regions in the northwest and

southwest, China is very concerned about the spread of radical religious tendencies that will enter its borders through the Middle East and Central Asia. In this context, the events that developed after the Arab Spring and the developments that took place with the emergence of the DEASH terrorist organization accelerated the process of re-determining the relations of the Beijing administration with the Middle East.[6]

One of the most critical developments showing the changing vision of China towards the region in the process of re-determining the Middle East policy is the Beijing administration's publication of the Arab Policy Document in 2016. The Arab Policy Document is the first official document published by China for the Middle East. In this sense, the fact that it has issued an official foreign policy document for the region has led to the emergence of a preliminary assumption that China is trying to re-determine its position in the current power structure in the Middle East. For this reason, the transformation process of China's foreign policy in the Middle East has become a field of study that attracts more and more attention in international academic studies.[7]

However, the majority of academic studies dealing with China's Middle East policy consider China's policy in the Middle East in the context of "energy supply security" or "great power policies" and assume that China is trying to become a "new hegemon power" in the region. Based on the assumptions that China is trying to establish hegemony in the region, there are changes in the US foreign policy vision and the opportunities for China in this context. The USA, which started to lose its influence in the region after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, announced that it would follow an Asia-Pacific foreign policy by reducing its presence in the Middle East after 2009, which accelerated the process of shaping the perception that China could replace the USA in the Middle East. The policies and discourses developed by the Middle Eastern countries towards China and the projects put forward by China in the recent period also impact the shaping of this perception. The strategic position of the Middle East within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative announced by Xi Jinping in 2013 has been interpreted as an indicator of the rising importance of the Middle East in Chinese diplomacy.

For this reason, studies that traditionally deal with China's policies towards the Middle East in the context of energy supply security have started to focus on hegemony and competition between great powers [8] after 2010. However, when China's foreign policy in the Middle East is considered with a holistic perspective, it becomes clear that the comments that the Beijing administration is trying to be a hegemon power in the region reflect a Eurocentric perspective. In this study, China's Middle East policy was tried to be analyzed within the scope of the developments in the region after the Arab Spring. For this purpose, in this study, first of all, China's foreign policy towards the Middle East is discussed by taking into account its historical background. Then, the increasing importance of the Middle East in Chinese foreign policy and China's diplomatic stance towards regional problems in the post-Arab spring developments are discussed through case studies. The main argument put forward as a result of the study is that China adheres to the traditional foreign policy principles in the Middle East. Still, a will to become an influential actor in the region is taking shape. However, China's increasing influence in regional developments is carried out on the principles of cooperation and common benefit with all countries in the region. The results presented in this study make it possible to interpret that China does not follow a policy to be a hegemonic power in the Middle East.

Within the framework of the national interest, "Hans Mor Jantho" classified the types of national interests: China as a global power, economically and politically, in the system. Primary interests include the preservation of geographical and political unity, cultural identity, and the survival of the nation against foreign transgressions.

The international community, especially in light of the enormous influence of the eight industrialized countries in trade and the international economy, in which China has no role, with opening the door for cultural exchange between China and the Arabs to prevent the outbreak of the so-called clash of civilizations.

Review of literature

Amin (1987)[9] and Muhammad Mahmoud Zaytoun (1987)[10] focused on the depth of the Arab-Chinese relations, which date back to very ancient times, and explained how the Arabs in the pre-Islamic

era moved to China due to the spread of trade relations by land and sea. Yemen has been famous since ancient times for swords and silk in particular, so; It was both necessary and reasonable for Islam to confirm its existence and define its features in China as a system of worship and transactions. Hence, the religion of the Arabs was the first inheritance from their culture that made its way to China. Samer Khair Ahmed (2009) [11] explained that the primary purpose of the Arab world's approach to China is to benefit from the Chinese rise, to develop the Arab reality in the various available dimensions. Arab-Chinese relations can be developed through China's need for Arab oil. In return for the Arab side benefiting from Chinese technology, the Chinese endeavour to open up to the West revolves in two directions: the first is to attract foreign investment to China so that it pushes the growth of the Chinese economy on the one hand, and transfers with it advanced Western technology, which is necessary for the development of Chinese industries on the other hand. As for the second aspect, it is opening the markets of those countries to Chinese exports to serve the trade balance and provide the Chinese economy with the funds necessary for development.

