

**CHINA-MIDDLE EAST RELATIONS:  
LATEST DEVELOPMENTS  
AND CHALLENGES**

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*EAI Background Brief No. 1737*

Date of Publication: 2 November 2023

## **Executive Summary**

1. China has maintained its Middle East policies through the decades, focusing on economic and strategic interests while cultivating amicable relations with all regional countries and advocating for peace and conflict resolution. China has reiterated its longstanding policy with regard to the recent Israel-Hamas conflict.
2. China's relations with the Middle East are key to its plan to maintain a strong presence in the Global South, which is important amid its tensions with the West.
3. China has gone beyond economics to include political and diplomatic involvement in world scene such as mediating regional conflict like the Saudi-Iran normalisation agreement reached in Beijing in March 2023.
4. China's deepening involvement in the Middle East in the 21st century can largely be divided into three dimensions: economic, strategic and cultural.
5. China-Middle East relations focus on trade and economic cooperation. By 2021, China's trade with Arab nations had exceeded US\$300 billion; its direct investment in Arab states reached US\$23 billion; and over 200 BRI projects had been implemented in Arab states.
6. The Middle East is important to China as a major source of energy, a key node in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and an important venue for US-China rivalry.
7. China's strategic and economic engagement in the Middle East has boosted its influence. Middle Eastern people tend to view China positively. Chinese language learning is thriving in the Middle East, reflecting the global power shift.
8. China and Middle Eastern countries have formed cultural and political solidarity in their pushback against the West's pressure on human rights. When China was accused by the West of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Middle Eastern governments have remained silent or dismissed the accusations altogether.

9. Countries in the Middle East appear to be taking a hedging strategy amid the US-China rivalry. China is playing a more active role in Middle Eastern affairs. Despite the greater involvement in the Middle East, China is careful not to become stuck in the minefields of Middle Eastern politics.
  
10. It is not prepared to overtake the United States as the dominant power in this region. Middle Eastern countries generally welcome China's deeper economic and diplomatic involvement. However, as China expands its security and diplomatic footprint, it will intensify US-China rivalry, placing some Middle Eastern countries between a rock and a hard place.