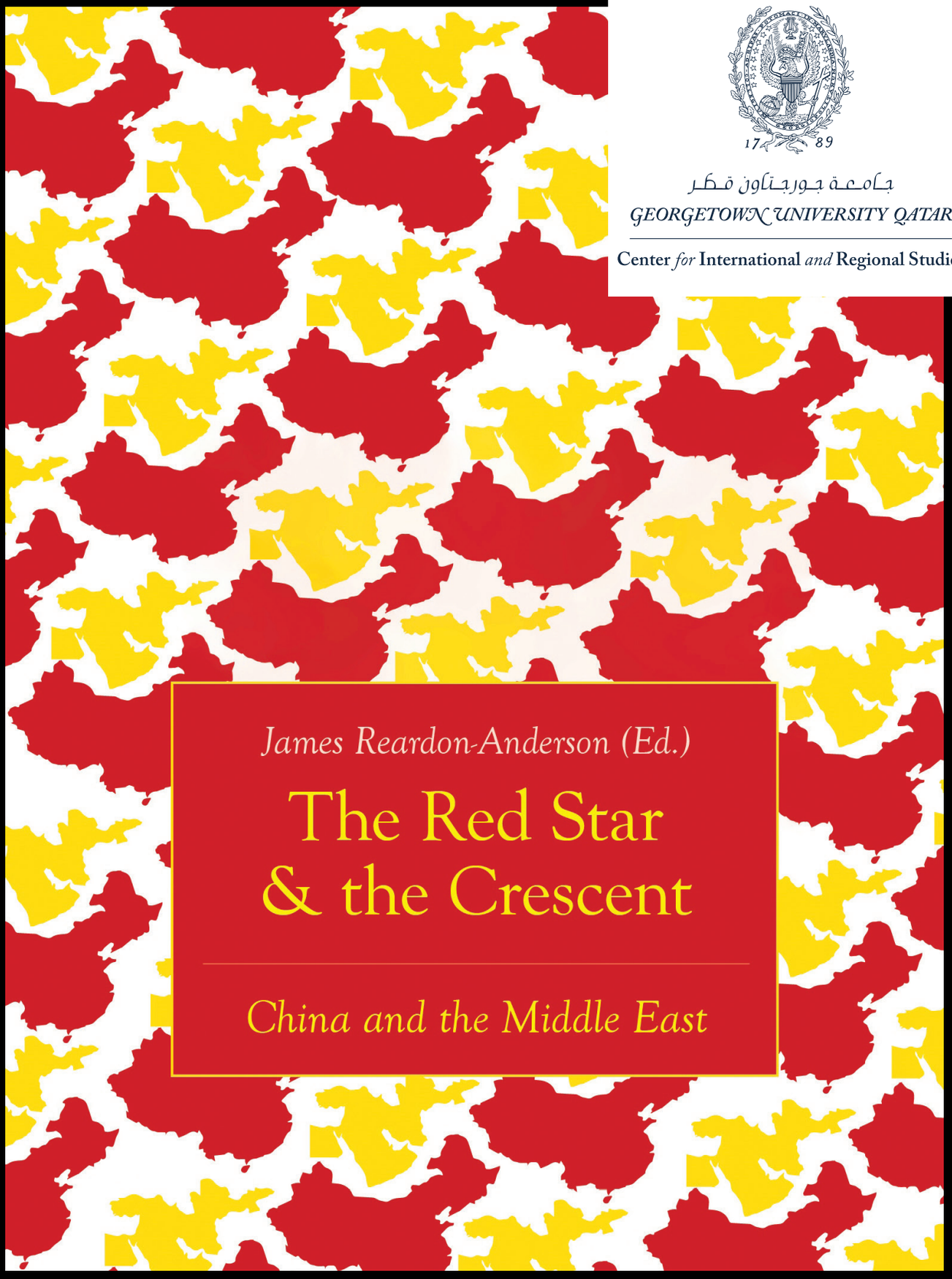

جامعة جورجتاون قطر

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY QATAR

Center *for* International *and* Regional Studies

James Reardon-Anderson (Ed.)

The Red Star & the Crescent

China and the Middle East

SUMMARY REPORT

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- To encourage in-depth examination and exchange of ideas
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The Red Star and the Crescent: China and the Middle East

Working Group Summary Report

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The Red Star and the Crescent
Working Group Summary Report

Much of the existing scholarship has viewed Chinese engagements in the Middle East through the lens of security, with particular attention paid to the implications of China's interactions for the United States and its allies. However, China's evolving relationship in the region ought to be principally viewed as an outcome of its own interests in securing its energy needs and developing export markets, as well as the fact that it has become a significant global power and cannot afford to divorce itself from events in the Arab world. CIRS launched a research initiative on "China and the Middle East" to examine the unfolding relationship between the two, not only through the lenses of international security, energy, economics, and investments, but also taking into account China's broader engagements with the region in the social and cultural spheres.

Given the magnitude and breadth of its interests in the Middle East, it is hardly surprising that China has stepped up its regional engagements over recent years. However, what remains unclear is whether or not China is broadening its involvement in the Middle East and moving beyond the traditional parameters of energy, trade, and investment. Middle Eastern states have long regarded China as a global power in primarily economic terms, and have developed their bilateral relations on this basis. China has seldom been considered a significant security partner or provider, particularly given that Chinese foreign policy in the region has consistently operated along pragmatic lines and within the established status quo of the regional security architecture. China has sought to engage with different Middle Eastern countries without demonstrating any political or ideological biases. Despite substantial international pressure to isolate Iran over the past years, China has maintained a healthy relationship with the Islamic Republic. Simultaneously, China has maintained strong bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, and Turkey, and has done so without getting drawn into the various tensions or conflicts these countries have with each other. Given the heightened instability across the Middle East, some analyses suggest that this neutral balancing act may not be sustainable for China in the long term. If regional turmoil deepens and spreads, and the US and its partners are unable to manage regional security arrangements, China may well find itself being dragged reluctantly into considering an expanded political and security role. With some Middle Eastern states increasingly feeling the vulnerability of a detached United States, there may well be an added incentive to augment China's role in the region.