The current study aims to identify the determinants of current Chinese policy towards Arab countries, relying on determining the focus of Arab policy towards China, identifying the principles of Arab foreign policy and indicating the extent to which China is affected by any measures or policies that caused lack of independence. In the future, with China adopting a unique vision to solve the problems of Arab countries based on the adoption of regional cooperation as a basis for security policy, while not getting involved militarily in the Arab countries, with China's commitment to adopting diplomatic channels in implementing its policies in the region.

The problem of the study: lies in studying the development of Arab-Chinese relations by addressing the internal and external repercussions that necessitated the crystallization of Arab-Chinese relations, and then dealing with those relations from multiple aspects and with the presence of many internal and external determinants that govern them.

Study questions:

1. What are the determinants of current Chinese policy towards

Arab countries? What are the Arab interests that the Arabs expect China to support in light of the existing problems in Sino-Arab relations?

2. What is the nature of the Chinese strategy towards the Arab countries - and what principles have it adopted to achieve this?
3. To what extent have the Arab pillars towards China contributed to developing political, economic and social relations? What reform programs are proposed to activate Chinese diplomacy's role towards Arab countries?

The importance and objectives of the research: The importance of the research revolves around two aspects: the scientific aspect and the practical aspect. From a scientific point of view, the study attempts to shed light on the era of American hegemony over the world and the absence of the other pole that creates balance after the fall of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the nineties of the last century. There is a consensus that China has so far been the country that possesses the strength that qualifies it to occupy this position.

Study methodology: The researcher will use the national interest approach, which is derived from the realistic theory, given that the concept of this approach is closely related to the theory of power. Because of this connection, "Hans More states, states will make every effort to maintain their security by all means, even if it requires the intervention of other states to help maintain this security. Doing an analysis of international politics on the basis that states act from a rational standpoint in their dealings with each other and will take decisions that serve their higher interests, which are (naturally directed towards increasing the state's capacity and power).

Historical Background of China's the Middle East Policy

It is generally thought that there is little in common between China, which is ruled by the Communist Party, which does not identify itself with any particular religious belief, and the Middle East, where states and societies are predominantly Muslim. For this reason, when international studies are analyzed, there is no consensus that there is a holistic foreign policy adopted by Beijing and assumed to be implemented in the entire Middle East region. Some of the studies dealing with China's Middle East policy focus on

the opportunities created by the weakening influence of the USA in the region, while some focus on the problems created by cultural, political and historical differences. However, as a result of the "reform and opening up" policies initiated in 1978, the importance of the Middle East has gradually increased for China, whose material power capacity has increased. One of the most critical factors shaping China's relations with the Middle East has been the connection between the perception of the geographical borders of the Middle East and the definitions of national interests. In this context, according to the understanding of history inherited from the Chinese rulers of the imperial period and preserved until today, the Middle East is not considered an independent geographical region on its own, but concerning the neighbouring regions that connect this region to China. In Chinese official documents, the term for the Middle East still used today is "Western Asia", and this term is also used in conjunction with "Central Asia" zhōng yà. However, due to the growing importance of the Middle East, Chinese leaders have chosen this region not only in the West. They also refer to it as the Broader Middle East dà zhōng dōng, not to include Asia and North Africa, but also parts of Central Asia and South Asia[12]. The main factor that caused the Middle East to become a region directly related to Chinese national interests from a region that is indirectly connected with China has been energy. Beijing's perception of the Middle East geography after the 1990s and the goal of "securing the energy supply" as the basis of its foreign policy is explained in the context of China's economic rise. However, unlike other powers in the world, securing energy supply for China undertakes functions such as increasing the welfare of the people, rapid modernization of the army, and most importantly, ensuring the regime's continuation, rather than the stability of economic growth. In this direction, China, which has shaped its relations with the Middle East through energy cooperation, has emerged as the largest commercial partner of the region. Developing relations through energy trade, especially after the 2000s, deepened and gained political and strategic dimensions. Accordingly, in the 21st century, the Middle East is associated with four primary security factors for China:

- Having rich energy resources.
- To create the geostrategic crossroads of the world.

- Being within the sphere of influence of China's national interests.
- The region where the main influence competition between the great powers is experienced.

