The Position of the GCC States in the Belt and Road Initiative

Emad Kaddorah
The Position of the GCC States in the Belt and Road Initiative

Series: Research Paper

27 Mai 2024

Emad Kaddorah

Researcher and head of the Editing Department at the ACRPS. He holds a PhD in International Relations and Middle East Studies and an MA in Defense and Strategic Studies. He has published several books and peer-reviewed articles, including Turkish Foreign Policy: Orientations, Flexible Alliances, Power Politics (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2021); The Rise of the GCC States and Turkey: Convergent and Divergent Regional Agendas (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021). His research interests focus on Geopolitics, International Relations, the Gulf and Turkish Studies.

Copyright © 2022 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center’s paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies
Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat
Al-Dayaen, Qatar
PO Box 10277, Doha
+974 4035 4111
www.dohainstitute.org
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................. 1  
Introduction ............................................ 2  
The Belt and Road Initiative: Aims and Corridors .......... 3  
China's Vision and Its Foreign Policy Stance under the BRI ....... 5  
The Position of the Gulf in the BRI ....................... 7  
  1. Attracting GCC states to the BRI ..................... 7  
  2. Why were GCC states gradually integrated in the BRI? ........ 8  
     A. China ........................................... 8  
     B. GCC states ..................................... 9  
  3. How have GCC states been integrated into the BRI? .......... 10  
     A. Saudi Arabia .................................... 11  
     B. Qatar .......................................... 12  
     C. UAE .......................................... 13  
     D. Kuwait ........................................ 13  
     E. Oman .......................................... 14  
Western Responses to the BRI: Relevance for the Gulf ............ 15  
  1. Debt traps ......................................... 16  
  2. Encouragement to withdraw from the BRI ................ 17  
  3. Alternative alliances to China ........................ 18  
  4. Possible Western escalation against China ............... 18  
  5. The Global Gateway Strategy ........................ 19  
  6. The economic corridor ................................ 20  
     A. BRI ........................................... 21  
     B. IMEC .......................................... 21  
Concluding Remarks .................................. 22  
Sources ............................................. 24
Abstract

The geography, resources, and capacities of states are an important part of China's global strategy. Yet, although the Gulf is strategically located and of economic importance to China, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states did not fall along the original routes demarcated by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Nevertheless, both China and these states have begun to mutually engage with the initiative, signing strategic partnerships, aligning these projects with national development visions in the region, and investing in Gulf ports and industrial cities. The expansion of the initiative has unsettled the United States (US) and its allies, some of whom have begun to view it as a serious challenge. In turn, they have attempted to impede the initiative by forming geopolitical alliances and proposing alternative economic initiatives. This article argues that the Gulf is of great concern to China and a key part of the BRI. It explores how the GCC states fit into BRI maps and the way in which each state has gradually become integrated into the BRI. It discusses Western responses to the initiative and the degree to which these may impact the GCC states. The paper offers tentative conclusions about China's likely approach if the initiative is obstructed and its interests undermined. Will it modify its foreign policy approach? And how may this affect the Gulf?

Keywords:

BRI, GCC States, Interest Community, Realism, Strategic Partnership, Anti-Containment, IMEC.
Introduction

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, China has successfully implemented much of its planned vision for linking geographical points around the world into its global strategy. Following the overland and maritime routes of the new Silk Road, China has established and invested in communication lines and physical infrastructure, including a naval force, commercial ships, supply stations, railways, ports, and industrial cities, all the way to Europe, through Eurasia on one side and across the Indian Ocean and Africa on the other.

Despite the strategic location of the Gulf and its economic importance to China, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states were not originally part of the BRI. Although the maritime route of the BRI passes through the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia, which sits astride the length of the sea, was not included in the initiative’s plans and infrastructure.

China began to update the BRI routes after its initial successes, integrating countries that were not included on its original maps. It began to link its emerging global network with the Gulf regional network in all six arenas of cooperation under the initiative, namely: hydrocarbon energy, infrastructure and transport, trade and investment, nuclear energy, satellites, and renewable energy. This integration was manifested in strategic partnership and comprehensive strategic partnership agreements with GCC states, the alignment between the initiative and the national development visions for these states, and Chinese investments in the region’s ports and industrial cities. In fact, it seems that GCC states are now a crucial component of the BRI.