The focus of this project is on the evolution of contemporary relations between China and the countries of the Persian Gulf, the Levant, and the Maghreb. Scholars from China, the Middle East, the United States, and Europe were brought together to address original research questions on a number of relevant topics, including but not limited to: the nature of China's bilateral relationships with different Middle Eastern states; the drivers and implementation of Chinese foreign policy in the Middle East; the role of energy; the impact of emerging security dynamics; the changes and continuities in China's role in the international system and in the Middle East; the emergence of China as a soft power in the Middle East; and religious, educational, and cultural connections between China and the Middle East. This project resulted in an edited volume entitled *The Red Star and the Crescent: China and the Middle East,* edited by James Reardon-Anderson (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2017). This Summary Report contains synopses of those chapters.

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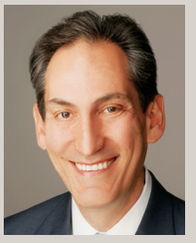

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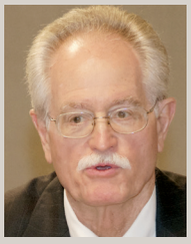

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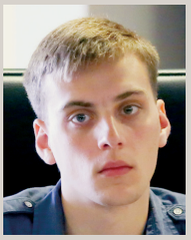

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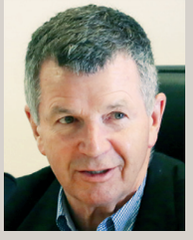

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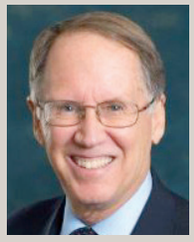

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Introduction

James Reardon-Anderson

This book brings together recent scholarship on China's relations with the Middle East and more narrowly the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf—a topic that has hitherto attracted too little attention from policymakers and scholars. The most important reason for this newfound focus is a new confluence of interests: China needs oil and gas, and the major oil producers in the Gulf need the Chinese market. Despite the decline in China's economic growth, its residents remain dependent on imports of energy, and the world's biggest suppliers are in the Gulf. Currently, more than half of China's crude oil imports come from the Gulf—the leading suppliers being (in order) Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iran, and Iraq. One can imagine that the details of this picture will change, as China's economy, world oil prices, and supply lines fluctuate, but it is highly unlikely that China's dependence on Middle East oil (and secondarily natural gas) will decline any time soon.

It is not that the Middle East has been or is likely to be the highest priority for Chinese policymakers. It is understandable that in the past, and more likely that in the future, Beijing has paid and will pay more attention to the Great Powers—the United States, Russia, and Europe; and that China has been and will remain a regional rather than a global power, whose historical traditions and immediate interests reside on the country's periphery—both land borders and surrounding waters. Yet beyond these priorities, the Middle East is likely to remain a focus of China's attention.

The same might be said of the countries in the Middle East. Until recently, China meant little to this region, which has been—and to a large extent remains—focused on its own problems and beholden to its main patron and protector, the United States. But things have changed in recent years, as the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy has created a corresponding demand for energy and the United States has been both distracted from and demonstrably less able to provide the leadership that countries in the region have come to expect or hope for. Countries in the Gulf that lead the world in petroleum reserves, production, and exports, now and in the future, will see China as an important (currently their single largest) market.

The chapters in this volume are designed to deal more with the implications of trade than with the trade itself, and to explore resultant or tangential issues. One of these issues is how to deal with the other great powers that are external to the region, most notably the United States. Despite recent developments, the US remains the principal keeper of security within the region and of the supply lines that connect the Gulf to its eastern (and all other) markets. The Gulf states and the Chinese recognize that they depend on the US for regional stability and secure supply lines. The Chinese may chafe at the assertion that they are "free riders," enjoying the fruits of this trade without paying their share to protect it. But both Beijing and states within the region are acutely aware that they need the American security presence, as well as a positive relationship with the United States, and this realization places constraints on policymakers on all sides.

This book has been designed as a conversation among the authors. We have tried to avoid either extreme: of forcing the contributors' diverse approaches into a uniform account of the subject, or inviting a "hundred flowers" that offer color and diversity at the expense of coherence. Our goal, rather, has been to put together a group of chapters that draw on the effort and creativity of the various authors, while at the same time speak to one another in a conversation that makes sense and enriches our understanding.

In sum, this book attempts to anticipate from different angles the future of China's policies in the Middle East (and by implication elsewhere). It brings together chapters written by leading scholars of Chinese and Middle East international relations in 2017. Inevitably, whenever the book appears, it will miss the most recent events; and in selecting among a range of issues, it will capture some and miss others. Essentially, we wish to point out that our chapters were completed before the election of Donald Trump and have focused on China's approach to the (Arabian or Persian) Gulf, while ignoring some tangential issues (such as China's relations with Israel).

James Reardon-Anderson is Professor of History in the Georgetown University School of Foreign Studies in Qatar. He is the author of five books on the history and politics of China, most recently *Reluctant Pioneers: China's Northward Expansion* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

1. *China's Search for Security in the Greater Middle East*

Andrew Scobell

One of the most remarkable seismic shifts in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East since the end of the Cold War has been the increasing involvement of the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, China's activism has been almost exclusively economic; in diplomatic and military arenas, Beijing has been extraordinarily timid in the Middle East.