Among these factors, one of the most critical geopolitical elements shaping China's policies towards the region is the spread of the rising fundamentalist ideology in the Middle East to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the northwestern border province of China where the Muslim Uyghur population lives. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, a region where China perceives a significant threat in its domestic politics, has gained a central position in the Belt and Road Initiative project announced in 2013. With this project, the expansion of Xinjiang's transportation networks with Central Asia and the increase in interaction led China to control the radical movements in the Middle East. Another geopolitical element directly related to this perception of security is that the Middle East is a region where great powers compete for control. Although China's influence in the region is increasing, the Middle East is a region where actors such as the USA, Russia and the EU are influential and compete to control the developments in the region. In this context, while China needs the support of influential actors such as the USA and Russia in controlling radical movements in the Middle East, it also wants to prove its place in global politics by creating a limited sphere of influence in the region. According to Li Weijian, director of the Shanghai International Studies Association West Asian and African Studies Institute, the Middle East is an important region where China can regulate its relations with the great powers. With all these geopolitical factors in mind, China's Middle East policy can be classified into five sub-periods.

Table 1: Periodic Classification of China's Middle East Policy and Guiding Principles [13]

Period	Router Policy	Most vital Partner in the Region
1949 to 1978	Ideology	sweetcorn
1978 to 1989	economic expansion	sweetcorn
1989 to 1999	Energy	Iranian
2000 to 2011	war on terror	Iran, Saudi Arabia
After 2011	Promoting multilateralism	Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sino-Arab Forum

With the 2000s, China has increased its political and economic ties with the Middle East and expanded its bilateral relations network. During this period, more high-level visits were made to the states of the region, the Sino-Arab States Cooperation Forum was established in 2004, [14] and various military links were established with the region's countries. In addition to bilateral relations, China has been more actively involved in the crises in the Middle East, which have the character of a global problem, than in the past. For example, in this context, through its membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC), [15] it has participated in reconciliation talks on Iran's nuclear activities and the Syrian Civil War. It has also become an increasingly influential actor in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. One of the most critical steps that enabled the expansion of relations in the 21st century was the establishment of the Sino-Arab Countries Cooperation Forum in 2004. [16] The most crucial pillar of China's multilateral relations with the region. The Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum, which constitutes the foundation, was officially established between China and the Arab League member countries due to Hu Jintao's visit to the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. The China-Arab Cooperation Forum aims to increase cooperation between China and Arab states through exchange programs in various fields such as politics, trade, economy, culture, technology, foreign relations, peace and consolidation of development. The principles are listed by Hu Jintao as follows [17]:

- Establishing political relations based on mutual respect
- Increasing economic and commercial relations to achieve common development goals
- Mutual learning and gain through cultural exchanges
- Contributing to world peace and joint development by cooperating on international issues

The forum held its first meeting at the Arab League Headquarters in Cairo in 2004, the second meeting was held in Beijing in 2006, the third meeting was held in Manama in 2008, the fourth meeting was held in Tianjin in 2010, and the fifth meeting was held in Tunisia in 2012. The China-Arab Cooperation Forum is critical in China's regional politics [18]. It is the largest institutionalized forum with regional states at the ministerial level of China and the Arab States. It

expanded this cooperation on environmental protection with the Second Action Plan.

Events in the Middle East at the end of 2010 deepened the already existing complex tensions and conflicts in the region and produced various effects. After these events, the countries of the region had to re-analyze the environment and adapt their domestic and foreign policies to the new situation. In this context, China faced a changing situation in the Middle East and entered a new process in its relations with the Middle East.

China's Middle East Policy after the Arab Spring

China's rapid and continuous economic growth performance in the last 30 years and the constant decrease in the relative share of the world leader USA in the global political power distribution in the same period cause the international system and global governance to be dragged into uncertainties. One of the geographies where it is felt in terms of, As a matter of fact, one of the most critical factors exacerbating the ongoing social and political instability in the Middle East since the end of 2010 is the uncertainties in the regional and global system. In addition, these instabilities, which are called the Arab Spring, also led to events that had a radical transformation effect for many oil-consuming countries, creating an effect where plans to mitigate the unpredictable and devastating effects were insufficient.

As well as the countries in the region where the Arab Spring took place, China, such as the USA, the EU and Russia, could not foresee the events that took place within the scope of the Arab Spring and were caught unprepared. However, when faced with these unexpected events in the Middle East and North Africa region, China adopted a restrained and calm attitude and observed the developments. It maintained its commitment to the principle of "not interfering in the internal affairs of other states" and encouraged peace talks between the parties. In this context, China's primary policy against the events of the Arab Spring has developed to protect its national interests in the region and Chinese citizens. The factors affecting China's decision-making process during the Arab Spring events; there have been broader concerns about a possible threat to China's political and commercial interests, the security of Chinese

citizens, and the potential dangers of instability in the region. For example, in Libya, one of the Arab Spring was influential, 38,000 Chinese citizens and \$18.8 billion, according to the official statements. China, which has reached investments, intervened to protect its commercial interests and citizens in North Africa and evacuated Chinese citizens in this country. [19]

