

China's Middle East Policy: Implications for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary history, the Middle East and China are the focus of global attention. Though Middle East has fought an ideological struggle with regard to religious extremism in the region, yet the quest for power energy sources cannot be overlooked. While Chinese policy frame , revolving around its approach of non-interference, economic development and a desire of having multi-polar global system is serious challenge for the US which on one hand, advocates democracy, human rights, but with the policy of intervention. Today, the world powers are competing each other for the supremacy of power resources where oil and gas are not an exception. China is the second largest consumer of world's oil after the United States (Bajpae, 2006). China is making an effort to build an economic, political and military influence in the region without involving the military force. Though future will reveal many truths yet it is anticipated that a new triangular balance of power comprising of China, Saudi Arabia and Russia might emerge on the global scene, owing to their inter-connected dependencies. China is looking forward by pursuing the policy of wait and see for the appropriate moment This study primarily focuses on their bilateral relations and deals with China's Middle East policy, its increasing activities in the region and implications for Pakistan. For Pakistan, the nature of future relationship with Middle Eastern multi-dimensional crisis is very important because it is the "Arc of crisis". The neutral role of Pakistan in this situation is much hazardous, carrying both challenges and opportunities along with the security repercussions.

Key Words: China, Middle East, Pakistan, Energy Requirements

Introduction

China's emergence in the Middle East is not unexpected and novel. It has historic ties with Iran from cooperation to the economic investments along with the sale of military technology. Notably, China's role in P5+1 became significant when in 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iranian Nuclear Program was signed. Apart from that the establishment of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2004 revealed Beijing's aspirations to broaden ties and endorse collaboration with Arab countries mainly with regard to the rising energy importance for China. Simultaneously, still expecting its role in the Iranian nuclear negotiations, China has by so far been avoiding its political and military role in case of Syria. However, China has showed more positive concerns towards Middle East since Xi Jinping came into power in November 2012. In January 2016, "The Chinese Arab Policy" was published by Chinese government which draws the scope policy for China-Middle East Relations, predominantly those countries

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belonging to the Arab League. The manuscript highlights the significance for China of this region “together with it identifies the way that China must cooperate with the Arab countries, under the formula “1+2+3”, however the new liaisons are much likely to be based on energy collaboration” (Castilla, 2016).

There is a significant contrasts in Middle Eastern Countries as far as their level of growth and liaison with the universal economy are concerned. Grouping them on the basis of exports, GDP, and population yields four general categories of Middle Eastern countries They are; Big oil exporters with small and big population and high incomes, and both these types are big oil exporters. While the other two are non-oil exporters with high foreign direct investment and the countries with low GDP but large populations (Balaam & Dillman, 2011: 351-352). The strategic partnerships of China are not the military alliances rather based on bilateral relations (e.g. economic, political, cultural and military) and it is mutually agreed by both sides (Medeiros, 2009: 82-89). It also highlights Chinese-Arab history in a broad context, covering the relation from the two thousand years old maritime silk roads to the modern era.

China’s relations with the region are as old as Maoist years, when bilateral relations of countries were designed in the far-reaching strategic and conceptual milieu of Cold War (Shichor, 2000: 27-39). Although China offered aid and logistic sustenance to revolutionary groups, yet the trade and commercial bonds remained restricted. (Daojiong & Meidan, 2015) write that “China had been perceiving Middle East as a ground where it could analyze the balance of power between US and USSR. Therefore, Beijing permitted the individual workers, groups and companies, to offer labor, share in construction ventures and provide consultation services in Middle Eastern markets. Undoubtedly, China has supported the anti-colonial struggles too back in Cold War days and this associates its strong bonding with Middle East. This link with the passage of time has developed towards gaining the region's oil and gas supplies. Though China has made much effort to diversify its energy support supplies, yet half of its oil imports depends on Middle East whereas Saudi Arabia and Iran offer approximately 30% of China's oil import (Bajpae, 2006)

During the early 1980s the countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran and Iraq emerged as the largest weapon customers for China but in early 1990s, the UN and US put sanctions on Iran and Iraq, terminating almost absolutely by the end of the decade owing to the arms embargoes imposed by the United Nations and the United States on Iran and Iraq. This happened partially because of the U.S.’s efforts to curb arms proliferation and to pressurize China, but mainly due to the realization in Middle East about ineffectiveness of inexpensive Chinese arms in the battlefield. That said, the Arab countries have been China’s primary supplier of crude oil and the 7th biggest trading partner since the mid-1990s (Daojinag & Meidan, 2015).

