

# China's Peaceful Diplomacy in the Middle East in the New Era and the US's Perception and Challenges to it

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## Abstract

## Review Article

Guided by the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and the vision of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," and adhering to the "Three Major Initiatives," China's Middle East peace diplomacy in the new era has achieved remarkable success. It has not only safeguarded China's national interests but also contributed to peace and development in the Middle East and the world. The peaceful nature of China's Middle East diplomacy is mainly reflected in the following aspects: focusing on promoting economic and trade relations, serving the Belt and Road Initiative, achieving mutual benefit and win-win results and common development; developing relationships with Middle East countries in an all-round way, not creating exclusive small circles, not taking sides against another side, and not carving out spheres of influence; actively promoting reconciliation between countries with discordant relations in the Middle East region and internal reconciliation in relevant countries; helping relevant Middle East countries resist foreign interference, safeguard national rights, and uphold the basic norms of international relations and international fairness and justice. However, China's Middle East diplomacy faces challenges primarily from the United States. Driven by Cold War mentality, zero-sum thinking, and a focus on relative gains, U.S. policies toward China in the region are marked by misperceptions and biases. Initiatives like expanding the Abraham Accords, promoting a Middle East NATO, launching I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, and USA), and proposing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) pose obstacles to China's diplomatic efforts. Nonetheless, the U.S.'s entrenched pro-Israel stance limits its capacity to undermine China's peace-oriented approach in the region.

**Keywords:** China, Middle East, China's Diplomacy, America.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Middle East region has always been a concentrated area of international hotspots due to its rich energy resources, complex political and religious relations, important geographical location, and special development history. As a major country, China attaches great importance to the Middle East region. Moreover, in the context of globalization, with its own development, the continuous growth of energy demand, and the expansion of other overseas interests, China's relations with countries in the Middle East region have become

increasingly close. In 2017, China surpassed the United States in global crude oil imports and has now become the world's largest importer of oil and natural gas [1]. Sixty percent of China's trade with Africa and Europe passes through the Middle East [2]. "In 2021, bilateral trade between China and Gulf countries increased by 44.3%, hitting a record high. When the global economy slowed down in 2022, trade between Gulf countries and China still grew by 27.1%, in sharp contrast to the decline in trade between China and Japan and the United States." [3]. At the same time, China's diplomacy in the

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Energy Information Administration, "China: Overview," August 8, 2022, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/CHN>.

<sup>2</sup>Manar Shorbagy, "Triangular Dynamics: Us Response to China's Assertiveness in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2024, p.139.

<sup>3</sup>Kevin Nguyen, Peter W. Singer, "How China Is Winning the Middle East," *Defense One*, Washington, Jan 19, 2024,

Middle East region has also become more active. China's Middle East diplomacy is a vivid manifestation of its peaceful diplomatic policy based on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and others.

### **I. China's Peaceful Diplomatic Practices in the Middle East in the New Era**

Entering the new era, China's diplomacy in the Middle East has become increasingly active. China's diplomacy in the Middle East is an important part of China's independent and peaceful foreign policy. China's diplomatic practices in the Middle East have promoted peace and development in the region. The peaceful nature of China's diplomacy in the Middle East is manifested in many aspects.

#### **(I) Make Every Effort to Promote the Development of Economic and Trade Relations, Serve the Belt and Road Initiative, and Achieve Mutual Benefit, Win-Win Results and Common Development**