While the BRI reflects China’s rapid development, massive productivity, extensive trade, and wide-ranging relations and influence, it also creates challenges for its peaceful foreign policy approach, which is based on what it calls an ‘interest community’ as opposed to Western realism. In response to its expansive projects and infrastructure around the world, the United States (US) and some of its allies have sought to impede the initiative through alliances and alternative economic projects. Should these policies assume a more offensive posture, entailing military tensions or sanctions, it is unclear how China will behave: will it retain a peaceful, defensive stance? Or will it adopt an offensive, realist pose?

This article argues that GCC states are currently the focus of the BRI because China’s objectives are broader than the original routes outlined by the initiative. In practice, it is seeking to enhance its external influence and presence on the world stage and in areas with vital markets and resources. Geopolitically speaking, the Gulf thus lies at the core of China’s foreign policy thought and the needs of BRI. China’s increased political activity in the region – for example, its sponsorship of negotiations to restore Saudi Iranian relations – demonstrates its interest in engagement in the region. At the same time, the GCC states occupy an important position of strength and an incomparable strategic location, which bolsters their chances of achieving their goal of diversifying their partners and economies.
This article is divided into five parts. The first section offers a brief overview of the BRI and its routes, most of which are far from the GCC states. Part two examines China’s foreign policy approach through the lens of the concepts of interest community and partnership, laying the groundwork for a discussion of its anticipated behaviour in the future, especially in the Gulf. Part three analyses GCC states’ position in the initiative, China’s efforts to integrate them across the six areas of cooperation, GCC states’ interests in the BRI, and how each country is enmeshed with BRI projects. The fourth section takes up Western projects articulated as an alternative to the BRI and examines the extent to which they may impact the GCC states. The fifth and final section offers conclusions about China’s potential approach in the Gulf, if BRI projects are obstructed. In particular, it asks: Would the Gulf be affected? What are the priorities of GCC states?

The Belt and Road Initiative: Aims and Corridors

The BRI is a megaproject unique in the history of the global economy, an approach aligned with President Xi Jinping’s thinking about China as a global power in the twenty-first century and with his vision of the country’s "great revival". The initiative is associated with China's desire to stake out its place in the world: ‘Our responsibility is [...] continuing to work for realizing the great revival of the Chinese nation,’ Xi said in his first speech as president in 2012, ‘in order to let the Chinese nation and stand more firmly and powerfully among all nations around the world.’

Key aspects of the initiative include infrastructure and investments in ports, transport, energy networks, trade, finance, and interstate communication. As of October 2023, some $4 trillion had been invested in the BRI. The aim is to make China a hub for communication in the region and beyond, and it is hoped that BRI projects and the states hosting its facilities will absorb Chinese local production surpluses. The initiative connects countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa with China, and thus far, 147 countries and 31 international organizations have signed BRI-related cooperation documents (memorandums of understanding) with China, demonstrating the initiative’s global reach.

The BRI is mapped along two primary routes: the overland route running from Xi’an through Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey to Rotterdam in the Netherlands, and the maritime route from the city of Quanzhou and passing through various stations in the Indian Ocean, then the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to Italy.

1 The BRI was announced on two separate occasions: first, during President Xi’s visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, when he announced the Silk Road Economic Belt, and second, when he announced the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in Indonesia. The Xinhua news agency published the first map of the initiative in May 2014. The initiative has become an integral part of China’s foreign policy. See: Pelagia Karpathiotaki et al., “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Contributions to Connectivity”, in Christopher Findlay and Somkiat Tangkitvanich (eds.), New Dimensions of Connectivity in the Asia-Pacific (Canberra: ANU Press, 2021), pp. 41–42, 45–46.


5 Yike Fu and Ovigwe Eguegu, “Mapping the Future of China-Africa Relations: How the Continent can Benefit”, South African Institute of International Affairs, occasional paper no. 333 (October 2021), p. 3; Silk Road Briefing.
Map 1: The Gulf is distant from the overland and maritime Silk Road

Source: Author's rendering, with the assistance of Souhail Jellaoui from the ACRPS design department and based on the map in: Silk Road Briefing, "The Belt and Road Initiative", accessed 7 October 2023, at: https://bit.ly/3rCrfj

GCC states do not lie in close proximity the main economic corridors of the initiative, namely:6

1. The economic corridor between China and Central and Western Asia, which is far from the Arabian Peninsula.
2. The economic corridor between northern China and the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, which links the overland and maritime Silk Road.
3. The new Eurasian land bridge linking the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.
4. The economic corridor between China and Mongolia and Russia.
5. The economic corridor between China and the Indo-Sino Peninsula.
6. The economic corridor between Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar.