Stakes and Interests of China's Middle Eastern Policy

There are three major pillars which can be determined as far as China's firm Middle Eastern policy is concerned;

- a) Security Energy Supplies
- b) Promoting trade and transport
- c) Finding potential avenues for security cooperation, especially in combating terrorism (Castilla, 2016).

Despite its quest for the unconventional energy sources, like from Russia and Central Asia's, China is persistently reliant on oil imports from the Middle East. This percentage rose to an average rate of 6.75 % during the period 2010-14 (Reuters, 2017). Though on one hand, the volatility of Gulf is an important concern, yet Middle East is struggling to reinforce energy collaboration with oil producing countries and that is of core significance for it. For example, it is supplying 51 % of its crude oil imports to China.

Since Middle East is situated between Europe and Asia, it carries significance with regard to China's Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Road initiatives jointly called OBOR. In order to cater this project, , the development of infrastructure and ports across Central Asia and the Middle East to facilitate trade in both directions is the need of hour for China. Iran in predominately is a lynchpin in such ventures (<http://isdpeu/publication/chinas-evolving-middle-east-role/>), whereby China seeks to "promote [e] common development and prosperity for all countries." In addition to that, China is much concerned about IS in Middle East and its own militants mainly in the Western region of Xinjiang. As it wants to have a strict control over border security, intelligence and anti-terror operations and anti-piracy.

The trajectory of China's economic and defense policies for the Middle East implies that China seeks to deepen its commercial presence and has limited interest in achieving a larger security role in the region. President Xi Jinping's vision for the 21st Century 'Silk Road' and the revival of Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt – 'One Belt, One Road' strategy – designates a hope that Chinese companies will be applauded to the Middle Eastern markets, together with the upstream oil sector. "China's determination to re-establish the ancient Silk Roads including the overland route that runs through the Middle East is another reason for the country to penetrate into strategic partnerships with eight Arab countries in current years, and sign agreements with six Arab countries to mutually track the proposal. For example, Iran, Turkey and seven Arab countries are among the founding members of the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a key institution for financing related infrastructure projects" (Minghao, 2016).

It is pertinent to consider that China gives primary importance to gain the natural resources in its economic growth and therefore, it quests for export markets in the Middle East is important. China views the region as an immense economic opportunity for its burgeoning firms (Lian, 2008; Alterman & Graver, 2008).

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Besides, the Middle East is a massive service export market for China's construction, telecommunication, and finance industries other than the contract services by construction firms (<http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/>). China is therefore operating in a viable mode and capitalizing considerable amount of money. A few challenges however remain to be solved. First, the region is plagued with many conflicts that can prove to be a big impediment in realization of China's Silk Road dream. Secondly, ways to optimize the trade relation and balance need to be sought out by both the parties. The recent waning in the oil prices resulting in budget discrepancies has lessened the buying power of consumers thus China's concern for the economic improvement of this region as this will create a win-win for all. Without a focus on growth of economy, all planned economic developments would be rendered unsustainable (Mahar, 2016).

Key Areas of Chinese Focus in Middle East

Chinese influence is gaining momentum in Middle EAST and the western influence is on decline. The beginning of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) 2013 and Middle Eastern interest in this project will play an influential rule in the days to come. While Chinese increasing gas imports will be another remarkable step to bring both regions closer than ever before. The gas imports, logistic costs and economic development are much important indicators when one studies Chinese interest in Middle East. The initiation of Arab Policy Paper in 2016 put an emphasis on China to have a new interest in Middle East. Chinese policy towards Middle East does not involve the economic integration only but at the same time it vows to adopt the policy of non-intervention in the region too. Today China is the part of Middle East geo-politics though depending heavily on its oil. Owing to these ground realities, China's political existence in the region itself is a challenge. Therefore it is anticipated that Chinese ties towards Middle East will not only comprise of economic and political cooperation but it will ultimately lead to military cooperation and potential military conflict too (Romaniuk & Berger, 2016).

Policy of Non-Intervention

China has adopted its non-intervention policy over Syria and so has shown Veto in UN Security Council Resolution. This stance may complicate its role in terms of regional security and its own energy interests in the times to come. Though still China may find it essential to tread to play a tougher role to guarantee regional security and to guard its own energy interests.

