

Strategic Hedging and Multi-Alignment China's Balancing of Iran and Arab Gulf States in a Changing Regional Order

Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari ^{1*} Kashif Gill ²

¹ PhD Political Science (Strategic Studies), Islamia College University Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Email: bukharipalmist@gmail.com

² M.Phil. Scholar, Governance & Public Policy, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: gillkashif600@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: China's increased Gulf involvement is a departure from its traditionally transactional energy diplomacy to one of multi-alignment. This paper explores the balance Beijing has to strike between Iran and the Arab Gulf states in the competition and sanctions-riven region without falling into explicit bloc politics, or competing with the expectation of achieving energy independence. The paper proposes that China's approach to the Gulf is characterized as a strategic hedging approach, encompassing economic pragmatism, political selectivity and diplomatic neutrality. China has established parallel ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf countries with trade, infrastructure investments, the Belt and Road Initiative, and energy cooperation. The Saudi-Iran rapprochement in 2023 was a testament to Beijing's newfound diplomatic ethos and its stance on stability over ideological alignment. The ability of China, however, to maintain balanced relations could be impeded by regional polarization, maritime insecurity, and an emerging competition with the U.S. The study satisfies a need to discuss non-Western diplomacy, regional order, and China's new Middle East policy.

KEYWORDS: China, Gulf, Strategic Hedging, Multi-alignment, Iran, GCC, Saudi-Iran Rapprochement, Belt and Road Initiative, Middle East Policy

Introduction

China's growing role in the Gulf has proved to be a key geopolitical factor in modern international relations. The Gulf is not just an oil-producing zone; it is a strategic place where world energy and shipping routes, security in the sea lanes, financial networks, regional power dynamics, and great-power competition all touch. The region is important for China's long-term foreign policy objectives on energy security as it is a major producer of some of the most precious energy commodities, and as a major corridor between the Asian markets and Africa/Europe, and it also presents prospects for infrastructure, trade, investment and diplomacy. China has a flexible approach to bilateral relations, not recurring to create formal alliances or declared bloc politics like traditional great powers do. Its policy on the Gulf involves it cooperating with both competing actors at once, notably Iran and the Arab Gulf states. This can be termed as "multi-alignment" or even more accurately "strategic hedging" since Beijing does not choose to align itself exclusively with one regional camp, but rather maintains ties across all main centers of power. This study tends to support that China's Gulf policy can be understood as the policy of multi-alignment as a form of strategic hedging. Beijing has forged strong ties with Iran and strengthened ties with Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates,

Pages: 33 – 48

Volume: 5

Issue: 4 (April 2026)

Corresponding Author

Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari

✉ bukharipalmist@gmail.com

Cite this Article: Bukhari, S. R. H., & Gill, K. (2026). Strategic Hedging and Multi-Alignment: China's Balancing of Iran and Arab Gulf States in a Changing Regional Order. *The Regional Tribune*, 5(4), 33-48. <https://doi.org/10.55737/trt/v-iv.236>

Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain and other Arab countries. This policy allows China to secure its energy supply, develop Belt and Road Initiative corridors, boost its economic clout and make itself appear as a non-partisan diplomatic player. Meanwhile, China doesn't take on the political and military responsibilities that historically come with Gulf leadership. Its strategy doesn't consist of a formal alliance system, nor neutrality. Instead, it is a functional and flexible strategy that enables Beijing to engage with rival regional powers without getting caught up in their conflicts (Xu et al., 2026).

China's dependence on the Gulf is mainly in terms of energy. The Gulf is vital to China's industrial and national stability as China has come to rely on oil and gas imports for its sustained economic development. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Iran are all part of China's energy equations. The Gulf also serves as a shipping route and logistics, as well as, industrial cooperation and investment in the petrochemical sector. But now energy no longer is the sole reason for China's regional presence. The Belt and Road Initiative has expanded the reach of China-Gulf interactions, thanks to the connection of ports, industrial parks, digital infrastructure, renewable energy, finance and transport corridors, giving a wider spatial dimension to the China-Gulf relations. It has shifted China's regional policy from transactional energy diplomacy to a more institutionalized and multidimensional policy. China-Iran relationship is a unique aspect of this strategy. Iran is a land rich in energy, and is a major regional power with a deep strategic geography, military strength and influence spanning several conflict zones. Additionally, it is of strategic significance due to its location in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz, Central Asia, Caucasus region and the wider Indian ocean region. From Beijing's point of view, Iran presents an opportunity for access to energy, continental connectivity and serves as a political asset in being a country that does not bow to U.S.-led pressure. But China's dealings with Iran are under tight control. Beijing has not been ready or able to make their ties with Tehran into a pact, and not keen to see their extensive economic ties with the Arab Gulf countries jeopardized for the sake of Iran. This is an example of China-Iran cooperation as well as its selectivity and interest-centered approach. Meanwhile, the Arab Gulf states have become key allies to the Chinese regional policy. Saudi Arabia has a leading role in energy exports, a regional leadership role, Islamic legitimacy, and Vision 2030 transformation agenda. The UAE is also a significant logistics, financial, technological and re-export centre. Qatar is key to LNG as well as Oman and Kuwait for commercial and strategic access. However, these states are not passively the targets of Chinese influences. They are also trying to diversify their foreign policies with the participation of China, USA, Europe, Russia, India and others. They themselves seek multi-alignment strategies, leaving room for China to step up its activities within the region without necessarily ousting the Americans (Bukhari, 2025; Noor & Ali, 2026).

The problem in China is that Iran and the Arab Gulf states are steeped in the history of geopolitical rivalry and sectarian competition, of ideological mistrust and proxy conflict and security dilemmas. The tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been behind battles in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Bahrain, and the Gulf's maritime insecurity has jeopardized energy supply, as well as global trade, on numerous occasions. China's foreign policy must therefore deal with this central paradox: stability in a region riddled with instability. Beijing has thus focused on economic cooperation, not intervening, diplomatic neutrality, and de-escalation. This enables China to stay neutral and show itself as a responsible power before the world, ready for development and dialogue. The Saudi-Iran rapprochement reached in 2023 at Beijing marked a symbolic shift in China's Gulf diplomacy. In the deal against restoring diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Tehran, China has proven that it could garner economic trust for diplomatic relevance. China's presence should not be exaggerated, however, as evidence suggests it has now become the leading outside power in the Gulf over the United States. Previously, rounds of dialogue had occurred via regional activities, such as between Iraq and Oman, and there were disparate motivations on the Saudi and Iranian side to

improve the situation. China's importance lay in its role as a political safe haven, diplomatic provocation and security forum, but not a complete security system. Thus, the episode demonstrates the effectiveness and drawbacks of China's multi-alignment policy (Nylan, 2026; Bukhari, et al., 2024).