After decades of near absence and virtual irrelevance, in the twenty-first century the PRC has emerged as a major player and presence in the region, but Beijing's role has been largely focused on economic activities. China's trade with the Middle East has increased more than 600 percent over a ten-year period, growing to $230 billion by 2014; as of 2015, China was the world's largest importer of crude oil—more than half of which comes from the Middle East. Of course this increase in trade is not confined to the Middle East alone; Chinese trade with, for example, Central Asia, has also seen tremendous growth, reaching $46 billion in 2012 from only $527 million in 1992. But even in such an environment of general trade expansion, China's increasing economic involvement in the Middle East does stand out. China's annual foreign assistance delivered to the Middle East, according to one estimate, jumped from $151 million in 2001 to $6.8 billion in 2010. Moreover, approximately 550,000 of the some five million PRC citizens around the world are located in the Middle East according to one analyst. In contrast, China has only been modestly engaged diplomatically and militarily in the region.

This timidity in the Middle East is in stark contrast to China's greater twenty-first-century assertiveness both in its own neighborhood and in other locales around the world. PRC President Xi Jinping, since assuming office in 2013, has articulated an ambitious agenda, including a more prominent role for China in global affairs. Despite greatly expanded interests in the Middle East, China has yet to allocate substantial security resources and make greater efforts toward protecting its interests in the region. This stark mismatch is a source of frustration to some Chinese analysts.

What are China's paramount interests in the Middle East? China's top interests include access to the region's energy resources, especially petroleum; doing whatever it can in the Middle East to preserve stability at home and peace in its Asia-Pacific neighborhood; expanding its influence in what Beijing regards as a pivotal region of the world; and demonstrating China's status as a global power. Beijing recognizes that the United States is the dominant outside power in the Middle East, and China's involvement in the region necessarily entails elements of cooperation and competition with Washington.

China's involvement in the Lesser Middle East—with the exception of economic activities—appears to be minimalist. Thus, while China is an economic heavyweight, it continues to be a diplomatic lightweight and military featherweight. This is despite the fact that the core Middle East holds a prominent place in China's economic, foreign, and security policies. The region is an important source for China's growing energy needs, is considered of key geostrategic significance, and in the twenty-first century Beijing seems to view the Middle East as "greater": inexorably linked to the PRC's internal security, national unity, and stability around its continental periphery.

China confronts the challenge of how to protect considerable interests from an array of threats and potential threats. Most of them are non-traditional security threats, especially terrorism, but traditional security threats, such as interstate war, are also present. Only time will tell whether Chinese learning will result in a greater diplomatic and military presence or, possibly, in enhanced partnerships with other states. Certainly, there is a lively ongoing debate within China about how best to protect China's overseas interests in the Middle East.

Andrew Scobell is Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation. He authored (with Andrew J. Nathan) *China's Search for Security* (Columbia University Press, 2012); *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); more than a dozen monographs and reports, as well as many journal articles and book chapters. He has also edited or coedited more than a dozen volumes on various aspects of security in the Asia-Pacific region, including with Phillip Saunders, *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

2. *China, the United States, and the Middle East*

Jon B. Alterman

As China's global footprint expands, it relies more and more on parts of the world where it has little influence and seeks to flourish in a system largely developed by others. As China's global interests broaden, the country constantly finds itself in contact with the United States, which is neither a clear rival nor a clear adversary, but is clearly the world's leading global power. While China faces many challenges in its foreign policy, one of the most fundamental is how to manage its own rise without either clashing with the United States or creating undue burdens for itself as the largest Asian power. This challenge manifests itself especially in the region between East Asia and the Middle East, a space that, from a US perspective, is truly the other side of the world.

The challenge is particularly acute because conditions in Asia are in flux. While some observers take the enduring US presence in this space to be a given, the United States in fact retains an array of options there. It can occupy that space in ways that complement China's ambitions, or in ways that confront them. It can seek a strong imprint on the region, or it can decide that its vital interests lie elsewhere. China, too, has choices about how it will move in this space. It can seek to shape the space to advance its interests, or it can accept the contours as they are. It can develop its economic, diplomatic, and military capacities in this space simultaneously, or it can focus principally on economic matters. It can work to establish broad multilateral frameworks for international interaction, or it can stress bilateral relations.

What is certain is this: how the United States and China handle their mutual interests in the Middle East, and in the Asian space leading to it, will not only be an important indicator of how they relate to each other globally, but it will also strongly affect their broader ties. The geopolitics of this area will have a profound effect on the future of geopolitics more broadly.

This chapter considers the ways in which the US and Chinese governments have approached the Middle East in the past, and describes China's rising interests there. It analyzes the countries' shared objectives and the contrasting ways in which they have pursued them. It considers the appeal of China to regional governments and the limits of its influence, and then analyzes China's more immediate task, which is securing the space between its Middle East interests and China itself. This analysis partly involves understanding the role of the US in Asia, and how the US military presence on the maritime route pushes China to pursue terrestrial alternatives. The chapter then considers how a shift in the US approach to the maritime space could have a profound effect on China's security and could push China to articulate more aggressively a "Chinese order" in Asia—one that could be well-accepted and serve Chinese interests. The chapter also analyzes some of the new realities that China will have to confront as its global interests deepen.

China's efforts to secure its growing ties to the Middle East provide an important window into how China sees its global role. China's Middle East strategy not only provides insight into how the Chinese government views its security interests, but it also forces the country to make choices about its ties to the United States and the post-World War II environment that the US helped to construct.

What is often forgotten is how many choices both China and the United States have to make about security in this part of the world, and how many of those choices have not yet been made. Which patterns of behavior change over the next decade, and how, will be among the most important indicators of Chinese intent, US intent, and the structure of great power relations around the globe.

Jon B. Alterman is Senior Vice President, Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, and Director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. He is the author or coauthor of four books on the Middle East, including with John Garver, *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States and the Middle East* (CSIS, 2008), and the editor of five more.