In a speech in 2014, President Xi Jinping put forward the "1+2+3" model for developing relations with Arab countries. Energy cooperation is the core and is listed as "1". The number "2" refers to infrastructure construction and trade and investment facilitation. The number "3" refers to new energy, nuclear energy and space satellites. Since the introduction of this strategy, as of early 2022, 20 Arab countries have signed cooperation agreements with China in fields such as energy, trade and investment, finance, infrastructure, medical care, high-tech, etc [4]. At the first China-Arab States Summit held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2022, President Xi Jinping emphasized the use of local currencies in trade, setting the tone for the next stage of economic cooperation with the Gulf region. Subsequently, the UAE settled a liquefied natural gas transaction in RMB on the Shanghai Stock Exchange, and Saudi Arabia is also considering using RMB for oil trade with China [5]. China attaches particular importance to bilateral cooperation or cooperation through the Arab League in the fields of digital and telecommunications technologies, such as the "China-League of Arab States Data Security Cooperation Initiative". Mechanisms such as the "China-Arab Cooperation Forum" and the "China-Africa Cooperation Forum" provide an important platform for China's economic and trade cooperation with Middle Eastern countries. In July 2021, China signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement with Iran.

China's economic and trade cooperation with Middle Eastern countries pursues mutual benefit, win-win results and common development. It adheres to the principle of non-interference, does not attach any

political conditions, and does not use normal economic and trade exchanges as a bargaining chip to change the internal politics of the other side. Therefore, it has been widely welcomed by Middle Eastern countries.

#### **(II) Develop All-Round Relations with Middle Eastern Countries, Refrain from Creating Exclusive Cliques, Pitting One Side against Another, or Carving out Spheres of Influence**

Despite the extremely complex relations among Middle Eastern countries, some of which have been in long-term hostility, China has never taken sides. Instead, it has developed friendly relations with all Middle Eastern countries. China is now the largest trading partner of Saudi Arabia and Iran and has established relatively solid technological ties with Israel. China maintains partnerships with both the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Iran simultaneously. Moreover, when developing relations with Middle Eastern countries, China prioritizes economic relations, followed by political relations, and places security relations last. China's security cooperation with individual Middle Eastern countries mainly aims to combat piracy and terrorism.

Compared with the United States' practices in the region, the peaceful nature of China's diplomacy in the Middle East becomes even more evident. For the sake of maintaining its own hegemony, the United States attaches particular importance to security and political relations and attaches political conditions even when developing economic relations. To maintain its hegemonic position, the United States deliberately employs power balance means such as "forming alliances" and "dividing and ruling" in the region. For example, its active promotion of the "Abraham Accords" aims to contain Iran and further isolate Palestine. After creating opposition, the United States takes the opportunity to station troops in relevant countries, thereby solidifying other countries' security dependence on itself and forming its sphere of influence in the Middle East, preventing other countries from deepening relations with countries where U.S. troops are stationed.

Unlike China, the United States' influence in the Middle East is based primarily on its military presence. The United States has radar bases in Turkey and Israel, air force bases in Kuwait, Turkey (Incirlik Air Base), and the UAE. The United States has Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, where its Central Command headquarters is located, with thousands of U.S. military personnel stationed there. The headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet is in Bahrain. The United States' military aid to the

<https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2024/01/how-china-winning-middle-east/393483/>.

<sup>4</sup>Wang Jin, "Xi's Visit Marks a New Era for China-Arab relations," *The Diplomat*, December 13, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/xis-visit-marks-new-era-for-china-arab-relations/>.

<sup>5</sup>Hasan Alhasan, "Contesting the West: China's Middle East Strategy," June 25, 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/06/contesting-the-west-chinas-middle-east-strategy/>.

region accounts for more than 50% of its total global military aid. As of 2023, there are more than 100,000 soldiers and security contractors stationed in the region. In the same year, the United States dispatched fighter jets and a Navy destroyer to the Gulf region, followed by 3,000 Navy personnel and Marines [6]. The U.S. military presence has made the United States an important strategic ally of several Arab countries, even when bilateral relations are tense. Out of considerations for maintaining hegemony, the United States' deep involvement in the politics and security of the Middle East is an important factor contributing to the long-term instability in the region.

### **(III) Actively Promoting Reconciliation between Countries with Estranged Relations in the Middle East and Internal Reconciliation in Relevant Countries**

While developing friendly relations with all Middle Eastern countries in an all-round way, China has not stood idly by or ignored countries in hostile relations or those with severe internal conflicts. Instead, it has become increasingly active in mediating peace talks, promoting regional peace and stability, and demonstrating the image of a truly responsible major country.