This article has added to the literature by stating that China's Gulf policy cannot be fully comprehended from an energy security or a great-power competition lens. While energy is a core concern, China's actions are also geopolitical, about connectivity, influencing others, and international order. Of course, there is this U.S.-China competition, but China's effort in the region is not a showdown with America. Beijing enjoyed a security climate in the Gulf that remains deeply influenced by the U.S. military presence, and at the same time is bolstering its diplomatic and economic influence. This creates a paradox: China benefits from an order it doesn't fully dominate and to which, as yet, it is not ready to succeed. Moreover, the study is thought-provoking in the sense of transposing the strategic hedging theory to China's own strategy in the Gulf. The term hedging is often used to describe smaller/middle powers' coping with uncertainty between great powers. Mirroring the Gulf context, within that world Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Oman. diversifying partnerships away from the United States are often called "hedging. But there is also 'Chinese hedging'. It does not over-commit to Iran, not deter Arab Gulf monarchies and not be responsible for regional security enforcement. This kind of hedging can "make China maximise its benefits and minimise its exposure", but also could curtail Beijing's ability to act decisively in times of crises (Fattah, 2026).

This study is guided by the following research question: How can China maintain "multi-alignment" with Iran and the Arab Gulf states, which cannot be reconciled, and how is China's "double face" strategy advantageous and disadvantageous? This is a key question given the Gulf is an area where it's hard to maintain a neutral stance. Outside forces are frequently put under pressure to stand on issues of sanctions, maritime security, arms transfers, nuclear negotiations, regional conflicts and diplomatic concerns. China has been successful in avoiding binary options in this regard, but future crises could put Beijing in a bind. Thus, the viability of such a strategy of China will hinge on regional escalation, competition with the U.S., sanctions regimes, and strategic agency on their part. The methodology of this study is qualitative and analytical from a foreign-policy analysis and international relations theory perspective and a perspective of regional security studies. It is based on a research of China strategy in the Arab Gulf states, which include some efforts in scholarly literature, reference of policy documents, official statements, and significant diplomatic developments in the region with regard to Iran. China is not portrayed as the outside power in the story. Rather, Beijing's Gulf policy is an adaptive energy-dependency, region-fracturing, domestic-economic, great-power-competition and Gulf choice-dependent approach. This method will help the study to go beyond descriptions and find pathways of the process in which China finds balance between relationships of competing (Cingöz et al., 2026).

The article now moves on to four parts. This first part discusses literature related to China's policy over the Middle East, strategic hedging, China-Iran relations and China-GCC engagement. The second section considers the pillars of China's multi-alignment strategy – energy security, BRI connectivity, diplomatic non-interference and institutional partnerships. The third part explains the balancing mechanisms in China, ranging from economic pragmatism, mediation, selective security cooperation to political ambiguity. The fourth section examines what we see as the boundaries of this approach: regional conflict, a sanctions squeeze, maritime security concerns, and U.S.-China strategic competition. The multi-alignment has proved effective for China as it is flexible, based in commerce, and carefully selected from a diplomatic point of view, concludes the article. But the same obscurity that works so well in theory might turn into a liability if regional crises put much-needed pressure on Beijing to make more explicit decisions (Noor & Ali, 2026).

Literature Review

There have been multiple layers of scholarship concerning China's relationship with the Gulf. The early research mainly involved energy security and regarding the Gulf as a key source of oil and gas for China's industrial development. Subsequent studies involved other aspects such as trade, infrastructure, Belt and Road project, sea lanes, arms sales, technology and diplomacy. Relatively recent scholarship has looked at the role of China within mediation, regional order, and great-power contestation, with the 2023 Saudi-Iran accord being a particular focus. Yet, an integrated account of the simultaneous ways of managing relations with Iran and Arab Gulf States by China is still needed. Unlike previous literature that examined China-Iran relations and China-GCC relations as separate, this research takes the view of seeing both of these relations as a whole, with China's Iran-GCC complex being a part of a larger multi-alignment strategy. The first stream of literature is China's energy security and the Gulf policy. The Gulf quickly became a more central part of China's foreign policy after the country upped its energy imports from the region. It has been suggested that early regional involvement was motivated by Beijing's desire to maintain political and military security, and have stable energy supplies. Based on this, relations between China and Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE can be viewed as being part of a Chinese strategy for the diversification of its supply in such a way as to minimize its susceptibility to disruptions. This literature is significant as energy has served as the backbone of the Beijing-backed strategy in the Gulf, which is exacerbated by maritime chokepoints and oil markets' vulnerability to volatility in the region (Osman, 2026).

But a single-energy-based explanation cannot fully represent the China-Gulf relations at present. The Belt and Road Initiative also shifted the Gulf away from hydrocarbons and towards a place for geo-economic connectivity. China now sees Gulf ports, industrial areas, transport corridors, renewable energy facilities, digital infrastructure and the financial system as an integral part of its broader regional aspirations. This has enhanced the ties with Arab Gulf countries seeking to diversify their economies, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Their country transformation programmes fit into the interests of China in infrastructure, technology cooperation, industrial investment and long-term commercial access. Thus literature that allows scholars to balance their oil-based thinking. The second strand of literature is on the hedging strategies and multi-alignment. Strategic hedging is a foreign-policy strategy of not fully aligning oneself with one side and keeping multiple alternatives open in case of uncertainty. It is based on cooperation, diversification, risk management and ambiguity. It has frequently been used in the Southeast Asian context to describe the way countries deal with the United States and China. In the Gulf, a similar notion is employed to describe the actions of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Oman, among other countries, that keep ties with the U.S. to ensure their security while forging new ties with China, Russia, India and other countries. This scholarship is helpful for the flexibility on its part rather than having to make definite connections (Mohsin & Ullah, 2025).