---

China’s Vision and Its Foreign Policy Stance under the BRI

China is trying to set itself apart from the modern Western legacy, which is stigmatized as imperialism and embraces a realism that exploits conflict and competes for spheres of influence. As a developing country that was a victim of imperial policies and thus shares grievances with other countries in the Global South, modern China claims to bring a new perspective to its policies, advancing the idea of an interest community, which promises to benefit everyone rather than just the superpower and promotes partnerships over conventional geopolitical alliances. With its rapid economic rise, its methodical implementation of its strategies, and the extension of its commercial and geopolitical influence, it has demonstrated a desire for development and peace, shared benefits, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries or in regional conflicts. This approach, which thus far has not been seriously shaken, has yielded great benefits that have enabled China to enter into partnerships and agreements with hundreds of countries.

With the BRI, China is conveying a revival of the spirit of the old Silk Road, based on "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit". This outlook in turn seems to reflect a desire to rebalance the scales, away from "political affairs between states" and towards "political affairs between networks", by focusing on communication rather than control.7

Along with the BRI, in 2014, President Xi proposed the idea of a ‘an interest community’, subsequently elaborated by Chinese officials to mean ‘a community based on common responsibility’ and later ‘the community of common destiny for mankind’. It is essentially China’s vision of world order. According to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the idea represents a major theoretical breakthrough “transcending over 300 years of Western theory of international relations”.8

All of these statements strongly emphasize the words ‘common’ and ‘community’ without using terms associated with the realist tradition, such as ‘alliance’, which entails competition, and possibly conflict, with other alliances. The focus on shared benefits seems designed to attract the interest of other parties and convince them to join the initiative. This explains why China has emphasized ‘partnership’, with its connotations of sharing in common, as an alternative to ‘alliance’.

Some Western scholars attribute China’s opposition to the idea of alliances to its negative experience with the two major military alliances of the Cold War, which prompted it to think of a model of relationships that differed radically from globe-spanning military alliances. The Sino-Soviet pact was a failure, while China’s view of NATO, aside from being ideologically hostile, was that it left non-members in a state of insecurity. Partnerships are an alternative, offering the advantage of flexibility based on mutual benefit, which is one of the five principles of peaceful coexistence. This notion covers a broad range of arenas while setting problematic issues aside.9

---

Interpretations of China’s approach vary. Some consider it pragmatic given the degree of material military power and influence the country has accumulated in a few decades; others, looking at its soft foreign policy, see it as a kind of cooperative idealism, which so far has earned it friendships and partnerships. It may also be taken on its own terms, as an example of the interest community it promotes. China’s behaviour and the BRI can be understood through a geopolitical lens as well, as the impact and effects of its rise began to be felt in geopolitically significant regions across the world. Certain geographical facts facilitate China’s new, proactive policy: it is the second largest country in Asia by area and the biggest in the word in terms of population; geographically, it spans a continent all the way to Eurasia, connected to the land routes leading to Europe; and its long coasts overlook the Indian and Pacific Oceans, giving it access to maritime corridors and international trade routes.

The BRI routes are geopolitically significant, and this is apparently deliberate. As noted above, one land route extends from northern China to Europe towards the Atlantic Ocean, penetrating Eurasia or the so-called heartland. Another maritime route starts from southwest China and connects the Indian Ocean with Africa, passing by the coasts of Eurasia to the south. The overland Silk Road, which brings China to Europe’s doorstep, may replicate the historical movement of peoples who reached and exerted influence over Europe, such as the Huns, Mongols, and Turks – whose geopolitical impacts on Europe are well described by Halfford Mackinder – with the key difference that China’s current policy is primarily peaceful and economic in nature. Meanwhile the maritime Silk Road strings together entrepots, support bases, and ports in the Indian Ocean and Africa, such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar in Pakistan, and Djibouti at the entrance to the Red Sea, reaching the Mediterranean Sea towards Europe, thus enhancing Chinese trade in what Nicholas Spykman calls the "rimland" and providing protection, strength, and support for trade flows. The initiative can be seen as an anti-containment strategy, designed to undermine any attempt by the US and its allies to contain China.