Using the special envoy mechanism, China has carefully mediated internal conflicts in Libya, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. China is an active participant in the Iran nuclear issue negotiations. It is particularly worth mentioning that China's mediation played a crucial role in facilitating the resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, thus effectively promoting the sound development of international relations in the Middle East and even a broader region, and receiving widespread acclaim from the international community. Thanks to the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the intensity of Saudi Arabia's confrontation with Yemen has decreased, and Saudi Arabia is expected to withdraw from Yemen with dignity. The reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran has also had a positive impact on Syria's eventual return to the Arab League, promoting the unity of Arab countries. The reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran has also had a positive impact on the normalization of relations between Iran and Egypt. The positive influence of the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran can even extend to other regions. For example, it has made Pakistan less cautious in developing relations with Iran, which may be conducive to the construction of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline [7]. In addition, on April 26, 2024, China invited Fatah and Hamas to hold talks in Beijing to promote reconciliation between the two sides. In late July of the same year, China invited a total of 14 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, to hold

reconciliation talks in Beijing, which ultimately led to the signing of the Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity by representatives of various Palestinian factions. China's actions have naturally attracted widespread attention and acclaim from the international community against the backdrop of the protracted Gaza war.

China has also made use of international mechanisms such as the SCO and BRICS to further develop its relations with Middle Eastern countries and promote the development of relations among Middle Eastern countries. For example, the SCO's expansion plan has had a positive impact on facilitating the resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. According to the Regulations on the Admission of New Members of the SCO approved by Resolution No. 1 of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO on June 11, 2010, eight conditions need to be met for joining the SCO. The second condition is: "Establish diplomatic relations with all member states of the organization." This means that Saudi Arabia must resume diplomatic relations with Iran if it wants to join the SCO. And Saudi Arabia is an applicant for membership. At the BRICS meeting held in Johannesburg, Saudi Arabia and Iran were both invited to join the BRICS. The UAE and Egypt have also become members of the BRICS since January 2024.

### **(IV) Helping Relevant Middle Eastern Countries Oppose Foreign Interference, Safeguard National Rights, and Uphold the Basic Norms of International Relations and International Fairness and Justice**

Although the conflicts in Libya and Syria have regional and domestic backgrounds, they are inseparable from the blatant interference of the United States and other Western countries. In the case of Libya, the United States and Europe went beyond the scope of authorization of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 and militarily interfered in Libya. Using the new discourse system of the "legitimate government" and the so-called "Responsibility to Protect" humanitarian intervention discourse system, they illegally overthrew the Gaddafi government. Since then, Libya has been in continuous internal turmoil. Based on the lessons learned from the Libya issue, China cooperated with Russia and other countries and exercised its veto power many times on international platforms such as the UN Security Council, thwarting the attempts of the United States and the West to replicate the Libyan interference model in Syria and effectively safeguarding the basic norms of international relations.

After the outbreak of the latest round of conflict between Palestine and Israel, although China has good relations with Israel, China did not condemn Hamas as

<sup>6</sup>See Manar Shorbagy, "Triangular Dynamics: US Response to China's Assertiveness in the Middle East," p.149.

<sup>7</sup>Arif Ansar, "China's Deepening Involvement in South Asia and the Gulf States," *Defence Journal*, Vol. 25, Iss. 12, July 2023, p.57.

Israel demanded. Instead, starting from the root of the matter and standing on the side of justice, China emphasized Palestine's inalienable rights to statehood and other rights, condemned Israel's serious human rights violations, called for a ceasefire and an end to the war, and appealed for negotiations to resolve differences and implement the "two-state solution" at an early date. China has also condemned the United States for siding with Israel and publicly or secretly supporting its continued and expanded war on many occasions. On November 30, 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released "China's Position Paper on the Palestine-Israel Conflict." On January 14, 2024, the "Joint Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and the Secretariat of the League of Arab States on the Palestine-Israel Conflict" was issued.