Hedging theory application to the issue of China's own Gulf policy has been still underdeveloped. The general view is that China is a bet that others make: "the safe bet" is made toward China, not that "China is the safe bet". In most cases, China is perceived as the destination toward which people make hedges, and surely not as someone who makes a hedge. But there are clearly elements of Beijing's regional policies that are hedging. It plainly is working with Iran, but is not formally allied. It extends its relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE but not its whole regional security agenda. It gains security stability from the United States while at the same time denounces U.S. domination and sanctions. It encourages political dialogue and isn't taking on the responsibility of enforcing regional settlements. Drawing on hedging theory, this work investigates the possibility that multi-alignment is a Chinese choice of risk management and access-maximization in this divided region instead of an accident. The literature on Sino-Iranian relations is also important as a foundation. In Iran's case, it has long held importance for energy, geographical and market considerations, as well as its opposition to U.S. pressure. Iran's strategic geographic position makes it a

geographic corridor between the Gulf, Central Asia, South Asia, Caucasus and Eurasian continent. This not only renders the topic pertinent to maritime energy routes but to also continental connectivity. China and Iran have tied up energy deals, construction projects, diplomatic aiding and modest-level cooperation in the security field. These two pledges, the comprehensive strategic partnership (2016) and the 25-year cooperation agreement (2021), have been read as indicative of a move toward stronger engagement (Priangani & Achmad, 2026).

Meanwhile, some experts warn against overstating the degree of the China-Iran alliance. Thus, China has continued the relationship with Iran, and China is also establishing closer economic ties with Iran's Arab rivals. Beijing has also shied away from pledging blanket political and military backing to Tehran. China may see Iran as essential to whether or not sanctions are being maintained, and see it as just a part of a larger Gulf strategy, while Iran sees China as essential to whether or not sanctions are being maintained. It is this asymmetry which is crucial to grasp when studying the connection. Iran requires Chinese space both economic and diplomatic and China appreciates Iran but would not wish to see it run risks on its commercial and strategic interests in the Arab Gulf. China-GCC literature highlights the features of economic complementarity, institutional involvement, and strategic diversification. Saudi Arabia is a key Chinese partner owing to its status as a key investor in the economic transformation, regional leader and major energy exporter. Logistics, finance, technology, ports, re-export networks are all at the core of the UAE's position. The significance of securing Qatar is gas and of Oman and Kuwait is China's overall energy and maritime profile. There is a debate among scholars about one-way relationship of these. Gulf monarchies want China's investment, technology and markets, Chinese government want energy and commercial access and political goodwill (Jaafar, 2025).

There is also an emphasis on the agency of the Gulf states in this literature. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Oman are not faced solely with the choice between Washington and Beijing. They are trying for alternating foreign policies which advance their autonomy as well as bargaining power. This is especially evident in the Gulf's continued ties with the U.S. military, and its growing relations with China on energy, technology, infrastructure and finance. This attitude exemplifies an overall regional trend of "multi-alignment". Because of the Gulf states' own divorce from the West, China's approach is possible through its "diversification" efforts, though the ultimate success of those strategies remains to be seen (Rehan, 2026).

There is another strand of literature which discusses the policy of non-interference that China has been following. Beijing positions itself as a partner respecting sovereignty, unwilling to impose any ideological conditionality, and abstaining from interfering in domestic politics. This posture is attractive to both sides of the Iron Curtain as it is not a Western one, which normally includes some of the following policies: democracy promotion, human rights criticism, political conditionality, and sanctions with Iran at the receiving end of such policies and Arab Gulf monarchies at the giving end. Non-interference allows China to foster ties to ideologically divided regimes while diminishing reputational risks when it comes to interacting with the players writing the game. But researchers also observe that non-interference is not done passively. It can be used as strategic instrument, and China doesn't have to make politically expensive commitments (Bukhari et al., 2024).

China's diplomatic efforts in the Gulf have been thrust back into the spotlight following the Saudi-Iran normalization talks this year, which have won praise from Washington, Tehran, and Riyadh. The deal brokered in Beijing by China is being seen by some analysts as evidence that Beijing is emerging as a significant diplomatic player in the Middle East. It revealed that Beijing could host negotiations, that it had relations on both sides and could show itself as a stabilizing force. Others are more circumspect, and suggest that China's contribution was important but confined. There had been prior communication through regional channels and both Saudi Arabia and Iran had tangible motives to defuse the situation. However, the Chinese role was facilitative and not hegemonic. It is

important because it reflects the general idea of China's Gulf diplomacy. Beijing is interested in mediation and dialogue but does not like to take hard security responsibilities. Wants to sponsor de-escalation but never to be responsible for enforcement. It's a contrast to the United States, which has military bases, defense agreements, ships in the waters and weapons ties throughout the region. China is thus both an ambassadorial power and a cautious strategist. Its engagement is growing but is still highly judicious and aims to stay within the bounds of Beijing's desires to stay out of regional tangles (Adhikary, 2026).

Key question in literature: Is China filling the void left by the US in the Gulf? Realist perspectives propose that in the long run, China can contest U.S. primacy due to its rising economic strength and ever-expanding strategic desire. For all these arguments there are energy dependence, naval modernization, arms sales, and diplomacy activism of China as indication of a progressive change in the regional order. But others say China isn't yet ready or capable of taking on the security roles traditionally played by the United States. It is clear that the U.S. continues to be the region's preponderant outside military power, and that China is the primary beneficiary of the stability in the region without taking on commensurate security responsibilities (Okezie, 2026).

This paper concurs with the argument that China's ascendancy in the Gulf does not necessarily imply a soon-to-be U.S. withdrawal. China is working to influence an order, which remains defined by the U.S. security architecture. "Beijing's approach is very successful because it does not have to pay for over expanding its military forces." But that can lead to weakness, as well. But as war looms over energy supplies, transport lines or Beijing-owned China nationals and Chinese investments, there may be greater pressure on Beijing to take clearer stances. This contradiction of increasing influence with decreasing responsibility is not highlighted fully in the literature. This study puts that contradiction at the heart of the analysis. The current range of literature also often stratifies aspects of economy, diplomacy, and security. In energy studies, one tends to concentrate upon oil flows and supply security. The study areas under BRI are infrastructure and connectivity. Security issues are oriented towards U.S.-China competition and regional conflicts. Diplomatic studies are about mediation, non-interference. Each of them is a helpful tool, and China's Gulf approach works in all these aspects simultaneously. Diplomatic access is for gain through Beijing's economic relations; commercial expansion depends on Beijing's neutrality; flexibility is provided by no-mixing of alliances in Beijing's policies. The multi-alignment framework can thus better combine these distinct strands than do single factor explanations (Gu et al., 2026).