3. *The China Model and the Middle East*
Mehran Kamrava

Developing countries are increasingly having to opt for one of two patterns of development: one advocated by the United States, known as the "Washington Consensus," and the other represented by China, generally referred to as the "Beijing Consensus" or the "China model" (*zhongguo moshi*). Given their traditions of statist activism in the economy and the development process, Middle Eastern countries almost uniformly have come closer to adopting the China model. This is despite the fact that in rhetoric, many have sought to identify themselves as being closer to the Washington Consensus. This inconsistency between appearance and reality suggests deeper structural incongruities in the political economies found in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that undermine their ability to adopt and implement effectively China's largely successful pattern of development. Reinforced by expansive trade, commercial, and political linkages between China and the Middle East, the China model may hold great allure and appeal in the MENA region. But its transferability as a viable pattern of organizing economic and political arrangements is far from certain.

This chapter examines the applicability, or lack thereof, of the China model to the Middle East. As we shall see presently, the China model has three intertwined and mutually reinforcing ingredients. They include state capitalism, featuring state control of the economy's commanding heights alongside a vibrant market capitalism; authoritarian state mechanisms and a tightly controlled political arena; and a measure of meritocracy derived from merit-based promotions through the communist party. Two of these features, namely state capitalism and authoritarian political control, also characterize a majority of political systems in the Middle East and North Africa. At a time when the allure of the Washington Consensus has steadily declined across the Middle East because of its perceived ideological and diplomatic baggage, the appeal of the China model has inversely increased. This appeal has not, however, translated into success. Middle Eastern political systems have by and large failed in their efforts to foster rapid and extensive economic development and industrialization, especially as compared to their Latin American and East Asian counterparts.

Despite efforts at emulating China's success, it is unlikely that much of the world will look like today's China a few decades from now. But China's primary source of power is more ideational than anything else. More specifically, China is exporting the idea of "market authoritarianism," whose appeal rests largely in its simplicity, as well as its challenge to the basic tenets of the Washington Consensus. As a region where China has extensive economic interests, and as the region within which the liberal democratic model is seriously challenged, the Middle East can potentially emerge as a future testing ground for China's global weight and influence. Be that as it may, it is more the idea of the China model and the replication of its economic miracle that is likely to hold the imagination of future generations of Middle Easterners.

Mehran Kamrava is Professor and Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He is the author of a number of journal articles and books, including, most recently, *The Impossibility of Palestine: History, Geography, and the Road Ahead* (Yale University Press, 2016); *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2015); *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*, 3rd ed. (University of California Press, 2013); and *Iran's Intellectual Revolutio*n (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

4. *China's Military Relations with the Middle East*

Degang Sun

China basically perceives the Middle East as a "market." Its military force has therefore kept a low profile in the Middle East to safeguard its geoeconomic interests, such as energy, investments, and trade; and such a tactic is the outcome of its development-oriented geoeconomic strategy. So far, China does not need military bases in the Middle East to influence local governments. Bilateral economic relations and military dependencies provide a channel of influence more powerful than hard military bases. The forms of China's military ties with the Middle East include long-term and ad hoc military presence. The former includes the Chinese naval fleet in Somali waters, the logistical site of Djibouti, and peacekeeping forces in the Middle East. The latter includes military exchanges and arms sales, the deployment of security contractors, joint military rehearsals, evacuating overseas nationals, and participating in other UN Security Council missions temporarily aimed at protecting Beijing's practical interests. Such a soft military presence is unlikely to be transformed into hard military bases in the foreseeable future, although China has already built a logistical site in Djibouti in 2017.

At the beginning of its reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, China identified itself as a "bystander" and "free rider" in the Middle East, and China's Middle East policy was characterized by "business first" tactics of "reaping economic benefits while shelving political entanglement." Since the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, however, China's interaction with the Middle East has become more intensive. In 2014, for instance, China was the largest trading partner of the Arab League and Iran, and the major economic partner of Turkey and Israel as well. Beijing's increasingly major economic presence in the Middle East has exerted a far-reaching effect on its traditional diplomatic policies, represented by the "Four Nos": non-interference in others' internal affairs, non-alignment, no political conditions attached, and no foreign military bases abroad. The Chinese prefer low-cost security arrangements with surrounding states, as alliances and other forms of partnership do not work in China's favor. China's military footprint in the Middle East, albeit relatively weak compared with its economic presence, seems set to become more tangible in the years to come.

China's soft military footprint in the Middle East is compatible with traditional Chinese diplomatic principles: no overseas military base deployment, and no hegemony or power politics. It also fulfills the practical needs of protecting its interests in the Middle East. It is the foundation for building up the new model of great power relations. In the twenty-first century, the United States, Europe, and Japan formed a "traditional core area," while China, India, and Brazil forged a "new core area." These two core regions have higher degrees of globalization, becoming the two engines of human development. In contrast, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa are marginalized. They pose a direct or indirect threat to the core areas and bring challenges, becoming key areas of global governance.

Since the early twenty-first century, the traditional powers, such as the US, UK, France, Russia, and Japan, generally perceive the Middle East as a "battle zone," and they have deployed hard military bases in the Middle East to further their interests, including maintaining the political predominance of the region, carrying out anti-terrorist and non-proliferation tactics, popularizing Western-style democracy and values,

defending allies, and preventing anti-Western radicals from challenging the regional order. All of these have been under the guise of security-oriented geopolitical strategies.

The connotation of Chinese overseas interests is increasingly rich, and the forms of soft military footprints that protect Chinese overseas interests are becoming diversified. Today, China is still a developing country. It faces the formidable task of promoting domestic reform and development while maintaining social stability. Economic construction remains the fundamental policy of China in the near future. This means that whether in Asia-Pacific regions or in the Middle East, the geoeconomic strategy will be the long-term strategy of Beijing. As the outcome of the strategy, China will rely on its soft military footprint to build a Maritime Silk Road from the South China Sea to the Mediterranean Sea in the twenty-first century.

Degang Sun is Professor of the Middle East Studies Institute, Shanghai International Studies University, China. His research interests are great powers and the Middle East, Middle East security, and China's policy toward the Middle East. His latest articles (with Yahia H. Zoubir) are "China's Response to the Revolts in the Arab World: A Case of Pragmatic Diplomacy," in *Mediterranean Politics* (2014); and "China's Economic Diplomacy towards the Arab Countries: Challenges Ahead?" in *Journal of Contemporary China* (2015). He is also co-editor of *Building a New Silk Road: China and the Middle East in the 21st Century* (World Affairs Press, 2014).