Although "not jeopardizing trade agreements, economic investments and energy connections in the region" are the main motivating elements of China's policy against the events of the Arab Spring, the overthrow of the authoritarian governments in the Middle East with public demonstrations made the Arab Spring national security and security for China made it a problem of internal stability. The Arab Spring has been a process that put pressure on the Chinese administration, which is reluctant to play a role in the decisions about the future of the Middle East, to be involved in the conflicts in the region, and especially to go to the field in the field of security. Concerned that it would have a strengthening effect on the minority's separatist demands, China gradually hardened its stance against the events of the Arab Spring. Moreover, developments such as the emergence of DAESH and the civil war in Syria forced China to attach more importance to the region. These recent developments and dynamics in the Middle East have not only threatened China's economic interests in the region, such as energy relations, working citizens' rights, and transportation lines, but also posed a significant threat to the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party administration. Beijing was concerned that the events in the Middle East might lead to a demand for democracy among the Han Chinese. People living in the autonomous regions, especially the Uyghurs, might demand more autonomy and religious freedom.

In this context, risks and opportunities emerged for China in the Middle East after the Arab Spring. Some of these risks can be listed as follows: (a) the collapse of alliances with authoritarian governments, (b) the increasing influence of political Islam and foreign fighters in the region, (c) economic risks, (d) the changing role of the USA. After the Arab Spring, China Two developments in the region are of particular importance in analyzing how the Beijing administration evaluates the opportunities and risks in the region [20].

Yemen Civil War

Along with the Arab Spring, one of the developments that marked a significant turning point for China's Middle East policy was the Yemeni Civil War. The Yemeni Civil War is seen as a "proxy war" between the Yemeni government backed by Saudi Arabia and the Houthi rebels backed by Iran. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are China's most important economic partners in the region, and both are essential sources of oil for Chinese energy security. For this reason, Beijing's official stance has been to balance both sides without turning either side into an enemy. But this balancing shows a strong eclecticism with critical caution. In this context, one of the dilemmas posed by the Yemeni Civil War for China has emerged in Beijing to maintain its neutral stance between Iran and Saudi Arabia, competing with each other in the region. Xi Jinping, who was planning to make a sizeable official trip to the Middle East before the outbreak of the Yemen Crisis, first planned to go to Egypt and Saudi Arabia within the scope of this trip. But after the Yemen crisis broke out, Xi Jinping changed his Middle East travel plan. The main reason for this change was the possibility that Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia could be interpreted by Iran as "support for the Saudi intervention in Yemen". The main problem, which is more evident with the Yemeni Civil War and creates the deadlock of China in the Middle East, is that the Beijing administration is forced to choose a side in the Middle East, but the Chinese rulers do not want to choose aside. Therefore, China's most difficult balancing act in the future will be to maintain good relations with Riyadh and Tehran, which are in regional and sectarian rivalry.

At the beginning of the Yemeni crisis, Beijing remained neutral to the actions of the Saudi army against the Houthi rebels, called for a ceasefire, and invited the international community to resolve the issue through diplomacy. However, Chinese rulers refused to condemn the Saudi-led intervention. On the other hand, China supported the resolutions prohibiting the sale of weapons to Houthi fighters by voting favourably in resolutions 2201 and 2216 discussed at the United Nations Security Council in 2015. He was assigned to rescue 600 Chinese and 225 foreign nationals from Turkey. This operation marked the first time in history that the Chinese navy was sent to rescue foreign citizens and Chinese citizens from a crisis area for the second time.

In this context, although China does not want to intervene diplomatically in the crisis in Yemen, the aid provided by Beijing to the President of Yemen Abdrabbuh Mansur has led to comments that China is in unofficial cooperation with the Saudi-backed forces in Yemen. On the other hand, Beijing calls for a ceasefire to the conflicting parties in Yemen. It supports the UN Security Council to play a constructive role in resolving the crisis through political means. Although Chinese officials offer a political solution to Saudi diplomats, they do not directly criticize the Saudi intervention. There is a widespread belief that the main determining factor of Beijing's policy in the Yemen Crisis is the strategic relations it wants to develop with Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia is vital in China's relations with the Sunni Arab World in the Middle East. For this reason, Beijing recognizes the Saudi Kingdom's strategic interests in Yemen and refrains from taking a step that would disrupt its relations with Saudi Arabia.