China contends that the goal of the BRI is not geopolitical influence. Zhang Ming, Chinese deputy foreign minister for West Asian and North African affairs, pointed out that "the world should not be divided into spheres of influence", and that the BRI "does not threaten the influence or interests of anyone, including the US". Wang Jisi, a Chinese strategist, said that the initiative is a defensive strategy aimed at rebalancing the US offensive approach.

There is no doubt that the BRI reflects China’s military, political, and cultural evolution as well as its economic growth. Transport lines reflect the flow of goods and people between the centre and the

15 Madani, p. 57.
periphery. Military readiness and security cooperation are necessary to secure infrastructure and freedom of transport, while economic agreements are required to facilitate procedures, and political relations and diplomatic channels are needed to consolidate cooperation and resolve incipient problems. All of this boosts China's presence abroad and enhances its geopolitical influence.

The Position of the Gulf in the BRI

The Gulf did not initially appear on the core maps of the BRI. In this section, I explain China’s efforts to bring the GCC states into the initiative through arenas of cooperation, the factors encouraging the two parties to participate in the initiative, and how each GCC state has been integrated into BRI projects and thus may find a spot on its maps.

1. Attracting GCC states to the BRI

China's push to bring GCC states into the BRI came initially as part of its efforts to expand the initiative to the broader Arab region. At the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on Sino-Arab Cooperation in June 2014, President Xi declared that the countries of the region are "natural cooperation partners in building the Belt and Road Initiative". Then, in January 2016, China issued the China's Arab Policy Paper, in which it clarified its willingness to cooperate for the mutual benefit of both parties. In the same year, President Xi made two visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt focusing on the implementation of the initiative. He presented China's vision for security and stability as a 1+2+3 pattern of cooperation: that is, energy cooperation would form the top tier; infrastructure and the facilitation of trade and investment act as a second tier; and high-tech fields in nuclear power, space satellites, and renewable energy come in as new breakthroughs at the third level. As of 2019, China had signed BRI-related cooperation documents with seventeen Arab states and had established strategic partnerships and comprehensive strategic partnerships with twelve Arab states.

The GCC states are not officially included on BRI maps or the proposed six corridors, and the Gulf region lies on the periphery of the maritime route through the Red Sea. Even so, these states are involved in all six areas of cooperation (see Figure 1), given their importance in energy (the top tier pattern of cooperation in the Chinese vision), the two secondary tiers (port and transport infrastructure, and trade and investment), and the third level (advanced technology of various kinds that GCC states hope to adapt and localize in the region). A review of the strategic agreements with some GCC states


shows how the landscape has gradually shifted in a way that suggests that these countries now lie are at the heart of the BRI.

Figure 1: Six arenas of cooperation in the BRI (1+2+3 pattern)

2. Why were GCC states gradually integrated in the BRI?

Various factors have influenced the shift in attention in both China and GCC states, from conventional bilateral relations towards strategic partnership, in recognition of the importance of integration in the BRI.

A. China

Geographically, the Gulf region falls between the overland and maritime BRI routes and is adjacent to the Red Sea corridor leading to Europe. With the early successes of BRI projects, and as investments increased from an initial nominal value of some $1 trillion to $4 trillion, China has continuously updated BRI routes, integrating states that were not originally included on the maps by creating a global integrated network based on regional subnetworks. If the global network is directly connected by the BRI maritime and overland routes, there must be linkages between it and the subnetworks, which is where the six areas of cooperation come in.
As a result of its economic rise, China has become the world's largest importer of oil and natural gas. While in 1990 it consumed 2.3 million barrels of oil per day and 0.5 trillion cubic feet of gas, it is expected to consume some 16 million barrels of oil per day and 7 trillion cubic feet of gas by 2030.21 The country is thus now highly dependent on energy sources from the Gulf, importing 210 million tons of oil from GCC states in 2022, or about 41 per cent of its total oil imports.22

China's interests in the region have also grown, as has the volume of trade. As of 2022, trade with all GCC states amounted to $304.7 billion (see Table 1), compared to just $1.3 billion in 1990.23 Chinese foreign direct investment in these states in the period 2005–2021 amounted to about $107.22 billion.24 In line with the BRI, China has invested billions of dollars in several ports in the Gulf and the wider region, among them Khalifa and Fujairah in the UAE, Duqm in Oman, and Yanbu in Saudi Arabia.25

As China expands the BRI, it is keen to have these states' investments in BRI projects via the injection of funds into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is the main financing channel for the BRI. (I discuss the membership of some GCC states in this bank and their investments in BRI projects below.)