Clash between Chinese & US Interests

American interests in the Gulf are not only limited to gas and oil while on the other hand, China was even more reliant on the Middle Eastern energy than the

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United States. Resultantly, it seems that China should invest in the region's stability even more since it can no longer escape responsibility—particularly the financial burden—of being favorable to uphold regional stability.

Edge of Chinese Diplomacy

The Chinese scholars have argued that China may not be in a position to fill in the potential gap unless the US may disengage itself in favor of a financial “pivot to Asia.”

China's Investments in the Region

Schenker (2013) writes that “China, nevertheless, ought to be more politically invested in the region. To date, China has contributed troops to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and has positioned a few anti-piracy ships off the coast of Somalia. This contribution has been least possible, China needs to do more”.

China's Interests in the Middle East

Owing to a profound energy growth model and a fast increase in its transport zone, China is massively investing in Middle East. Yet on the other hand, China's foreign policy is all set to grasp the tedious stage of middle East.

China's Relationship with Islam

Schenkar (2013) writes that "China's foreign policy principles might be uncongenial with the substantial role of religion in the Middle East and North Africa. Since China's foreign policy is exclusively practical, and that Beijing might catch a modus vivendi with Islamist states in the Middle East" . However, it also had issues with Turkey because Muslim population was being targeted in Beijing . There could be a probability that it could worsen its relations when Muslim factor becomes in focus.

China's Reaction to Libya

China had rescued 35,000 Chinese nationals from the country through airlifts and sea withdrawals when conflict in Libya rose. China has perhaps recognize the fact that it may not be impersonated for the trade disruptions and lost business. "This exorbitant eviction has constrained Chinese business leaders and policymakers to initiate thinking the political peril of doing business in other conflict-prone areas like Algeria or Nigeria, and to begin thinking about how to soothe these dangers" (Foster, 2014).

China & Arms Proliferation

China, over a great period of time has adopted the policy of non-intervention in the internal matters of other sovereign country and it continued to have congeal relations. Still over the passage of time, the Chinese political approaches in the region also transformed . Shenker (2013) writes about a freelance journalist based in Beijing, Willem Van Kamenade, who argued that "China has replaced the United Kingdom as one of the top five arms exporters in the world, though not a primary arm supplier for Middle East". China has supported Syria which resulted in massive protest against China and Russia.

The Arab Spring transformed this dynamic. Middle Eastern regimes of partial legitimacy were overthrown in a “domino effect”, shifting conventional power affairs and collaboration models, and presenting China with a predicament: hunt its low-risk, stumpy-payoff method to the Middle East in this post-Westphalian dystopia, or choose a more striving trail in which the use of regional pivots and military interests occurred? (Unver, 2014).

The two-thirds of the world’s proven petroleum reserves rest with Middle East, nearly all of which are concentrated in the Persian Gulf (Arabian Gulf). About 75% of oil reserves are in the Gulf, while Saudi Arabia alone has about one-quarter of the world’s oil. The political and economic trends and development in the region are shaped mainly on the basis of abundant oil and gas reserves (Camett, et.al; 2009: 228, 24). China however has strategized its Middle East posture as follows:

Energy Security

Energy dependence and foreign policy of the countries are directly related to each other. The whole Middle East is passing through an uncertain phase with regard to its future. China is approximately among the top net monthly oil buyer from Iran. While the other Arab countries are relatively weak yet Iran and Turkey have appeared as possible candidates for Chinese ventures (Unver,2014). Energy security remains a permanent concern for Beijing. The so called Arab Spring, its effects on the Middle East and especially the U.S.’s overpowering role have added to China’s unease. It therefore has expressed deep concern about reliance on Washington D.C. for providing security in the Middle East as a ‘public good for rest of the world. The U.S. moves to cut defense budgets and enhance energy self-sufficiency at the earliest have also shaped the basis of Chinese concern. While many uncertainties lurk around, rise in U.S. energy production largely through management of its shale gas and oil reserves pooled with waning call is expected to lessen its reliance on supplies from Middle East and elsewhere (McLaughlin, 2015: 23).

Securing smart ways of energy supplies is a top priority for the Chinese leadership. Growing affluence and the resulting increase in wages has affective competitiveness of Chinese exports and growth has seen a 7 per cent dip. Another

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burden for the country are large state enterprises that soak up 35 percent of the economic activity. Resultantly, the leadership under Xi Jinping has boarded an aggressive drive to eradicate corruption and transport economic decision-making into a more commercial versus political approach.