5. *China and Turkey: Sailing through Rough Waters*

Altay Atlı

The relationship between China and Turkey is best described as one of ebb and flow, with economic initiatives aimed at mutual benefit being welcomed by both sides. It is peppered with much rhetoric on both countries' "rise" in the global system and their "importance" to each other; with certain steps being taken, only to be eventually put on hold or totally derailed due to political issues and miscalculations, as is recurrently the case. The relationship between the two countries is developing, starting from 1971 when the two countries officially recognized each other; but the nature of this development is better described as oscillating, rather than following a linear progress.

China and Turkey are strategic cooperation partners, and both sides subscribe to the discourse that there should be greater collaboration between two G20 member-countries located at both ends of the Asian continent. Initiatives like China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) project, which is welcomed by Turkey with great enthusiasm, serve to nurture this idea, and studies inquiring into the dynamics of the relationship between China and Turkey offer much optimism for the future. Despite this positive outlook and profound optimism, which is not only nurtured by politicians but also subscribed to by several academics, China and Turkey appear to be rather reluctant when it comes to practical progress in the relationship. Intentions easily fall prey to political concerns, perceptions, and miscalculations; barriers are erected against progress in the relationship. The Sino-Turkish relationship is one of "great expectations," but whether and to what extent expectations translate into concrete outcomes is a different question.

This chapter offers a critical perspective on the Sino-Turkish relationship. The inquiry starts from the widely accepted premise that it is the economic dimension of the relationship that both sides are emphasizing, and argues that the level of economic interaction between the two countries does not produce an incentive that is strong enough to ensure stable and uninterrupted progress between them. As will be shown, despite the appearance, there is no significant economic dependence between China and Turkey, which contrasts with most of the other dyadic cases between China and the countries of the Middle East. China depends profoundly on the region's hydrocarbons, and the countries of the region similarly depend on Chinese capital and infrastructure. The absence of a certain level of economic interdependence leads to greater vulnerability of the relationship against non-economic factors.

This chapter investigates the relationship between economic interaction and the prospects of political conflict or political alignment. Despite the appearance, and relatively high trade figures, only minimal economic dependence is found between China and Turkey, which makes the relationship vulnerable to effects such as developments in the Uyghur issue. The asymmetry in the relationship caused by China being economically more influential makes the relationship even more prone to conflict. Expectations of future trade and investment are shared by both sides, but the positive effect of these expectations on the overall relationship is likely to remain limited if concrete steps are not taken to turn expectations into outcomes. In addition, mutual perceptions between Turks and Chinese citizens are distinctly negative, inflicting an adverse effect on the development of relations between the two countries.

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6. *China and the Iran Nuclear Negotiations: Beijing's Mediation Effort*

John W. Garver

This chapter analyzes China's policies toward the negotiations over Iran's nuclear activities—between Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council, plus Germany (known as P5+1). These negotations, called the "Seven Party talks," span from the inauguration of Barack Obama as United States president in January 2009 to the signature of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on July 14, 2015. The chapter seeks to identify the contours and evolution of Chinese policy toward those negotiations, plus the calculations underlying those Chinese policies.

The thesis here is that China's policies underwent a significant shift early in Obama's second term that started in January 2013, with China playing a much more active and substantive role in the talks. Earlier, including during Obama's first term but following an approach tracing all the way back to the 1979 hostage crisis, Beijing was content to remain a bystander to big power diplomacy involving Iran. It followed the lead of the United States, Moscow, and European capitals, and garnered the status rewards of being deemed a responsible power willing to work in tandem with other leading powers to address important security concerns. Simultaneously, Beijing sought to protect China's commercial/energy interests with the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Prior to early 2013, Beijing sought to keep both sides (Washington and Tehran) minimally happy, and took initiative only when China's commercial interests with Iran were threatened by Western-driven sanctions. In essence, Beijing sought to balance the relationship between Washington and Tehran.

Early in 2013, however, following Obama's re-election, China shifted gears. It began using its good offices to ease tension and facilitate communication between the bitterly hostile US and Iranian negotiators. It began advancing its own suggestions, with a "basket proposal" that accommodated the core concerns of both sides. These concerns were Iran's non-pursuit and non-possession of nuclear weapons; recognition of its "right" under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to non-military research and utilization of nuclear energy; and the lifting of sanctions imposed on Iran since 2006, when Security Council sanctions began. China's top leaders, including Xi Jinping, began openly lobbying Tehran on the need to address international concerns satisfactorily about possible military dimensions of Iranian nuclear programs. Foreign Minister Wang Yi "actively mediated" (*jiji woxuan*) the dispute between Tehran, the United States, and Europe, encouraging the two sides to compromise and meet each other half way (*xiang xiang er xing*). As part of this effort, authoritative Chinese representatives made clear to Iranian leaders that China was prepared to participate largely and generously in Iran's development effort, but that the premise of such participation was a satisfactory resolution of the Iran nuclear issue. Given the political and economic importance of China to the IRI, it seems likely that Beijing's more active approach played a significant role in bringing about the agreement of July 14, 2015.

China had a unique set of assets that positioned it to mediate US-Iran relations. It had good relations with both the United States and Iran. It was a valued strategic partner and interlocutor of both. It made sense to China's leaders to use those unique assets to protect China's own interests, to demonstrate to China's people the growing power and influence of their country, and to make a contribution to world peace.