There are several areas where literature is lacking. Firstly, China's Iran policy ought to be linked more with China's GCC policy. Second, hedging strategies in the Gulf states are better known than those of China. Third, Saudi-Iranian reconciliation must be understood not only as a stand-alone diplomatic maneuver, rather as a larger trend towards multi-alignment by China. Fourth, current research will sometimes overestimate China's regional influence, as it is sometimes assumed that socioeconomic presence leads to political control in the region. This study aims to respond to these gaps by looking at China's simultaneous interaction with antagonistic actors in the Gulf as a form of multi-alignment, albeit a strategic, albeit limited, one. The themes arising in this study are also a continuation of the larger strategic discourse detailed in Dr. Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari's recent book, *"Nuclear Iran: Deterrence, Power Shifts and the Future of the Middle East"*, exploring Iran's nuclear trajectory, deterrence posture, regional ambitions, alliance behaviour and changing balance of power in the Middle East. Furthermore, nuclear deterrence, strategic stability, regional alliances, and near-future scenarios of conflict usefully form a conceptual framework for understanding the fact that China's Gulf policy should not be understood exclusively in terms of trade or energy security. The strategic context of Beijing's multi-alignment is determined in part directly by Iran's nuclear issue, the Iranian strategic calculus and Iran's rivalry toward Arab Gulf states. This article not only sheds light on the nature and scope of China's balancing strategy, but also situates it in the broader evolution of Iranian power,

regional security interactions, and changing Middle Eastern balances. The literature reveals a shift in China's engagement with the Gulf from energy security to a general strategy that is geopolitical and geo-economic in nature. It also reveals that the cause of Iran and Arab Gulf states turning to China is different yet for the same purpose. Iran is looking to build economic resilience and diplomatic backing while facing sanctions, while Arab Gulf states are looking for diversification, investments, technological and strategic autonomy. The advantage for China is that this parallel relationship means Beijing is never committed exclusively, but also it gives Beijing the opportunity to expand its influence. But China's approach to managing these in parallel, or to maintain the balance, has not been adequately explained in the literature, and it has yet to be determined whether the balance can be kept in a time of crises. This study is valuable because it posits that China's Gulf policy consists of strategic hedging by means of multi-alignment, flexible and effective in normal times, but more exposed in a regional escalation and an international great power contest (Bukhari, 2026).

Research Methodology

The approach of research in this study is qualitative research which is descriptive and analytical. The research is largely based on secondary sources such as academic literature, policy reports, government documents, trade statistics, and expert analyses on the Chinese Gulf policy. The method of content analysis is employed to isolate common themes, policy strategies and policy trends of Chinese interaction with both Iran and the Arab Gulf states. By using a comparative approach, the relationship between Iran and China and that between the GCC and China is assessed. Electricity, energy cooperation, trade relations, diplomatic activities, infrastructure projects and security aspects receive special attention. Case analysis of key developments such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and China's mediation in the Saudi-Iran rapprochement is also included.

Discussion

Evolution of China's Gulf Policy: China's involvement in the Gulf has progressed from its focus on energy resources to include a multi-faceted approach on trade, infrastructure, diplomacy, financing, technology, and strategic positioning. During most of the 1990s and early 2000s, Beijing's main motive to enter the Gulf was obtaining reliable energy supplies for China's speedy industrialization. The Gulf region became a crucial part of the economic stability of the Chinese government with the growth of its economy and its need for oil imports. But you can no longer just account for China's Gulf policy with crude oil imports. Through the years the interests have grown to encompass market access, port development, digital infrastructure, industrial cooperation, investment partnership, renewable energy and the greater diplomatic influence. What is emerging is the shift in China's energy security strategy from merely narrow to broader, in terms of geo-economics and geopolitics. This transformation gathered pace with the launch of Belt & Road Initiative in 2013, which put the Gulf in the broader China's connectivity narrative. The area became a strategic centre of correlating transport routes from East Asia, Central Asia, Africa and Europe via sea lanes, industrial corridors, logistics systems and energy. China's long-term economic goals dovetail just fine with the port, sovereign wealth funds, free zones and energy infrastructure of the Gulf. Thus, Beijing has established ties with not only each of these states but with regional economic systems as well. The BRI is thus providing China with an avenue for its commercial operations to create a slow transformation of political influence, access and long-term strategic presence. What is unique about China's Gulf policy is that China itself does not operate with alliance-building that characterizes the approach of the Western powers. Beijing has taken a flexible approach that has allowed it to engage in multiple regional players at the same time, rather than exclusive partnerships. This is especially apparent in China's bilateral ties with Iran and the Arab Gulf countries. Iran is a strategic partner and is geopolitically important due to its energy but Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and

Bahrain provide a wider range of economic opportunities as well as institutional cooperation. China's policy can thus best be characterized as multi-alignment: a foreign policy whereby Beijing keeps channels of communication open with all rival camps without committing itself in the form of formal alignments against any of the major regional players (Bukhari et al., 2024).

Iran's Strategic Importance in China's Gulf Calculus: Due to their geography, riches, regional influence and resistance to external pressure under the U.S., Iran has played a particular role in China's policy toward the Gulf. In terms of its geographical location, the Iranians may link Gulf to Central Asia, Caucasus to Iran, South Asia to Iran and vice versa. This makes Iran relevant in a twofold context; maritime and continental aspects of Chinese connectivity. Its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz additionally makes it strategically important from the point of view of energy security in the world. From Beijing's perspective the continued ties offer an important access point to any sustainable policy in the Gulf, an actor it can't ignore: Tehran. Then there is the importance of Iran's vast oil and natural gas reserves. International sanctions have not deterred China the leading buyer of Iranian energy who is exposed to legal, financial and reputational risks. Perceptions of increasing entanglements between the two countries as a result of the long-term strategic cooperation agreement between China and Iran do not necessarily suggest a formal alliance between the two. China places value on Iran as a strategic partner but has been loath to pay a high price for Iran in favour of the Arab Gulf states, which are much bigger partners than Tehran. A look at this suggests the pragmatic and restricted meaning behind Sino-Iranian alignment . Iran is also a strategic insurance policy for China. Beijing's relationship with Tehran insulates it from over-reliance on the Arab monarchies of the Gulf and gives it diplomatic leverage to a key non-Arab player in the region. This provides China with flexibility in an area marked by rivalry, insecurity. Meanwhile, China benefits from Iran's cooperation by virtue of the political and economic leverage it offers against the sanctions. This connection is thus beneficial to both parties, albeit unequally. Moreover, Iran has need for Chinese assistance more than China has need for Iranian assistance, and China ignores the fact that it makes it essential to view Tehran as one important piece of a much larger puzzle in the Gulf, and not necessarily as the cornerstone of its Middle East policy (Ahsan et al., 2026)