Uninterrupted Flow of Natural Gas

From an energy trade outlook, “the interdependent liaison between the Middle East and China is a proportioned balance: the Middle East requires China as much as China does the Middle East” (Feng, 2015). Middle East-China energy trade bond has stretched much farther from oil. China’s developing interest in importing natural gas is one example. Until 2011, natural gas made up 4.6 percent of China’s total energy consumption mix, far below the world average of 23.8 percent (<http://www.kreab.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2013/07/FYP-for-Energy-Development.pdf>). Since 2006 China’s natural gas consumption has elevated progressively at an annual rate of 16 percent. In 2012, the Chinese National Development and Reform Committee (NDRC) further impelled demand growth by initiating an execution strategy to indorse the use of natural gas in a extensive sectors, from central heating to electricity generation. In order to counter such fast-rising claim, China will have to trust progressively on foreign imports. Qatar, which had no energy-based links with China in 2009, turned out to be the second largest supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to China by 2013 and the latter is now Qatar’s fifth largest natural gas customer, accounting for 6.4 percent of its natural gas and LNG exports (Feng, 2015).

Multi-polar World Order

With the changed global scenario, in addition to securing energy supplies for promoting its own economic growth, China focuses to build up a soft power image in the region too. Moreover, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (Peng, 2013), enlarged China’s expectations and demands for a newfangled, more comprehensive global structure. The main reason behind this order is the long wish to address economic and political disparities between the developing and the developed world – the global South and North.

Implications for Pakistan

China on one hand wants to expand its friendship with Pakistan and on the other hand sees Pakistan as “spring board” for larger connectivity with Middle East (Chaziza, 2016). Pakistan lies at the crossroads of “Middle East” and “Asia”, however is important because of its neighboring connection with the Persian Gulf nations, together with Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Historically, Saudi Arabia has been Pakistan’s closest partner in the Middle East, since China has played that role in Asia. In the present scenario, the country’s

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heterogenous interests and requirement commend that China will be a more befitting best friend, yet this is dependent on several factors, along with its relations with Afghanistan, Iran, and India. Simultaneously, Pakistan does not pursue to suspend its vital relationship with Saudi Arabia, however slightly wants it to perceive that the Pakistani military may not play its active role in Middle Eastern politics. Pakistan is in the midst of devil and the deep sea in Middle Eastern present day affairs. Since olden days, Pakistan has made efforts to play the role of a balanced between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Though Pakistan depends heavily on Saudi economic cooperation, oil payments and financial assistance, it does not want to mar its relations with Iran as well. The current global scenario demands a peaceful neighborhood for Pakistan, predominately in the wake of the economic ventures like CPEC.

The current situation demands for Pakistan to have a neutral approach with regard to the global engagements. Rather Pakistan should be called to play its role as a peace-builder in Middle East crisis. In this regard, the killing of Shiite community in Karachi soon after CPEC Agreement cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, refusal of Pakistan in case of Yemen is another example that Pakistan does not want to play a role of proxy between Shia- Sunni conflicts 'in the region. Therefore, Pakistan is making efforts to balance its relations both with Iran and Saudi Arabia, since both US and China have tilt towards Iran and Middle East. The underway Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project underway, also demands that Pakistan might adopt a very cautious foreign policy posture towards the Middle East. It is due to this fact that Pakistan is trying to maintain good relations with Turkey as well and the approach regarding Yemen crisis was made due to close partnership with Turkey' With major global transformations occurring and the Centre of power moving to Asia, Pakistan is looking much beyond the opportunities with China rather than active involvement in Middle Eastern affairs – a remarkable change from its previous status (Hussain, 2015). There are strong factors contributing to Pakistan's close relations with both Saudi Arabia and China. China Saudi Arabia is a long-standing ally, Muslims religious home, a large supplier of oil and a source of monetary favors. Simultaneously, China has largely surpassed Saudi Arabia in terms of Pakistan's economic, strategic and political interests. Over the years, has provided technical support and access to the nuclear energy to Pakistan and is an immediate neighbor that also does not have good terms with India. It is ostensible that China's tweak is presently tougher, although that does not infer Pakistan's 'pivoting' away from the Middle East, either soon or eternally. Undoubtedly the regional countries together with Saudi Arabia will maintain their partnership with Pakistan on account of historical, ideological, cultural, and economic congenialities. However, Pakistan's close bilateral relations with China will bar the former from wooing the Arab States by taking any direct military action in the Middle East (Shad, 2015).