China's effort to mediate the US-Iran conflict via the Seven Party talks is an example of China's use of its growing power to promote peace or—stated more explicitly—to avert war between the IRI and the United States. China's diplomacy at this juncture offers a statesman-like effort to promote reconciliation between major powers, even when such reconciliation might result in loss of certain strategic advantages for China. It offers an example of sincere Chinese effort to uphold the global non-nuclear weapons proliferation regime. It offers a clear example of an acute Chinese sensitivity to the probable destabilizing effect of war; and it offers a reassuring example to other countries that China will use its ever-greater power to uphold peace and international stability. The success of parallel Chinese and US policies toward Iran's nuclear issues offers an example of how the two countries may work in tandem to address first-order security issues, even when they have serious differences in approach and geostrategic interests.

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7. *China and Iraq*
Joseph Sassoon

Relations between China and Iraq give insight into how China maintains strong and cordial relations with developing countries—such as Iraq, throughout its decades of turbulence—and manages to benefit from dramatic changes like the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. From Iraq's point of view, China represents a very different model compared to relations with ex-colonial powers or superpowers such as the US. The so-called "China model" appeals to countries such as Iraq, that is: rapid growth under authoritarianism—or what is known now as competitive authoritarianism—without the complexities that an "American model" brings with it. This is reinforced by the disillusionment among many Arab countries with the US's lack of long-term commitment to the region. This chapter argues that China-Iraq relations could be an important litmus test for the new Chinese leadership, in dealing with unstable countries that are abundantly rich in resources and are essential for China's long-term growth.

This chapter examines the relations between China and Iraq, with a historical review of the relations between the two countries, going back to the 1950s. It highlights the reaction to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and analyzes how relations between the two countries have developed in the last twelve years. Three facets that have made Iraq a strategic partner to China in the decade since the invasion are assessed: trade and economic dealings, oil, and arms supplies. These factors are critical to understanding how China perceives Iraq in its overall trade and global strategy. The risks and challenges that China faces in its bilateral relations with Iraq are also highlighted.

Apart from Iran, China was the other country that reaped the biggest benefits from the invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein's regime. Iraq's rich resources in oil and gas opened up new possibilities for China to diversify its supplies and be less dependent on Saudi Arabia. At the same time, Iraq, after decades of deprivation, wars, and sanctions, desperately needed a wide variety of cheap imports. Thus a symbiosis developed between the two countries, aided by the fact that China had no historical "baggage" in the region. It was fundamentally a bilateral relationship based on mutual benefits.

Once the US administration announced its intention to pull out all American soldiers from Iraq, US influence began to wither. For example, the Iraqis ignored numerous calls by senior American officials not to allow Iranian planes to land in Iraq that were on their way to Syria, carrying arms and ammunition to Bashar al-Assad's regime. The feeling within the Iraqi leadership, and in many quarters in the Arab world, was that the US was not as interested in the region as it used to be; that its focus was more on Asia. This definitely left a vacuum of power that China used to its advantage from 2008 onward. Thus, Chinese investments in building relations with Iraq over many decades; a dramatic change in Iraq's needs after the invasion; and the power vacuum mentioned above; all led to a structural enhancement of the relationship between Iraq and China. Iraqis perceive China as a positive force that will bring economic prosperity without a huge political cost, as the Chinese would not intervene in Iraq's internal affairs or "lecture" the Iraqis on how to run their institutions in a more open and free way. Another critical factor bolstering the relations between the two countries is China's willingness to take a long-term view on its investments, a luxury that Western companies cannot afford.

Unfortunately for both countries, Iraq has not enjoyed much political stability since the fall of the Ba'th. A bloody civil war raged for two years, and the sectarian rift, encouraged by the eight-year rule of Nuri al-Maliki, only exacerbated the situation. In 2014, the attacks by ISIL on Mosul and other parts of the country ushered in new elements of instability. Iraq in 2016, more than in any period before or after the 2003 invasion, was most at risk of disintegrating into three parts.

Finally, economic factors might impact the bilateral relations: on China's side, the slowdown in economic growth will lead to a significant reduction in energy consumption; on Iraq's side, the collapse of oil prices in the world markets is having calamitous implications for the country after it wasted the years of oil boom in graft and mismanagement. Yet, the relationship is essential for both countries on many levels, and one could expect China to be more politically and economically involved in Iraq in the coming decade, in spite of the challenges it is now facing.

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8. *Silk Roads and Global Strategy: China's Quest*
Stephen Blank

Beyond Central Asia, China is clearly embarked upon a global program of port construction that could in time lead to a far-flung network not only of ports for "port calls" but for naval bases. China is already building this kind of infrastructure in the Indian Ocean and a base in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. Moreover, Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent report openly confirmed that China is looking to build infrastructural facilities and support abilities, i.e. bases. China is also now increasing its military assistance to the Afghan army, demonstrating Afghanistan's growing security importance to China as it moves forward on OBOR. China's 2015 participation with Russia in joint naval exercises in the Mediterranean also exhibits an interest in projecting power into the Middle East, if not beyond. Similarly, at a recent conference of Russia's Valdai Club on the Middle East, where the need to render foreign assistance to states there was raised, an unnamed Chinese participant observed that while Beijing wants to be friends with everyone and has no intention of interfering in the Iran-Saudi rivalry, it will provide such assistance and investment, presumably in conjunction with the OBOR project. Indeed, inasmuch as OBOR is supposed to link China through Central Asia with Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, these and other projects listed below are not incomprehensible.

Apart from Iran, China is making major investments and has negotiated a currency swap with the United Arab Emirates, giving it access to the very important ports and transport routes through the Emirates for the OBOR projects. China has unsuccessfully sought a deep-water port on the Georgian coast of the Black Sea, in conjunction with the planned construction of overland rail and transport routes to Georgia as part of OBOR. Similarly, Ukraine figures prominently in Chinese thinking now that it has a free trade agreement with the European Union. In January 2016, China officially supported a freight train route from Ukraine to Kazakhstan and China (and presumably in return), which includes ferries across the Black and Caspian Seas, and bypasses Russia. Traffic started on this route as of March 2016. Chinese officials also met with Ukrainian officials to discuss a commission on the functioning of the Silk Road to increase Ukraine's transport capacity. China is also helping to build numerous railway and infrastructure projects to provide the overland dimension of OBOR to its final destination, Venice. Plans also include European interest in reopening the Beskyd tunnel to connect Southern Europe with Ukraine, and in expanding the Silk Roads into the Baltic States. Finally, given the continuing turmoil in the Middle East and the plans for OBOR to traverse parts of that region and then link up with other networks or subsidiary routes, it is clear that OBOR is connected to China's growing interest in and capacity to influence the Middle East.