Strategic Importance of Arab Gulf States: Although Iran is strategically important, the Arab Gulf countries as a whole are economically and institutionally more important to China. By virtue of Vision 2030, the country's drive for significant economic transformation, its role as a region's leader and major supplier of crude oil, Saudi Arabia continues to remain at the forefront of the current situation. The UAE has become a hub for Chinese companies for logistics, finance, technology and re-export services. These countries are also key to LNG (Qatar), and regional trade and maritime interests (Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain with China). The GCC states collectively provide China with solid energy cooperation, access to investment markets, financing partnerships, and high-end infrastructure and technology markets. Over the last ten years, Chinese trade and investment ties have grown with the GCC, going well beyond energy. Chinese companies are more interested and engaged in areas such as telecommunications, renewable power, artificial intelligence, industrial parks, port investment, construction, logistics and digital infrastructure. This evolution may only demonstrate how China's BRI and the geopolitics of economic diversification of the Gulf states go hand in hand. In the Gulf of Arabia countries the call is for technology transfer, investments, industrial development and alternatives to relying mainly on the western markets. In exchange, China's targets are stable markets, energy supply, investment partnership, and political goodwill. This complementarity has transformed China-GCC relationship to become one of the most dynamic aspects of China's Middle East policy. The Arab Gulf states also have sizeable sovereign budget, funds to invest in Chinese markets and also co-finance projects in the region. This financial dimension increases interdependence and provides China an extra reason to have good stable

relations with the capitals of the GCC. In contrast to Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries are not bound by sanctions and cannot be cut off economically, but can provide China with access to globalised capital, advanced infrastructure projects and international business networks. This discrepancy is one of the reasons behind the branching of ties with Iran, while China continues to embrace wide-ranging trade with the Arab Gulf monarchies (Waters & Putrono, [Waters2026](#)).

Economic Foundations of China's Multi-Alignment: Economics is the bottom line of China's multi-alignment approach. Beijing's focus is on mutually beneficial cooperation, not on ideology or regime-type preferences, or on having formal alliance commitments. This will help China to operate in states with varying degrees of political structure, strategic outlook and rivalry among regions. Beijing is able to exercise its influence, and also avoid the political implications of taking a side with economic engagement. This method is particularly useful in the Gulf, given the often risky dynamics of open alignment in the region due to polarisation. China's commercial language offers a neutral platform by which it can keep lines of communication open with both Iran and the Arab Gulf states. There are Chinese firms on both sides of the Gulf. Chinese interests in Iran are in energy, transport, infrastructure and trade not subject to sanctions. Cooperation comprises energy, petrochemicals, ports, telecommunications, renewable energy, finance, artificial intelligence, manufacturing and smart city projects, amongst other, in Arab Gulf states. This diversification of sectors lessens the dependence of China on a single partner or sector. It also enhances the Chinese presence in the region without any security commitment. This equals a network model of control which relies on less military bases and more infrastructure, money, technology, and energy entanglements). The other benefit of economic involvement is that it helps dampen resistance of regional partners as China is seen as a development partner rather than as a political slip-in. The latter is in contrast to the western countries brandishing democracy promotion and other sticks, such as sanctions, military action or even human right conditionality to Beijing. Gulf governments largely approve of China's business-oriented approach, which gives them investment and technology, but not demands from the political side. But it is not as if China's policy has no strategic implications. Over time, economic interdependence may bring political influence and dependency, and extend Beijing's diplomacy (Bukhari, [2025](#)).

Diplomatic Neutrality and Non-Interference: The main features of China's diplomatic approach in the Gulf are of respecting the sovereignty of countries, territorial integrity, non-interference and political neutrality. Because the former principles resonate with the Iranians and the Arab Gulf monarchies to enable mutual cooperation while at the same time avoiding interference by others in the way each country functions. Beijing does not speak out often on human-rights issues, internal politics or ideology conflicts between regional governments. This makes China an appealing partner for those governments wanting economic progress without political strings attached. Non-interference thus serves as both a diplomatic concept and an instrument in the practice of multi-alignment. The Chinese neutrality also allows them to be seen as mediators, and not as part of the conflict, in the fight between the region's powers. In a region where outside forces are characterized by alliance politics, it is of all the more significance. Beijing's attempt to deliberately not come out on side of either Iran or the Arab Gulf states gives it some promise with both sides. But neutrality has its limits as well. China could be called upon to clarify its stance should there be a sudden spurt in regional conflict. It has energy security, maritime security and investment security interests, and these could increasingly call for a more active diplomacy than non-interference. Whether the Saudi-Iran rapprochement of 2023 was a triumph of China's diplomacy or a failure hinges on how its neutrality was viewed by both sides. By keeping reasonably working relations with both the Riyadh and Tehran governments, Beijing was able and willing to host and broker the restoration of the diplomatic relations. The agreement improved the image of

China as a positive diplomatic player and demonstrated that there can be economic leverage for diplomacy. But China's function was more to facilitate rather than to coerce. It did not specify any settlement, security or enforcement mechanism. This is a trend of China's Gulf policy: Beijing is looking to have a say and not to take on much security responsibility (Bukhari et al., 2024).

Energy Security and Maritime Stability: Energy security continues to be the main structural pillar of the Chinese Strategy towards the Gulf. China depends on energy goods imported from the Gulf, so security of the region is key to China's economic security. China's industrial activities, transportation, inflation and strategic planning would be impacted if there is any disruption to the flow of oil or gas from the Gulf. The Strait of Hormuz is especially significant as one of the world's most critical maritime choke points. This means that threats, concerns, pressures or tension between Iran, the United States, Israel or Gulf states can directly impact Chinese economic interests. The multi-alignment approach is a tool for safeguarding energy interests by diversifying and reaching out diplomatically. Beijing's relationship with Iran and the Arab Gulf producers concurrently lowers Beijing's risk of over-reliance with one supplier. De-escalation is supported by China, thus ensuring the maritime conditions are maintained to preserve energy flows. Despite this, however, China has limited capacity to guarantee energy passages given they do not command military-security structures in the Gulf. The U.S. continues to be the preeminent external military power in the area. This fact presents a strategic paradox: China requires the security and stability of the Gulf and a considerable amount of this security comes from a great power-led system of order (Mohsin & Ullah, 2025).