## II. U.S. Perceptions of Risks Posed by China's Middle East Diplomacy

China's interests in the Middle East lie in maintaining access to economic activities, ensuring the free flow of commerce, preventing violent extremism from undermining its investments, and enhancing its global power status through mediation efforts to resolve conflicts. Some of China's diplomatic objectives in the region align with U.S. interests. For instance, China's anti-piracy naval task force, though not coordinated with the U.S. or other Western navies, has contributed to maritime security in critical chokepoints like the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. However, as China expands its diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, the U.S. increasingly perceives these efforts as a challenge to its own interests. American policymakers view China's growing influence—through infrastructure investments, energy partnerships, and strategic mediation roles—as potentially undermining U.S. dominance in the region. This perception is further fueled by China's non-aligned stance, which contrasts with U.S. alliances and security frameworks, creating tensions over competing visions for regional order.

### (I) U.S. Perceptions of the Extent to Which China's Middle East Diplomacy Poses Risks to the United States

Overall, the United States believes that China's diplomacy in the Middle East has brought it risks at five levels. Each level of risk is related to China's varying degrees of interaction with specific countries.

The first level of risk is China's moderate investment in a certain Middle Eastern country's economy and a small amount of arms sales. This level of

risk is represented by China's relationship with Jordan. The United States believes that such a relationship poses little harm to it.

The second level of risk is that China's economic relations with a certain Middle Eastern country will allow China to collect information on U.S. military platforms and personnel. The United States believes that Huawei's role in supplying regional mobile phone networks has generated this level of risk. Where China's technological presence increases, due to the dual-use nature of its commercial goods, this level of risk is even higher. This level of risk prompted the United States to reach an agreement with Saudi Arabia in July 2022, with Saudi Arabia cooperating with the United States to study 5G and 6G. To this day, the United States still pressures Saudi Arabia to reduce cooperation with China [8]. Egypt succumbed to U.S. pressure and turned to Exxon and Nokia instead of Huawei for 5G technology [9]. China's investment in Israel, especially significant investments in the technology sector, has also worried the U.S. government. The United States is concerned that if Israel gets too close to China and achieves in-depth cooperation in some technological fields, it will promote the rapid development of Chinese technology. The United States regularly pressures the Israeli government to reject the signing of a "China-Israel Free Trade Agreement" and to refrain from achieving cooperation in the technological field.

The third level of risk is that the economic relationship between a Middle Eastern country and China may lead to the strengthening of their security relationship, and China may exploit this relationship at the expense of that country's defense ties with the United States. For example, this level of risk has affected the defense relationship between the United States and the UAE. The negotiations on the F-35 fighter jets between the United States and the UAE broke down due to two issues: the presence of Huawei in the UAE's mobile phone network and the reported construction of a secret military facility by China at al-Khalifa Port in the UAE. The United States believes that China's deep economic ties in the region and subsequent investments in key infrastructure, especially port construction, give it the opportunity to transform its commercial influence into military power projection, potentially threatening the overall relationships of regional countries with the United States.

The fourth level of risk is that the increasingly deepening economic and security relationship between a Middle Eastern country and China will cause that

<sup>8</sup>White House, "Results of Bilateral Meeting Between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Fact Sheet, July 15, 2022, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/15/fact-sheet-results-of-bilateral-](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/15/fact-sheet-results-of-bilateral-meeting-between-the-united-states-and-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/)

[meeting-between-the-united-states-and-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/15/fact-sheet-results-of-bilateral-meeting-between-the-united-states-and-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/).

<sup>9</sup>Selim, G. M. and Moaaz, R. S., "Sino-Egyptian Relations Post-2013: The Dynamics and Challenges of an Emerging Strategic Partnership," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.43, No.4, 2021, p.363.



country to gradually deviate from the United States' security orbit. For instance, the relationship between a certain country and China has reached such an extent that in terms of security cooperation, China, rather than the United States, begins to be the preferred option.