Syrian Civil War: Syria became the country where the civil demonstrations in the Middle East as part of the 2011 Arab Spring events became a global power struggle rather than a national and regional crisis. These events, which turned into a civil war in Syria, have turned into a proxy war. The great global powers and the powers that want to take the regional leadership role to try to re-determine their spheres of influence in the Middle East. [21]

Although there are perceptions that the Syrian crisis does not pose a significant threat or opportunity for Beijing in the context of China's bilateral relations with Syria, the Syrian crisis has created a vital breaking point within the scope of the general objectives of Chinese foreign policy. Before the Syrian crisis began in 2011, China, which was Syria's largest trading partner, stopped purchasing crude oil from Syria after the embargo initiated by the EU in 2011. Although China does not have high economic interests in Syria, it has encouraged the status quo of the administration in Syria and the peaceful solution of the problems because it is worried that the instability in these countries will have a spreading effect. This policy has been met with dissatisfaction by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and China, with which they have upgraded their relations to the level of strategic partnership in 2016, were positioned in opposite camps during the Syria Crisis.

Beijing's policy of helping Bashar al-Assad stay in power in the Syrian crisis was strongly criticized by various Saudi newspapers. Riyadh was dissatisfied with China's veto of UN resolutions on the Syria Crisis. Moreover, Saudi leaders expressed their dissatisfaction with the strategic dialogue between the Gulf Cooperation Council and China between 2012 and 2013. Thereupon, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries unilaterally postponed the third annual meeting of the China-Gulf Cooperation Strategic Dialogue to show their dissatisfaction with this issue and called on the Chinese leaders to "reconsider their position in Syria".

Due to the intensification of the crisis in Syria, especially during the G20 presidency, China has been trying to organize the G20 member countries to take the fight against terrorism. In parallel, China's newly appointed ambassador to Syria, Xie Xiaoyan, made statements supporting Russia's military intervention in Syria within the framework of the international fight against terrorism but avoided intervening in Syria on the side of Russia. In this context, the most critical area of action in which Beijing shapes its Syria policy is the votes it cast in the UN Security Council in the decisions regarding the Syria Crisis. The table below shows how China voted in the negotiations on the Syria Crisis. The main reason why China does not approve the sanctions in the UN efforts regarding the Syria Crisis is the international community's attitude in the case of Libya. Accordingly, the consequences of the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1973, which envisaged the establishment of a no-fly zone in Libya but abused to displace Muammar Gaddafi, determines China's fundamental political stance in the Syria Crisis today. The Libyan intervention turned into a regime change operation, and that China did not veto the UN Security Council Resolution later turned into a great disappointment. It was perceived as a mistake that should not be repeated.⁴⁸ Regarding this issue, China's UN representative Li Baodong in 2011, at the open session on the protection of civilians under armed conflict in Syria, openly referred to the Libyan example. He said: "The main purpose of UNSC resolutions 1970 and 1973 was to end violence.We are against the deliberate re-interpretation of the decisions in a way that goes beyond their purpose and authority." To confirm this clear statement, China took a passive stance in the Syria Crisis by rejecting the UN

sanctions and an active policy to "create a norm" regarding international interventions carried out.

In this context, Beijing tries to draw a clear line between "regime change imposed from outside" and "intervention for conflict resolution" in Syria. China does this through three basic diplomatic methods: multiple and successive vetoes, dissemination of discourses to undermine the legitimacy of intervention by Western powers for regime change, and involvement in the international community's shaping of the post-intervention "responsibility to protect" norm. While the intervention in Syria exacerbates the instability for China is one dimension of the issue, the possibility of the responsibility to protect invites the sovereignty problem is another dimension. For this reason, China emphasizes the concept of "responsible protection" instead of the concept of "responsibility to protect". The concept of "responsible protection", which constitutes an essential example of China's participation in the norm-forming efforts of the international community, determines six criteria for intervention in a state and includes being responsible during and after the intervention in the state that is the subject of the intervention. The concept of "responsible" is also seen as the product of an effort to explain the vetoes used by China to oppose intervention in Syria and to counter criticism that claims China is acting irresponsibly. As Zhao Lei points out, Chinese leaders increasingly recognize and focus on making an "institutional contribution" to the international community, creating a "discourse power". Great power should create its own rules rather than follow the rules created by others. In this context, China's wide-ranging Syria policy reflects skilful diplomacy that includes holding official meetings with opposition groups, conducting bilateral diplomacy to address the concerns of regional powers opposing Assad, and holding regular meetings with the conflicting parties in small groups.