Gulf sovereign funds – some of the most important in the world – and other investment instruments are seeking to find outlets for investment outside the West, in order to diversify their projects and reduce risks and volatility. China may therefore view these states as potential financiers and creditors for BRI projects, and they may function as a counterweight to states that rely on loans to finance their BRI-related projects.

Two features of GCC states may thus explain their strategic importance and the drive to link them to the BRI: firstly, their massive energy exports to China and secondly, the geopolitical importance of the region. GCC states form the nexus, in terms of both geography and infrastructure, between Europe and many other regions,26 and they are of interest to competing powers.

B. GCC states

GCC states seek inclusion in the BRI because it is a promising global project. The types of the projects covered by the six arenas of the initiative are extremely attractive because they combine the

traditional economy (energy, the consolidation of the centrality and potential of major Gulf ports and airports, their global chains, and trade) with the new economy and high tech (hydrogen, cables, fibre optics, the digital economy, space, and nuclear and renewable energy). In other words, the initiative could forge stronger links to new global economic networks and bring GCC states closer to their primary goal of diversifying their trading partners and economies.

The national visions for development in each GCC country – Saudi Vision 2030, Qatar Vision 2030, We the UAE 2031, Kuwait Vision 2035, and Oman Vision 2040 – form the basis for their advancement. The goal of these visions is to develop all economic sectors and to carry out strategic development projects within a specific timeframe. Linking these visions to BRI projects may therefore offer GCC states opportunities to develop relations with China and participate in its megaprojects and regional and global network, given China’s rapid development in the past few decades.

At the same time, China may also be seen as another potential partner, in addition to the US, traditionally the region’s primary security partner. The nature of China’s policy and its commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries may make it an attractive option for greater military and security cooperation. For example, Washington’s decision to temporarily freeze arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and its suspension of the sale of F-35 aircraft to the UAE, prompted Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to search for alternative suppliers, even temporary, including China. The BRI may give GCC states with space to form multilateral partnerships outside the region, and it could incentivize China to engage in political and security arrangements in the Gulf region, without implying that it is an alternative to the US and its arrangements. China’s security interest, and perhaps its future engagement, may increase as its interests in the region do, which could require it to protect and defend these interests if it is denied access or threatened, as I will discuss in the final section of this paper.

3. How have GCC states been integrated into the BRI?

Over time, it has become common for Chinese and Gulf officials to refer to the BRI when talking about new joint ventures or even existing ventures such as ports, industrial cities, and transport routes. Explaining the content of the initiative, China asserts that it is concerned with major areas of cooperation that may link countries to the BRI. The maritime route through the Red Sea is increasingly seen as including Saudi Arabia as China has become interested in its western ports, such as Yanbu. Moreover, China’s investment in some major ports, such as Duqm in Oman and Khalifa in the UAE, has been interpreted as linking the Gulf to the Pakistani port of Gwadar, which is a central station on the BRI map.

---

29 Liangxiang and Janardhan, p. 1.
Accordingly, the GCC states are gradually being integrated into the BRI, which has been quasi formalized by official Gulf statements and agreements signed with China in recent years. The following section shows the extent of GCC states interest in the initiative.

**A. Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of China's most significant partners in the Gulf. The volume of bilateral trade has multiplied in recent years thanks to major economic projects, reaching $106 billion in 2022,\(^{30}\) up from $80 billion in 2021, or 30 per cent in a single year.\(^{31}\) Much Sino-Saudi trade revolves around oil, which accounts for about 20 per cent of China's total crude oil imports.\(^{32}\) KSA's investments in China amounted to $23 billion.\(^{33}\)

This rapid uptick in cooperation was underpinned in part by China's elevation of its relations with Saudi Arabia in 2016 to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership,\(^{34}\) which was officially signed during President Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia in December 2022, where it was also announced that thirty-four investment agreements valued at $30 billion had been concluded as well.\(^{35}\) Referring to the integration of these agreements into the BRI, President Xi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman welcomed the involvement of Saudi companies in various partnerships within the framework of the initiative.\(^{36}\) Generally speaking, the two states have established bilateral and regional coordination mechanisms aimed at aligning the BRI and Saudi Vision 2030.\(^{37}\) A committee was convened during Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to China in 2016, titled "Saudi Vision 2030 and the Belt and Road Initiative: Together for a Bright Future", to discuss the shared visions of the two projects.\(^{38}\) Khalid al-Falih, the minister of energy, industry and mineral resources, said that reviving ancient trade routes complements Saudi Vision 2030.\(^{39}\) China is seen as an important partner in projects associated with Saudi Vision 2030, including the $500 billion mega-city of NEOM.\(^{40}\)

The maritime Silk Road, which passes through the Red Sea, is of crucial economic and investment importance to Saudi Arabia and its western ports. In fact, a cooperation agreement in the field of

---


32 US Institute of Peace, pp. 20–21.


35 "China, Saudi Arabia Cement Ties".