The numerous strategic motives have tied China and Pakistan in a close liaison –their collective concerns about Indian hegemonic quest being the

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dominant one. The current elevation with regard to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as the flagship project of One Belt One Road ambition has altered the regional scenario for the better. A few weeks after Pakistan decided to withhold from any involvement in Saudi-Yemen skirmish, the Chinese President Xi Jinping set for his first state trip to the country and revealed a USD 46 billion worth CPEC plan. The multi-modal CPEC speculates linking Kashgar, China with Gwadar Port in Pakistan through roads, railways, and oil pipelines and will erect infrastructure for energy generation and telecommunications (Lin, 2011). It is a hopeful task with a well-built potential of elevating the China's Western region and Pakistan and there are signs of efforts by Pakistan to acutely deal with all concerns moved up by China (Lin, 2011) such as security of its nationals working in Pakistan for the project. It is worth mentioning that the projects like CPEC and other investments in the region will not only boost up Pakistan's economy and its liaison with Western China along with Chinese access to port facilities on the Indian Ocean.

Though CPEC will be having long-lasting impacts yet it has given rise to the soaring relations with India on the other hand. Both China and Pakistan have disturbed relations with India throughout history. Hussain (2016) writes that "How China steers this determination to enlarge its influence with Pakistan, and how other powerful countries re-join, could define whether South and Central Asia go on board on a new age of collective affluence or remain ensnared in a succession of conflict. One of the most important issue with China is with regard to the security situation in Pakistan. And for that reason, Pakistani government has taken undoubtedly very firm decisions. It has made many improvements in order to safeguard the national economic interests. The fact that President Xi guaranteed Pakistan after its rejection to take sides in Yemen that China would support it in the affair of unscrambling of its links with the Arab world, also points to this.

Certainly, there are limitations to this change in relations, as events in both South Asia and the Middle East can have an obvious impact on Pakistan's foreign policy. Strategically speaking, CPEC will open avenues for China to have an easy access to Persian Gulf states. Thus this project is not only a geo-political representativeness nevertheless a geo-economic gain for China also. A shift in India's power and behavior, for instance could influence the Sino-Pakistani connection. India has already stated that CPEC is "undesirable" owing to the fact that part of the development project will pass through Pakistani-administered Kashmir, which India alleges as its own territory. Whereas China and Pakistan have both sacked this concern, it will be imperative to notice how far India takes the issue. Since the economic corridor is a long-term project, if the sharing of power in Asia alters notably within the next decade or so, India might make an effort to use its pressure on China to close down construction. In that case, the Kashmir dispute would perhaps become a critical international issue once again. On the other hand, if China goes through with the full plan despite pressure from India, it would be an indication of its unwavering relationship with Pakistan and enmity

with India

(<http://spearheadresearch.org/wp->

content/uploads/2018/01/CPEC-Analyzing-External-Challenges.pdf).

Linn (2011) argues that “Taking into account a diverse scenario, if the state of affairs in Afghanistan worsens, Pakistan may have to maintain its focus westward, which would unavoidably engage cooperating with Saudi Arabia and other regional players to try to alleviate the country”. Owing to the geographical realities and proximity, Pakistan has been more concerned with the situation in Afghanistan rather than Yemen. Therefore, as compared to its own neighbor, Yemen remains a far-distant secluded subject. For Pakistan, Afghanistan’s stabilization is more important because at the end of the day, it is the stability or disability in Afghanistan which will define the region’s future. The role of Saudi Arabia in Afghan perspective cannot be overlooked at the same time. Simultaneously, if Iran and US improves their relations to some extent, many challenges may crop up vis-a-viz Pakistani-Saudi liaison. Saudi Arabia fears that an Iran-US entente will recognize Iran as a threshold nuclear state, which will bring an end to US imposed sanctions. Since Saudi Arabia is against the Iranian nuclear program, it might use Pakistan that could denote anything from using Pakistan’s nuclear umbrella to dissuade or induce Iran to directly make an effort in order to purchase nuclear weapons from Pakistan. How Pakistan responds to Saudi Arabia’s petition in a world where Iran has nuclear potential would be exceedingly consequential for their imminent relationship, seeing how such a situation would be of grim significance to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in this state of affairs, Pakistan may come across multiple challenges, ranging from security issues to its relations with China and Saudi Arabia and vice versa. Pakistan, a gateway to Middle East is significant for China where it quests for energy resources. Therefore, Pakistan’s contiguity to the Middle Eastern markets serves as a fundamental doorway for trade between China and those regions.