Constraints and Challenges

- ▶ Judging from its achievements, the balancing strategy adopted by China has serious limitations. First, there is a profound lack of resolution over regional conflicts. The Saudi-Iran agreement diminished tensions between two diplomatic machines but it did not mitigate any underlying competition. Politics in the Gulf and throughout the region remain influenced by competition for influence in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. If either side needs some diplomatic bait or reassurance, then a further rise may leave China in a tough spot. It will be more difficult for Beijing to remain neutral when it finds itself in a flare up open conflict ; (Xu et al., 2026).
- ▶ Second, the spectre of U.S.-China rivalry has an increasing presence on the Gulf's geopolitical landscape. Gulf states remain heavily reliant on U.S. for defense, intelligence, air defence, maritime security as they forge closer economic ties with China. This develops an "alignment pattern of two," to benefit both Gulf states. That is a threat and challenge for China. Beijing might be able to expand influence without replacing Washington, but its technology, port, and infrastructure projects might be subject to U.S. scrutiny. Gulf states might be pressured to temper cooperation with China in sensitive areas in an increasingly competitive environment (Cingöz et al., 2026).
- ▶ Third, the sanctions against Iran are making regional balancing more difficult for China. Although China has persistently maintained economic relations with Iran, sanctions impinge upon financial barriers, insurance, shipping, technology transfer and even corporate activities. Chinese companies continue to be wary of being subject to U.S. secondary sanctions. This restricts the comprehensive development of Iran's cooperation with China and Iran not being an economic partner like that of Saudi Arabia or UAE. As such, the asymmetric nature of China's ties with Iran as compared with the Arab Gulf States is reinforced by sanctions (Okezie, 2026).
- ▶ Finally, there could be a greater sense of expectations for China with its increasing footprint. Beijing may receive greater expectations from regional players to get more involved in crisis management, reconstruction,

conflict prevention and maritime security. But China's current strategy relies on a lack of high-cost security pledges. Beijing might suffer in international perception as a responsible power if it stays on the sidelines in times of a big-time crisis. It is also dangerous to become too active and entangle the risk of accidents. This ambiguity between influence and responsibilities is likely to figure among the key challenges of China's future Gulf policy (Adhikary, [2026](#)).

Results and Findings

- ▶ **China's Multi-Alignment is Driven Primarily by Economic and Energy Interests:** It turned out to be a means of pursuing Chinese economic goals in the Gulf, particularly an energy security strategy, a desire for greater trade growth, an infrastructure connectivity agenda, and a diversification of investment strategy. Iran and Arab Gulf states have different but complementary roles to play in this strategy. Iran offers strategic location, energy wealth and political weight as a regional player of the non-U.S. led regional system. The Arab Gulf states offer larger economic prospects, steady supplies of energy, capital for investments, and a developed infrastructure network. Thus, China does not need to select between Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) since both are useful to China's long-term interests (Bukhari et al., [2024](#)).
- ▶ **Strategic Hedging Explains China's Balancing Behavior:** The second is that strategic hedging is the most appropriate conceptual explanation to China's policy in the Gulf. In a sense, Beijing is not lock-step allied with anyone, and not neutral at all. It handles instead numerous partnerships, none of which are exclusive, and flexibility in conditions where regional conditions are not known. This allows China to reap the rewards of Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE, without having to fully commit itself to one side against another. Strategic hedging further enables China to keep their military profile and save the costs of over extending while growing their economic and diplomatic portfolio (Xu et al, [2026](#)).
- ▶ **Arab Gulf States Offer Larger Economic Value, While Iran Offers Strategic Depth:** The third finding is that collectively the Arab Gulf states are more economically valuable for China than Iran but Iran is strategically important. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain offer more in terms of trade volumes, investment opportunities, energy security, and institutional support. In contrast, Iran is providing strategic depth, geography, energy opportunities, and influence in the region's security dynamics, that are not bound by sanctions. This is why China is not only maintaining a close relationship with Iran but not permitting the Iran partnership to dictate its Gulf strategy. So Beijing's policy is not a balanced economic policy, but a balance within the strategic sphere (Ahsan et al., [2026](#)).
- ▶ **Non-Interference Strengthens China's Diplomatic Access:** The fourth finding was the Chinese principle of "non-interference" also gives it a diplomatic advantage in the Gulf. Beijing has successfully placed itself as a viable partner with both Iran and Arab Gulf monarchies by eschewing any doubts on domestic political systems while also not demanding any ideological changes. China wants to avoid a polarisation sensitive approach, but in times of crisis, in which normative position-taking and political pressure may be necessary, China will be constrained by the principle of non-interference as well. The best thing about it in normal diplomatic yarns might be the worst thing about it in war (Bukhari, [2025](#)).
- ▶ **The Saudi-Iran Rapprochement Demonstrated China's Diplomatic Potential but Not Regional Dominance:** The next key point is that the Saudi-Iran balance by Beijing and during 2023 signified multifaceted aspects of China's expanding capacities as a diplomatic force and should not only be read in terms of Chinese dominance in the Gulf. Beijing played a part for hosting the final deal and for maintaining good connections with both sides for de-escalation. But the environment of dialogue was created by China itself, and China's comprehensive security guarantee was not at all given. It was not in a hegemonic role but rather a

facilitating one. The discovery has helped to support the view that China is pushing its influence in the region but being very careful and selective (Bukhari et al., 2024).

- ▶ **China Benefits from U.S.-Backed Security Without Replacing It:** Sixth, China's presence in the Gulf has expanded in a security landscape defined by the United States. Beijing does have the benefit of regional stability, maritime security and open courses of energy transport, but not the same level of military security as Washington. This will enable Chinese economy to grow without the expense of a security front-line. But it might be difficult to maintain in the face of increasing competition between the U.S. and China and the desire of the Gulf states for diversified security partnerships (Abbaszada & Liu, 2026).
- ▶ **The Sustainability of China's Strategy Depends on Crisis Management:** The next is the seventh finding: China's multi-alignment approach works in times when there is controlled rivalry, but it does not work in times of crisis. Provided Iran and Arab Gulf states are prepared to "separate economic and diplomatic ties," which means just that, Beijing can maintain a balance of relationships. But, if there were a serious military escalation, a sanctions problem, or a confrontation between the U.S. and China, perhaps China would be compelled to make more definite decisions. The future of the Gulf strategy would thus rely on the capability of the Chinese leadership to strengthen its crisis-management system without losing the flexibility that is the key to multi-alignment (Fattah, 2026).