40 "China, Saudi Arabia Strengthen Partnership".
maritime transport was signed in 2019,\textsuperscript{41} which aimed, according to Saudi Minister of Transport Nabil al-Amoudi, to strengthen the maritime transport industry, and facilitate and develop the flow of commercial ships.\textsuperscript{42} China has also contributed to the infrastructure of the $10-billion Yanbu Port refinery,\textsuperscript{43} and Saudi Arabia hopes to participate in regional projects related to the maritime route. It offered Pakistan some $16 billion in loans and investments associated with the Sino-Pakistan economic corridor, including an investment of $10 billion in an oil refinery and a petrochemical complex in the port of Gwadar.\textsuperscript{44}

In the field of high tech – one of the six areas of cooperation in the BRI and a component of Saudi Vision 2030 – hydrogen has received close attention, with the aim of creating a clean energy system through specific technologies. In August 2020, Saudi Arabia announced the launch of a venture to produce green hydrogen in NEOM powered by 4 GW of renewable energy. China is the world’s largest producer of hydrogen, turning out more than 21 million tons of the 70 million tons produced globally in 2019, making it possible for the two countries to work together to produce hydrogen on a large scale.\textsuperscript{45} Satellites are also a focus of cooperation with China. In December 2018, Saudi Arabia launched two locally developed satellites, SaudiSat 5A and 5B, into space from China as part of the so-called Digital Silk Road. The BeiDou satellite navigation system is used throughout the region, with applications for telecommunications and maritime security.\textsuperscript{46}

**B. Qatar**

China and Qatar have expansive relations based on the BRI and trade in energy resources, especially natural gas, which Qatar supplies to China. The strategic partnership was announced in 2014, after which the two states established joint infrastructure projects and conducted several military exchanges.\textsuperscript{47} According to the Chinese ambassador to Qatar, Li Chen, Qatar was one of the first states in the region to support the BRI. A memorandum of understanding was first signed during the visit of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, to China in 2014. Qatar is also a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Sheikh Tamim and President Xi have agreed to link the BRI and Qatar Vision 2030.\textsuperscript{48}

In March 2019, the two countries signed an agreement under which Qatar will supply China with 4 million tons of liquefied gas annually for a period of twenty-seven years, the longest-term gas deal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Webster and Pelayo.,
\item \textsuperscript{44} Zahran, p. 196.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Donmi, pp. 21–22.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Zahran, p. 202.
\item \textsuperscript{47} US Institute of Peace, pp. 20–21.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Al-Raya, “Nata’ij Muthmira li-l-Ta’awun al-Qatari al-Sini fi Mubadarat al-Hizam wa-l-Tariq”, 26 April 2019, accessed 3 September 2023, at: https://tinyurl.com/3jxwza5.
\end{itemize}
in the world. In the immediate wake of the agreement, trade between the two states doubled, increasing by 45 per cent in just one year; in 2022, the value of trade came to roughly $26.2 billion, compared to $18 billion in 2021.

Since entering the LNG market in the early 1990s, Qatar has relied on Western firms, notably ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, and Total. The agreement thus allowed Qatar to diversify its partners rather than relying exclusively on Western technology, and its tech ties with China seem to be deepening. In 2019, China's ambassador to Qatar, Zhou Jian, articulated Beijing's goal of integrating the BRI with Qatar Vision 2030, noting that Qatar was one of the first countries to join the initiative. For China, the recent gas deal is of strategic importance given its determination to move away from unclean energy by 2060. Nevertheless, LNG remains one of Beijing's key priorities.