Apart from the UNSC, another international platform where China has shown its basic stance in Syria policy was the Foreign Ministers Meeting of the Syria Problem Action Group, also known as the Geneva Conference. Beijing accepted the decision taken in Geneva on June 30, 2012, and was announced by Hillary Clinton to establish a transitional government in Syria and that Bashar Assad will not play a role in this government. He boycotted the process with Russia by not participating in the Friends of the Syrian People Group meeting.

Conclusion

This study confirmed that there is almost unanimity that China is one of the countries that possess all the ingredients that qualify it to occupy a strong position on the international scene and pursue an independent, peaceful foreign policy intending to protect its independence and preserve its territorial integrity. A new international economic and political system that embodies the desires of peoples to live in freedom and peace. When the change in China's Middle East policy in the historical process is analyzed with a holistic perspective, it is revealed that the Middle East has become an increasingly important region for the Beijing administration. The growing importance of the Middle East in Chinese diplomacy should be seen as a result of both the global outlook of Chinese foreign policy and the Beijing administration's changing perception of the region. For the Chinese administration, the Middle East means a geostrategic space to re-determine its position in the global power struggle. However, while entering into this struggle, Beijing follows a different path from the traditional significant power policies and refuses to take a side in regional conflicts. China is trying to make its traditional value judgments dominant through its foreign policy and wants to show that today's world cannot be shaped only by Western values and theories. It follows political determinants towards the Arab countries. China has taken a positive attitude towards many Arab issues. It supports the Arab and Palestinian position by pressuring Israel to respond to Palestinian and Arab rights, especially about the need to end the Israeli occupation or stop the aggression against the Palestinian people. And it seeks to develop forms of Arab and Chinese cooperation in the fields of security in the Gulf to achieve balance with the American presence, preserve energy sources to protect human civilization and support industrial and international development projects, including sustainable ones in the countries of the region.

In this study, China's Middle East policy has been discussed in the historical change process. The current perspective of the Beijing administration towards the region has been tried to be revealed. According to the analysis, it was concluded that the Middle East was positioned within the framework of national priorities for the Beijing administration. For China, whose main goal in foreign policy was to

export ideology in the 1949-1978 period, the Middle East made a sense to show support to Third World countries. However, for China, which prioritized integration with the global system after 1978, relations with the great powers gained importance and the Middle East remained in the secondary plan.

As the Beijing administration was exposed to international sanctions after the 1989 Tiananmen Events, the Middle East became important again. After 2010, the foreign policy in the region was redefined within the scope of the global power struggle. Within the scope of the Arab Spring, which is the most crucial factor that necessitates this re-determination process, China has gained an active position for the first time in the solution of regional problems. To reveal this position, the examples of the Yemen Crisis and the Syrian Civil War are discussed in this study. Accordingly, China appears to support Saudi Arabia in Yemen due to its interests but acts together with Iran and Russia in Syria. According to these examples, China follows a "balancing policy without direct intervention", not "taking sides and direct intervention" policies, similar to traditional hegemonic powers in the Middle East.

In an interview with Mearsheimer, Brzezinski [22] said that Chinese leaders agree that the best way to ensure China's global supremacy is a "prudent policy of gaining influence", and that for this reason, China has followed a much more flexible and in-depth policy than many states that tried to achieve great power status in the past. This argument, which supports the results presented in this study, also indicates that Beijing will continue to follow a very flexible and pragmatic foreign policy in the Middle East. Many consider this policy the pride of the Chinese people and the peace-loving world people. Chinese diplomacy has remained vital and active, dealing with developments positively and flexibly. It has always called in all international forums to reform the global system and establish a just and reasonable international order through its repeated invitation to meet with the countries of the world based on clear.

China follows a particular strategy in its relations with Arab countries at all levels and what happened at the political level. On the other hand, it is trying to assist by various means to develop industry and technology in the Arab world and push the peoples of the region to achieve a growing industrial economy, through the introduction of

technological industries, on the other hand, the Arab countries are trying to benefit from China's unique experience in achieving high rates of economic development and trying to eliminate the problems of poverty and unemployment by taking advantage of development projects through the application of China's policy of opening up to the outside in a comprehensive way and working to expand the scope of cooperation in the fields of commercial, economic and technological contacts, as well as scientific and cultural exchanges on a larger scale based on the principle of equality, and the achievement of mutual benefit between all parties. Arab countries are attempting to leverage Chinese capabilities and expertise in the fields of economics, social policy, and politics in order to achieve a strategic balance in the region.

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