The confluence of OBOR with enhanced geopolitical reach, capability, and willingness to talk about "hard" security approaches, apparently reflects Xi Jinping's willingness to use geoeconomic intimidation, as well as economic rewards. Therefore, the OBOR project bears watching. However, we should not assume that what is promised will be implemented. In fact, there is a great distance between what China promises and actually implements. Despite many promises of largesse and of big projects, often the money is not allocated or the project is stopped or delayed midstream, and this has happened in many countries. Neither is it clear that China's own faltering domestic economy will allow it to build all the intended projects from

China to Europe. Finally, so far China has not had to deal too deeply with all the many problems and political issues that will arise in all of the intervening countries where it is building projects, and it is by no means clear how China will cope with all those problems on top of its existing agenda.

Nevertheless, this audacious project, even if only partially realized, will effect a major geoeconomic and geostrategic change throughout the regions where it takes shape. Given its audacious sweep and the geoeconomic and geostrategic implications inherent in the OBOR vision and projects, we ignore it at our peril. And the fact that only China is now capable of thinking on this scale, in and of itself, is a marker of great significance.

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9. *Choosing Not to Choose: The Belt and Road Initiative and the Middle East*

Andrew Small

The role of the Middle East in China's Belt and Road initiative (OBOR) is one of the least-clearly articulated of any of the regions that fall under the scheme. Many of OBOR's underlying objectives certainly converge there. It is a region that requires significant infrastructure, it is a critical energy source, a land bridge to Europe, and a major focal point for Chinese efforts to stabilize its broader neighborhood and address threats from militancy. But many of the ambiguities about the future of China's broader strategy in the Middle East apply even more forcefully to OBOR. The initiative is in its early stages, so the uncertainties surrounding it exist in many other regions too. Much of the existing analysis about its ramifications are based on an assessment of the motivations, logic, and goals for the initiative, rather than a detailed look at on-the-ground developments. But in the Middle East, one of China's principal objectives has been to decouple trade and economics from the complexities of the region's politics, whereas one of OBOR's defining characteristics is the deployment of economic tools to serve strategic and political ends.

In addition to examining the genesis and rationale behind OBOR, how it is being put into practice, and the challenges it faces, this chapter looks at how China might resolve the potential contradictions between OBOR and the traditional framework of Chinese policy in the Middle East. China may seek to resolve the contradictions through facing up to the political choices in the region that it had previously abjured, through a realization of OBOR that prioritizes "balance" over other political and economic objectives; or through a more modest set of activities than in other regions where political neutrality is not such an overriding concern. The factors that may lead to a deepened Chinese military and intelligence role in the region, for instance—such as the need to take more direct action against the Turkistan Islamic Party in Syria, or further evacuations of personnel of the sort that has taken place in Libya and Yemen—are precisely those that would inhibit a significant, broad-based increase in China's economic presence. Even in the event of an end to the war in Syria, China's response is still likely to be defined by caution about exposure to the risks of being caught in the middle of the region's political dynamics; in contrast to, say, Afghanistan, where China has promised large-scale investments if a peace settlement is reached.

Until China is willing to make clearer strategic choices in the Middle East, OBOR is likely to take a more modest form there than in several of the regions on China's periphery. Other potential initiatives include the following: an effort to develop transportation routes through Iran and Turkey; a heightened level of involvement in the industrial sectors of relatively well-developed and stable Gulf states; investment cooperation with Gulf-state financiers; expanded investments in infrastructure, particularly in Egypt and Iran; further involvement in the region's ports, including the new military base in Djibouti; and otherwise a degree of continuity in energy ties with major exporters of oil and natural gas, as well other important economic relations in the region, such as Israel. Some Chinese analysts have gone so far as to argue that China intends OBOR to "bypass" the Middle East, which is evidently too strong. This is still a substantive agenda; but it is far from being a transformative one.

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10. *Hajjis, Refugees, Salafi Preachers, and a Myriad of Others: An Examination of Islamic Connectivities in the Sino-Saudi Relationship*

Mohammed Turki Al-Sudairi

The most authoritative works dealing with the Sino-Saudi relationship have been largely fixated on analyzing its economic, political, and strategic dimensions. This is naturally an outcome of the Kingdom's (eroding) status as a hydrocarbon "swing producer" and China's own global ascendancy, not to mention the ramifications that their increasingly "interdependent" engagement could entail a gamut of issues, i.e. on the United States' role in the Middle East; the position, balance, and power vis-à-vis Israel and Iran; and even the future structure of Gulf security. Islam—unavoidably perhaps—also registers a presence in such discussions, albeit in a somewhat faint and cursory fashion. Its inclusion stems from two inescapable factors: the centrality of the religion to Saudi Arabia's national and political identity as a self-proclaimed Sunni power with custodianship over the Two Holy Mosques; and the presence of dynamic Muslim minorities within China (making up 1.6–2 percent of the total population) with complex and burgeoning ties with many parts of the Islamic world, including Saudi Arabia.