The fifth level of risk is that China shakes up traditional Middle Eastern partners on the US security orbit and then organizes more Middle Eastern countries to undermine US interests. This is a situation where China's influence in the Middle East generally exceeds that of the United States. The United States believes that this level of risk is the most remote possibility in the region but is still worthy of consideration. Although this situation is unlikely to occur in the short term, it poses a huge risk to the global competition between the United States and China [10].

## (II) Key Areas of U.S. Attention to China's Middle East Diplomacy

The key areas of U.S. attention to China's Middle East diplomacy are related to its perception of the risks associated with China's Middle East diplomacy. As mentioned above, the high-risk levels identified by the United States are related to challenges to the political and security relations between the United States and Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, the focus of U.S. attention to China's Middle East diplomacy is on Chinese initiatives that could potentially undermine the political and security relations between the United States and Middle Eastern countries.

What is particularly unsettling to the United States is China's combination of state-controlled commercial enterprises with military development (commonly referred to as "civil-military integration"). The United States believes that China requires state-owned enterprises in specific sectors to receive and service Chinese military assets, effectively blurring the lines between China's commercial and military presence abroad, and putting countries with commercial agreements with China in an "awkward" position of potentially supporting the Chinese military, which would pose a threat to the United States. In the Middle East, this dilemma is most evident in China's investments in ports and industrial parks. The United States believes that although these investments are intended for commercial development, they can also enhance China's naval capabilities and help China establish future military presences.

China's growing security presence in the Middle East has caused concern among U.S. policymakers. This concern involves the risk that China may gather information about U.S. forces and equipment in the region. The most obvious example is China's security presence in Djibouti. In that country, China's first overseas support base is located just 8 miles from the U.S. Navy's Camp Lemonnier [11]. The United States has accused China of interfering with its military activities.

## III. Challenges Faced by China's Middle East Diplomacy

Although the peaceful nature of China's Middle East diplomacy is quite evident, the United States, mainly out of considerations to maintain its own hegemonic position, believes that China's Middle East diplomacy threatens its interests. As a result, it has set many obstacles to China's peaceful diplomacy in the Middle East. To counter China, the Biden administration has put forward the "Invest, Align, and Compete" plan [12]. It can be said that the challenges to China's Middle East diplomacy mainly come from the United States.

### (I). The United States Forms I2U2 and Coordinates It with the Indo-Pacific "Quad" Mechanism to Counter China and Other Countries

To compete with China, the United States has adopted a series of policies to undermine China's Middle East diplomacy strategically. In July 2022, the United States formed I2U2 (the two "I"s represent Israel and India respectively, and the two "U"s represent the United States and the UAE respectively) in the Middle East, aiming to become the central pillar of the United States' new strategy in the Middle East region. U.S. National Security Advisor Sullivan clarified the administration's goals by explicitly comparing it with the Indo-Pacific "Quad" mechanism. He said: "I2U2 can become a feature of a broader region, just as the 'Quad' has become a core pillar of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy." [13]. Importantly, this connection was conceived before Saudi Arabia and Iran reconciled. It is based on the concerns of Israel, the United States, and the UAE about Iran, as well as the concerns of the United States and India about China. India, the UAE, and Israel will cooperate with the United States to oppose China's connections with Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. In providing technology and military supplies to other countries, the United States regards economically and technologically powerful India as a counterbalancing force against Russia and China. Incorporating India into this equation also means attracting Israel away from China by replacing China

<sup>10</sup>See Grant Rumley, "China's Security Presence in the Middle East: Redlines and Guidelines for the United States," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Notes, No.123, October 2022, pp.14-15.

<sup>11</sup>"Only 13 km Away from the US Military! Chinese Navy Stationed in Djibouti Support Base!" August 3, 2017, <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK4t2k>.

<sup>12</sup>The White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 12, 2022, p.24.