Conclusion

The multi-alignment policy in China's Gulf posture is a well-developed policy of managing relations between contending regional players. But Beijing has acted with "Diplomatic Neutrality", helped by a strategy of "Strategic Hedging" in its dealings with Iran and the Arab Gulf States, and impelled by economic pragmatism. With this strategy, China has been able to acquire energy supplies, global trading networks, promote the Belt and Road Initiative, and improve political influence without committing to large military operations. This approach remained effective in the Saudi-Iran reconciliation facilitated by China, which has been successful. However, maintaining this balance will be increasingly difficult as regional rivalries continue and competition with other parts of the world gets tougher. China's success will hinge on its capacity to keep all parties on their toes and remain free of any charge of manipulation, or getting caught up in wars where it may compromise its strategy.

Recommendations

- ▶ **Institutionalize China-Gulf Dialogue Beyond Bilateral Diplomacy.** The regular and inclusive dialogue mechanisms should be supported between China and Iran, GCC States, and the relevant regional organizations. Bilateral diplomacy has helped Beijing in managing distinct relations; however, institutionalized dialogue would lead to lessening the reliance on crisis-driven interaction. The platform can be a structured one that covers maritime security, energy security, environmental threats, trade routes, and conflict prevention. Such an arrangement could also serve as a perfect way for China to cease symbolic mediation and commit itself to meaningful and more lasting diplomatic activities without formal alliance obligations (Bukhari et al., 2024).
- ▶ **Expand Cooperation Beyond Energy.** China should pursue the goal of diversifying its partnership with the cluster of countries of the Persian Gulf away from the hydrocarbon sector. However, long-term cooperation will be constrained by reliance on hydrocarbons, as energy security requirements will be at the center. Beijing should strengthen cooperation in the fields of renewable energy, artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, green hydrogen, education and agriculture, logistics, industrial manufacturing, and healthcare technologies. This would ensure a China-BRI goal sits parallel to Gulf diversification policies and is no longer energy market dependent (Rehan, 2026).

- ▶ **Strengthen Sanctions Risk Management in China-Iran Relations.** China should do more to establish advanced risk management methods to deal with Iran. Some payment difficulties and restrictions in shipping, insurance, investment, and technology transfer will persist. Beijing has to be careful in making promises to Iran which cannot be delivered, out of legal or financial considerations. This was not a realistic approach, as it would protect Chinese companies and keep diplomatic relations with Tehran intact. This would also narrow down the gap between the announcement of strategic cooperation and its actual implementation (Dellios & Ferguson, 2025; Okezie, 2026).
- ▶ **Promote Maritime Security Without Militarized Overextension.** China needs to actively participate in the Gulf to ensure maritime stability without reaching militarized "overstretch". Because China is heavily reliant on secure shipping lanes, it does not want any interference in the shipping lanes in the Strait of Hormuz and its environs. But Beijing must look at ways of cooperation, including anti-piracy coordination, emergency communication lines, port safety, dialogue on shipping insurance, and confidence-building at sea, instead of forming an unnecessarily militarized regional posture. This would guard China's pursuits without damaging its reputation of being a fair trade member (Nylan, 2026; Bukhari et al., 2024).
- ▶ **Preserve Strategic Neutrality but Improve Conflict-Prevention Diplomacy.** China should keep a stance of neutrality on Iran's relationship with Arab Gulf countries, and this neutrality should not amount to a diplomatic 'dumbness'. Investing in early-warning mechanisms, quiet diplomacy, and preventive mediation would be wise for Beijing, before crises get out of hand. The Saudi-Iran dialogue was a good example showing China's positive role when it enjoys the confidence of both countries. But future diplomacy should be institutionalized and less based on one-off symbolic breakthroughs (Cingöz et al., 2026).
- ▶ **Avoid Exclusive Strategic Commitments.** Signing exclusive agreements that may jeopardize its ties with rival Gulf partners is something China should not be doing. The agreement would put at risk China's much more extensive economic ties with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf Cooperation countries. Likewise, too close an affiliation with the Arab Gulf monarchies at Iran's own economic cost would take away strategic options for Beijing. The power aspect of China is that it is acceptable to all sides. That should continue to be a key element of its policy in the Gulf (Ahsan et al., 2026).
- ▶ **Encourage Gulf States to Use Chinese Engagement for Regional Development.** Economics cannot serve as a vehicle for Gulf States to pursue regional development and maintain a threatening attitude towards China simultaneously. There is a potential for regional cooperation to yield shared economic gains through infrastructure, renewable energy development, logistics, industrial zones, digital infrastructure, and education. China-funded infrastructure can help de-incentivize confrontation, if its projects are not building toward zero-sum game dynamics; that is, if they are geared toward regional integration. It is, therefore, in the medium- to long-term interest of the Gulf countries to view their cooperation with China as a development and diversification process, rather than as an instrument for bloc politics (Rehan, 2026).
- ▶ **Balance China Engagement With Existing Security Partnerships.** The Arab Gulf states should stay on with China, keeping a healthy relationship with other important powers. However, while China offers economic, technological, and diplomatic advantages, it's not yet a security provider on the scale of the USA. Gulf countries thus should be wary of not overly relying on any one outside player. A balanced approach would maintain strategic independence and minimize the chance of great-power pressure, while enabling Gulf governments to enjoy multi-partnerships (Hongyuan, 2026).
- ▶ **Develop a China-GCC-Iran Research and Policy Forum.** Misperceptions could be diminished, and policy communication could be strengthened through a dedicated research and policy forum by Chinese, Iranian, and GCC scholars. Academic and policy dialogues can play a role in crisis avoidance by finding

common ground, such as energy stability and climate adaptation, food security, maritime security, and regional trade. Such a forum does not eliminate state diplomatic actions, but could be a useful track-two channel for maintaining a dialogue in times of political tensions (Khan, [2025](#)).