There are influential aspects dragging Pakistan towards both Saudi Arabia and China. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia is an old partner, home to Islam’s holy cities, a big supplier of oil, and a donor of financial offerings. Concurrently, China has principally vanquished Saudi Arabia with regard to the accomplishments of its economic interest. It is obvious that China’s twitch is presently stronger, even though it is not as if Pakistan can or will ‘pivot’ away from the Middle East—either shortly or enduringly. “Saudi Arabia and other countries in that region will persist to be key allies for Pakistan owing to historical, cultural, and economic factors. The key discrepancy, nonetheless, is that Pakistan’s military will not have to take action in the Middle East due to the country’s close economic and security cooperation with China” (<http://uchicagate.com/2015/06/15/pakistan-between-asia-and-the-middle-east/>). In terms of Middle East crisis, Pakistan can find the more points of convergence rather than sorting out divergence. History reveals that Pakistan had never been a part of intra-Arb conflict. The present crisis must be looked through the prism of Intra-Arb rivalries. Therefore the present day geopolitical undercurrents are perplexing for Pakistan. The country must consider the geo-politico-economic dynamics of Middle East before formulating any policy.

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Its security interests need pragmatic overhauling. Once the country itself becomes strong, both politically and economically, it can then play a role in Middle East. A number of significant similar proposals have been initiated by China chiefly focused on the revival of old Silk Road trade route. They include tripling of its development fund for Africa to USD 60 billion, investment in UK's nuclear plants and a package of economic incentives to the Middle East. The Middle Eastern crisis has two-fold impact for Pakistan's economy, i-e, threat to flow of remittance and security situation. Therefore, it is high time for the country to go for its own national narrative and work for the economic betterment of the region. Pakistan should remain out of fighting other's wars, though can remain engaged in economic fronts of Middle Eastern region.

Therefore, if the state of affairs goes wrong with respect to Afghanistan, this will call for an inevitable cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other regional players to calm down the region and avoid any spillovers. The issue of proximity makes it all the more significant for Pakistan to get involved in such affairs as compared to the distant issue of Yemen. Saudi Arabia would essentially be a main player if Afghanistan any destabilization occurs, since it has the decades old relations both with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Conclusion

The Middle East offers an impressive package for China with respect to the latter's long-term interests in energy security and the aspirations for an increased overseas markets and investment opportunities in the region. This posture also translates the central point of Chinese policy which looks for a non-violent circumstances which may lead to progress. Consequently, Chinese Middle East policy is centered on the promotion of economic and energy relations since it desires to make progress yet through negotiations and dialogue (Chaziza, 2016). One of the fundamental principle of Chinese foreign policy is that it always opposes regime change, in any case when accomplished by Western powers, since it suspects that such changes are prone to be adopted for other regions too – thus China's unease on the Arab Spring and its aftermath. The Arab Spring have marred the relations within the regimes undergoing change but also dragged Beijingin advertently more into the region's politics. Furthermore, Washington's 'rebalance' towards Asia simply known as the U.S. strategy to contain China and its new engagement in the Middle East exacerbate Beijing's concerns.

China has always followed a policy of 'non-interference in internal affairs' in the Middle East, hence it is hard to find evidences of China being involved in any kind of political activism in and affecting domestic affairs of the region (Mclaughlin, n.d: 23). This consistent strategy has always served the Chinese interests. It is interesting to note that notable disorders in the Middle East such as the Iranian revolution, Iran-Iraq War and Iraq and Iran's pariah status drew the United States more deeply into the internal politics of the region but China perceived them as golden opportunities to create commercial prospects for itself.

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Moreover, legal and similar obstacles faced by the western firms paved more ways for Chinese firms to develop viable commercial interactions in certain countries (Mclaughlin, n.d: 3)

China's non-interventionist policy posture and serious focus on socioeconomic development through commercial collaboration create a win-win for all stakeholders. Therefore, Chinese firms receive a warm welcome in regions such as Africa and the Middle East. However, the involvement of all the world powers in the Middle East, all having different missions, calls for broader strategies for a greater peace not only in the region but the world at large. Although Halford Mackinder's 'Rimland' has fallen a pray to hegemonic ambitions, all actors will eventually have to choose peace over conflict and war to yield constructive dividends.



Source : Bajpae, Chietigi. (2006, March 29). China's Growing Middle East Role and the Potential for US-China Conflict. *The Asia Pacific Journal*. Vol. 4 (3). Retrieved from <http://apjif.org/-Chietij-Bajpae/1677/article.html>

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