<sup>13</sup>Sriram Lakshman, "I2U2 Can Become a Regional Feature like the QUAD: Jake Sullivan," *The Hindu*, July 14, 2022, [www.thehindu.com/news/international/i2u2-can-become-a-regional-feature-like-the-quad-jake-sullivan/article65637011.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/i2u2-can-become-a-regional-feature-like-the-quad-jake-sullivan/article65637011.ece).

with India's markets and investments, preventing the latter from obtaining Israeli technology.

## **(II) Proposing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor to Counter China's Belt and Road Initiative**

The United States believes that the Belt and Road Initiative is a grand plan by China aimed at undermining the overall interests of the United States, especially its interests in the Middle East region. In response to the Belt and Road Initiative, the United States launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) at the G7 summit in 2022. As part of the PGII, the United States proposed the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). It seeks to establish a maritime and rail network connecting India with Europe through the Middle East. Trade will travel by sea from India to the UAE, then by rail through Saudi Arabia and Jordan, finally reaching Haifa in Israel. Then, goods will be transported by sea again to Europe. Although the United States envisions IMEC as a tool to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative, Gulf countries believe that both projects are manifestations of the emerging multipolar world order, and they can balance relations with China and the West to maximize their own interests.

## **(III) Promoting the Expansion of the "Abraham Accords" and Establishing a "Middle East NATO" to Undermine China-Facilitated Reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran**

China's facilitation of the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is regarded by the United States as a challenge to its Middle East strategy, undermining the goal of the "Abraham Accords" (agreements on normalizing relations signed by the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco with Israel in 2020) – to promote the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue through Arab-Israeli reconciliation (in fact, to further marginalize it) and build a regional alliance against Iran. After the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Biden administration of the United States accelerated the pace of expanding the "Abraham Accords," trying hard to induce Saudi Arabia to normalize relations with Israel, undermining the quality of the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran and sabotaging China's relevant efforts.

In fact, the conclusion of the "Abraham Accords" itself had the aspect of preventing the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran to some

extent broke the United States' strategy of divide-and-rule in the region. The United States originally wanted Saudi Arabia and Iran to form a certain balance. However, the failure of military intervention in Yemen, especially the attack on the oil refinery in 2019, made Saudi Arabia feel that the United States was unreliable. So Saudi Arabia contacted the then Iraqi Prime Minister and asked him to mediate the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Iraqi Prime Minister soon invited General Soleimani to Baghdad to discuss establishing new relations with Saudi Arabia<sup>[14]</sup>. On January 3, 2020, General Soleimani flew to Iraq on a civilian airliner and was assassinated by a US drone at Baghdad International Airport. This was an order from President Trump. One of the main purposes was to try to build a new deterrent to prevent the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Expanding the "Abraham Accords" is an effort by the United States to compete with China politically in the Middle East. Parallel to the expansion of the "Abraham Accords" is the United States' military security efforts to try to establish a "Middle East NATO." In 2021, the United States brought Israel under the purview of the Central Command from the US European Command, opening up new possibilities for Israel-Arab cooperation. The 2022 US National Defense Strategy Report details the goals of establishing a "Middle East NATO": seeking to establish a network of air defense and missile defense capabilities across the Middle East region to promote greater cooperation while strengthening defenses through a layered approach. The normalization efforts between Israel and major Arab countries provide additional opportunities for strengthening regional air defense.<sup>[15]</sup> As part of the efforts to establish a "Middle East NATO," military content was the central topic of the "Negev Forum for Regional Cooperation" officially announced in November 2022. Representatives from Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, the UAE, and the United States attended the opening ceremony. The forum is open to future regional members joining<sup>[16]</sup>. The goal of the "forum" is to strengthen information sharing among member countries and regional military cooperation with the US Central Command.

Currently, the efforts made by the United States to expand the "Abraham Accords," construct a "Middle East NATO," and establish the "Negev Regional Cooperation Forum" mechanism are all contrary to China's facilitation of the reconciliation between Saudi

<sup>14</sup>Juan Cole, "China Hangs Washington Out to Dry in the Middle East," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Washington, May 17, 2023, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2818310354?accountid=176682&sourcetype=Reports#>.