Because of the dominance of politico-economic and strategic discourses, conversations on Islam are often heavily colored by a state-centered mindset, even in works where a more nuanced attention is accorded to it. That is to say, the role of Islam is appraised by how far it complicates or facilitates the advancement of strategic and politico-economic objectives defined by the two states. This mindset produces two perspectives. On the one hand, Islam is conceived as a tool of the state. Its "constituent parts," in the form of symbols, organizations, institutions, and agents, are reduced to instruments that are utilized in pursuit of particular goals aimed at either courting or pressuring the other party to assume a more favorable stance as a means toward obtaining a particular objective identified by the state. On the other hand, it is identified as an external threat. That is to say, Islam is imagined to be an uncontrollable and turbulent factor that poses a challenge—security-wise, ideationally, politically, and strategically—to the development of long-term relations between the two countries. This notion also carries with it the implicit understanding that, by virtue of these states' identities, their relationship will be marred by considerable contradiction and tension, although this is not always stated.

The analysis in this chapter is done under the rubric of "Islamic connectivities," denoting all types of significant interactions through which Islam has been symbolically and discursively deployed, on whatever basis, and for whatever objective. These "Islamic connectivities" are examined along functional lines based on identifiable themes and channels, and at the backdrop of a loose chronological division of four epochs: the Late Qing and the Republic (late nineteenth-century into the 1940s), the Cold War (1950s–1970s), the Reform and Opening Up (1980s–1990s), and the Post-9/11 period (2000s–2010s). The loose approach means that particular sections, examining specific connectivities, will sometimes go beyond an identified period in favor of an analysis that covers a longer time span. As for the chronological divisions as such, the reasoning behind them is threefold: first, it situates these connectivities in their proper contexts, that is to say that it serves to shed light on the domestic and international circumstances from which they emerged. Second, such an epochal approach helps communicate the changing "mood" of Sino-Saudi relations during different time periods, not to mention changing roles and perceptions

among states and other actors. Third, it allows us to trace the evolution and growing complexity of Islam's role, and the character of particular connectivities (which might be reproduced in different epochs), from the earliest beginnings of this relationship to the present. The author does not claim to have exhausted all connectivities and themes in this chapter, but tries to capture the most pivotal ones in the course of their analysis.

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11. *China's Uyghurs: A Potential Time Bomb*

James M. Dorsey

Lurking in the background of Chinese President Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road" vision of Eurasia as a Chinese sphere of influence undergirded by a Chinese-funded network of transport and communications infrastructure lies a potential time bomb: the long-standing refusal of northwest China's Uyghur population to be assimilated in the same way that their Muslim Hui cousins have melted into the fabric of Chinese society. China hopes that Chinese-built infrastructure in Pakistan and Central Asia will increase interdependency and spur economic development in its troubled northwestern, resource-rich province of Xinjiang or New Frontier, where harsh measures against the cultural and religious practices of the restless Uyghurs have fueled Islamist and nationalist violence. A job boom in Xinjiang, engendered by the infrastructure development, would allow the government to dilute the region's Uyghur population further, through the immigration of non-Uyghurs.

China's stakes in Xinjiang are huge. Xinjiang hosts 15 percent of China's proven oil reserves, 22 percent of its gas reserves, and 115 of the 147 raw materials found in the People's Republic. With 2,800 kilometers of border with Central Asian nations, Xinjiang is China's gateway to Eurasia. Its 1.6 million square kilometers account for 16.6 percent of China's territorial landmass. Xinjiang is moreover home to some of China's most sensitive military facilities, including its nuclear arsenal.

Uyghurs, Turkic rather than Chinese speakers, currently account for 46 percent of Xinjiang's 22 million inhabitants, and together with their cousins of Central Asian and Tartar origin, make up 52 percent. While still the largest group in Xinjiang, Uyghurs have seen their relative numbers dwindle over the decades as the result of a government effort to marginalize them in their own homeland. Economic policy aimed at fostering growth favores the country's Han majority. Han, who once accounted for a mere 5 percent of the region's population, now constitute Xinjiang's second largest ethnic group at 40 percent.

The Uyghurs' disenfranchisement is evident in statistics quoted by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's census office. The numbers show that the percentage of Uyghurs working in agriculture, 80.51 percent, is higher than the national average of 61.6 percent and far higher than the 36.7 percent among Han in the region. Similarly, only 5.3 percent of the Uyghur have moved into professional and technical jobs, while 11.1 percent of Han have graduated into those slots. The same is true for managerial and administrative jobs: less than one percent of the Uyghur workforce occupies such positions, compared to 3.9 percent of the Han labor force.

Demographics matter in a region in which Xinjiang's capital of Urumqi and other major cities like Kashgar are far closer to Central Asia than they are to Beijing. Urumqi is 2,400 km from Beijing, but only 1,000 km from the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, and 1,800 km from Kabul. The Uyghur city of Kashgar further west is a mere 400 km from Bishkek and 800 km from Kabul. To compensate for this geostrategic weakness in what Beijing considers its soft belly, China enhanced its grip on Xinjiang in the 1980s and 1990s with the dispatch to the region of the Han paramilitary Xinjiang Construction and Production Corps. Initially focused on securing China's borders, the Corps took control of 48 percent of Xinjiang's land. Since the demise of the Soviet Union and the eruption of Uyghur protests, it has expanded its focus to include the quelling of domestic unrest.

The result is an emerging situation in Xinjiang that could over time complicate China's relations with Middle Eastern and other Muslim nations, despite their current willingness to turn a blind eye. That may become increasingly difficult as Beijing emphasizes improvement of Uyghur standards of living without addressing political and cultural grievances; seeks to eradicate Uyghur culture by restricting fasting during Ramadan and the consumption of yogurt; forbids men to wear beards; and marginalizes teaching of Uyghur language or using it in interactions with the government and the judiciary; and moves to ensure Han Chinese dominance in Xinjiang.

For now, Middle Eastern and North African governments, determined not to muddy relations with China, have remained largely silent about the plight of the Uyghurs. Their attitudes appear to confirm Chinese scholar Zhang Xiandong's call for close Chinese political and economic cooperation with Middle Eastern nations in a bid to create a favorable environment for a crackdown in Xinjiang, should Chinese Muslims inclined towards separatism spark a development that would present a great challenge to the social stability and economic development in northwestern China.

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