- ▶ **Link BRI Projects to Regional Stability Goals.** China should look at and ensure that BRI projects in the Gulf are linked with greater regional stability goals. Infrastructure corridors, port investments, energy networks, and digital systems should be constructed in a way that generates shared advantages and avoids strategic suspicions. Multi-Gulf Economy Projects can encourage interdependence among the Gulf Nations and mitigate conflict incentives. But China should also ensure transparency, financial sustainability, and participation of the local people to avoid criticism of dependency and unequal distribution of benefits (Bukhari et al., [2024](#)).
- ▶ **Prepare for Crisis Scenarios in the Strait of Hormuz.** China should draw up contingency plans in case of disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. These should comprise energy-stockpiling plans, supplier diversification efforts, emergency shipping coordination, insurance measures as well as diplomatic crisis channels with Iran and with the Gulf Cooperation Council. With China's Gulf strategy relying on steady energy supplies, “crisis preparedness” is not an option. An improved contingency plan would lower the likelihood that Beijing would be driven towards reactive decision-making if escalation in the area occurs (Nylan, [2026](#); Bukhari et al., [2024](#)).
- ▶ **Advance a More Credible Model of Responsible Multi-Alignment.** China needs to build a more nondeceptive model of responsible multi-alignment. It's a strategy that so far is working: it's flexible, attractive commercially, but with more influence comes more expectations. Beijing needs to demonstrate that multi-alignment is more than a means of dodging responsibility; it is an approach for mitigating tensions, fostering development, and maintaining regional stability. It calls for better, ongoing diplomacy, better crisis communication, and more investment in regional public goods. What is realistic is for China to establish a more sustainable and acceptable Gulf strategy in light of the importance of neutrality and responsible engagement (Yasmin et al., [2024](#)).

References

- Abbaszada, R., & Liu, H. (2026). China's Mediation Paradigm: How China's Mediation Diplomacy Advanced Saudi-Iran Reconciliation. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 28(1), 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2025.2557169>
- Adhikary, A. (n.d.). India's Nuclear Doctrine And Deterrence Strategy In South Asia. <https://tssreview.in/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/24-Akash-Adhikary.pdf>
- Ahsan, H., Ahmed, A., & Iqbal, M. A. (2026). India's Naval Nuclearization and Pakistan's Strategic Response: Implications for South Asian Stability. In *Emerging Maritime Security Strategies of Global Powers* (pp. 379–404). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/indias-naval-nuclearization-and-pakistans-strategic-response/403219>
- Bukhari, S. R. (2025). Between regionalism and globalism: Exploring the contemporary and prospects of Syria in the Middle Eastern polity. *International Social Research Nexus (ISRN)*, 1(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.63539/isrn.2025001>
- Bukhari, S. R. H. (2026). Nuclear Iran: Deterrence, power shifts and the future of the Middle East. Publisher Name. <https://doi.org/10.65758/isbn.9786277813567>
- Bukhari, S. R. H., Khan, A. U., Noreen, S., Khan, M. T. U., Khan, M. N., & Haq, M. I. U. (2024). Silenced voices, unheeded pleas: The plight of Palestinian human rights under the shadow of Israeli occupation. *Remittances Review*, 9(1), 2240–2276. <https://doi.org/10.33282/rr.vx9il.98>
- Bukhari, S. R., Khan, H. A., Khan, A. U., Haq, I. U., & Hussain, E. (2024). Evolving world order, impact on peace and stability in South Asia. *The Regional Tribune*, 3(1), 284–296. <https://doi.org/10.63062/trt/v24.044>
- Bukhari, S. R. H., Khan, T. U., Khan, N., Khan, A. U., Noreen, S., Haq, I. U., Ullah, T., & Khan, E. (2024). China's Trade Relations with the United States: Matrix of Conflict and Cooperation. *Research*, 9(2), 263–284.
- Bukhari, S. R. H., Malik, S. M., & Mahmood, M. A. (2024). Chinese BRICS: Contamination of US-led Neoliberalism. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 8(2), 320–331. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2024\(8-II-S\)28](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2024(8-II-S)28)
- Cingöz, M., Özev, M. H., & İzol, R. (2026). Saudi Arabia's Quest for Regional Hegemony on the Basis of Opposition to Iran. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 61(2), 1350–1366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096251313551>
- Dellios, R., & Ferguson, R. J. (2025). China and the Strategic Evolution of the Belt and Road Initiative. In U. H. Ghorri & J. Farrar (Eds.), *Globalisation Disrupted* (pp. 135–156). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-3997-0_8
- Fattah, A. (2026). China's strategic approach to the Persian gulf: Balancing relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. *International Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-025-00746-1>
- Gu, Y., Wu, Y., & Moratto, R. (2026). *Chinese Science Fiction in Translation and Its World Impact: Connecting Futures*. Taylor & Francis.
- Hongyuan, Y. (2026). China and New Geopolitics of the Electricity Age: The Reconfiguration of Global Power. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740026500028>
- Jaafar, B. (2025). Middle East Geopolitical Dynamics and Their Impact on the Global Balance of Power. In B. Jaafar, *Middle East Geopolitics and the Rise of Multipolarity* (pp. 75–109). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-06717-3_4
- Khan, S. (2025). China's Strategic Interests and Role as a Mediator. In S. Khan, *Authoritarian Mediation* (pp. 49–75). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-01388-0_3

- Mohsin, L., & Ullah, A. K. M. A. (2025). Migration Trends from China from 1979 Onward. In A. A. Ullah (Ed.), *Handbook of Migration, International Relations and Security in Asia* (pp. 1–20). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-8001-7_21-1
- Noor, & Imran Ali. (2026). Between U.S. and China: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the geopolitics of great-power competition in the 21st century. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 4(1), 4864–4874. <https://doi.org/10.59075/015np559>
- Nylan, M. (2026). Environmental Equity in China and Beyond: Past, Present, and Future. <https://www.torrossa.com/it/resources/an/6192856>
- Okezie, E. C. (2026). Contemporary armed conflicts and the crisis of international intervention in Africa. *Journal of Arts, Environmental and Management Studies*, 1(1), 70–82.
- Osman, K. F. (2026). *4 Evolving Dynamics*. Yemen at the Crossroads: Crisis and Reconstruction.
- Priangani, A., & Achmad, W. (2026). Middle Eastern Geopolitics and the Transformation of Islamic Law: An Analysis of Islamic Politics in Muslim Countries. *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, 85–98.
- Rehan, T. (2026). India's shifting nuclear doctrine and its impact on the strategic stability of South Asia. *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability*, 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.37540/njips.v9i1.209>
- Waters, A., & Putrono, J. A. (2026). Indonesia enters the multipolar era by joining BRICS+: Three geopolitical realignment pathways for states as Global South–South cooperation platforms expand. *Third World Quarterly*, 47(5), 1038–1056. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2025.2586173>
- Xu, C., Zhang, J., & Zhang, Y. (2026). China's New-Era Maritime Security: A Holistic National Security Framework. Paths Publishing Group.
- Yasmin, T., Gill, Q. S., & Mustafa, G. (2024). China's Growing Influence in the Middle East: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Prospects. *Global International Relations Review*, VII(I), 01–13. [https://doi.org/10.31703/girr.2024\(VII-I\).01](https://doi.org/10.31703/girr.2024(VII-I).01)