<sup>15</sup>US Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 2022, p.77.

<sup>16</sup>Antony J. Blinken, "The Negev Forum Working Groups and Regional Cooperation," US Department of State, Press Statement, January 10, 2023, [www.state.gov/the-negev-forum-working-groups-andregional-cooperation-framework/](https://www.state.gov/the-negev-forum-working-groups-andregional-cooperation-framework/).

Arabia and Iran, challenging China's relevant diplomatic efforts.

#### **(IV) The Unconditional Support of the United States for Israel Challenges China's Efforts to Promote Reconciliation among Palestinian Factions**

On October 7, 2023, a new round of conflict between Palestine and Israel broke out and has continued ever since, remaining unresolved to this day. The international community has made various efforts to end the conflict. Among them, China's diplomatic efforts in promoting the reconciliation of various Palestinian factions (including Hamas) have attracted much attention. In order to break out of the current conflict dilemma, China proposed a "three-step" initiative: ceasefire and cessation of hostilities and humanitarian relief are the top priorities; "Palestinians governing Palestinians" is the basic principle for the post-conflict reconstruction of Gaza; the "two-state solution" is the fundamental way out in the future [17]. However, the unconditional support of the United States for Israel in various aspects such as politics, economy, military, and diplomacy challenges China's efforts to promote the reconciliation of Palestinian factions.

The reconciliation of Palestinian factions is a process, which is clearly reflected in the "three-step" initiative advocated by China. It can be seen from the "three-step" principle that the reconciliation of Palestinian factions is not the goal; it is a means to achieve the real goal of resolving the Palestine-Israel issue through the "two-state solution". Due to the unconditional support of the United States for Israel, it is very difficult to complete the first step (ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, humanitarian relief) in the "three-step" process. Therefore, the practical path of internal reconciliation in Palestine has also been blocked to a certain extent by the United States. Because if the "first step" of ceasefire and cessation of hostilities cannot be taken, it means that on the issue of Hamas's status, the positions of the United States, Israel and other countries are contrary to those of China and other countries, which means that the United States, Israel and other countries do not recognize China's promotion of internal reconciliation in Palestine. Through its support for Israel, the United States has indicated that it believes that no

legitimate political organization in Palestine in the future should include Hamas, although the Beijing Declaration shows that Hamas has become more moderate and has in principle accepted the "two-state solution".

#### **CONCLUSION**

China's diplomacy in the Middle East in the new era is based on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and the concept of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind". Objectively, while safeguarding China's national interests, it has also promoted peace and development in the Middle East. The United States positions China as its biggest competitor. In developing relations with China, it adheres to Cold War thinking, focuses on relative gains, and believes in zero-sum games. Accordingly, it regards the Middle East as one of the important regions for competing with China. Therefore, its perception of China's Middle East diplomacy is full of mistakes and prejudices, and it has set many obstacles and carried out some acts of sabotage against China's Middle East diplomacy. The United States' expansion of the "Abraham Accords," the construction of a "Middle East NATO", the launch of the I2U2, and the proposal of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor construction plan all pose certain challenges to China's Middle East diplomacy.

However, all of the above efforts by the United States have one common fatal weakness--attempting to bypass the Palestinian issue. The new round of conflict between Israel and Palestine has brought severe shocks to the above series of U.S. plans: Saudi Arabia has become more cautious about normalizing relations with Israel; Arab countries are even more reluctant to participate in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and the I2U2 mechanism with Israel as an important node; the construction of a Middle East defense alliance has made slow progress; the "Negev Regional Cooperation Forum" ended in a fiasco and was ultimately canceled. Facts have shown that challenging China's Middle East diplomacy means challenging peace and development in the Middle East, and it is doomed to have no good outcome.

<sup>17</sup>"Palestinian Factions Sign in Beijing, Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity," July 23, 2024,

[https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjzbzd/202407/t20240723\\_11458692.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjzbzd/202407/t20240723_11458692.shtml).