C. UAE

The United Arab Emirates is the second country in the Gulf which China has designated a comprehensive strategic partner, starting in 2018. It also comes in second in trade volume, which in 2022 amounted to about $99.27 billion. The UAE has committed to the BRI, according to the UAE Minister of State Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber, because the initiative offers opportunities to invest in infrastructure abroad. In April 2015, the UAE joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. DP World, which operates several ports around the globe (six in South Asia, four in China, and one each in Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, and Indonesia), aspires to join in BRI transport projects and is currently help develop the Eastern Gateway Terminal connecting China and Europe. In 2019, China signed a $10 billion deal to develop a new industrial city in Abu Dhabi's Khalifa Industrial Zone. In 2023, the two states agreed that the programme for the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement would be aligned with the economic objectives of the We the UAE 2031 vision as well.

D. Kuwait

The BRI has the potential to achieve the goals of Kuwait Vision 2035. As part of the vision, the country announced a megaproject in March 2023, the Northern Economic Zone, which, according

50 "Ghurfat Qatar: al-Tabadul al-Tijari bayn Dawlat Qatar wa-l-Sin Irtafa’ bi-Nisbat 45 bi-l-Mi’a khilal 2022", Al-Raya, 12 June 2023, accessed 3 September 2023, at: https://tinyurl.com/muj8yb6y.
52 Chen, p. 106.
54 Rahmat, p. 10.
55 Liangxiang and Janardhan, p. 4.
56 Webster and Pelayo.
to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, would accommodate investments estimated at $600 billion and involve the establishment of Silk City and other ventures. As a first step, Kuwait and China plan to establish a joint $10 billion investment fund, called the China-Kuwait Silk Road Fund. A plan is also under consideration to merge five Kuwaiti islands with Silk City, in cooperation with China, to turn the area into an international zone, a project that Sheikh Nasser described as a 'new Hong Kong'.

In 2014, Kuwait became the first country in the Middle East to sign BRI-related cooperation agreements with China, and bilateral relations were upgraded to the strategic partnership level in 2018. In September 2023, the two states signed seven agreements to strengthen the partnership, covering such areas as the five-year plan for bilateral cooperation 2024-2028, the low-carbon green system for waste recycling, environmental infrastructure for water treatment plants, renewable energy, the Mubarak al-Kabeer port project, free and economic zones, and housing. These agreements may significantly boost trade between the two countries beyond 2022 levels, which came to $31.5 billion.

E. Oman

Oman’s coastline is gradually becoming an important stop on the maritime Silk Road. Since 2016 China has pumped in billions of dollars to turn Duqm, a fishing village located 550 kilometres south of Muscat, into an industrial hub and major port. Overall, Beijing has invested some $10.7 billion in the construction of Duqm Port and Industrial Zone. The project is part of Oman’s strategy for economic diversification, but it could also be read as an example of China’s successes in promoting the BRI. Overlooking the Arabian Sea, Duqm Port is a potential business hub for Chinese businesses located near export markets that China seeks access to in the Gulf region, Indian subcontinent, and East Africa. Chinese companies have already invested more than $3 billion in Duqm and are projected to pour in $11 billion, according to Oman WanFang consortium. Oman is also interested in investing in the Special Economic Zone in Gwadar, to strengthen the link between this major station on the China maritime route and its own ports.

China and Oman are working to strengthen the alignment between the BRI and the sultanate’s Vision 2040, and cooperation is visible in the areas of infrastructure, energy, communications technology, electric power, and fisheries. Bilateral trade in 2022 came to $40.5 billion. These developments have enhanced Oman’s position within the initiative, and on 28 April 2022, both parties advocated

62 Webster and Pelayo.
63 Liangxiang and Janardhan, p. 4.
upgrading bilateral relations to the level of strategic partnership, which may entail even stronger military cooperation.65

Table 1: Sino-Gulf partnerships and alignments with the BRI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Trade (billion $ in 2022)</th>
<th>BRI alignment with national vision</th>
<th>Prominent BRI-related projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Comprehensive strategic partnership</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>Saudi Vision 2030</td>
<td>Oil, Yanbu refinery and port, high tech, NEOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Qatar</td>
<td>Strategic partnership</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>Qatar Vision 2030</td>
<td>LNG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 UAE</td>
<td>Comprehensive strategic partnership</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>99.27</td>
<td>We the UAE 2031</td>
<td>DP World, Khalifa industrial city and port</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Kuwait</td>
<td>Strategic partnership</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>Kuwait Vision 2035</td>
<td>Silk City, Northern Economic Zone, Mubarak al-Kabeer Port</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Oman</td>
<td>Possible strategic partnership</td>
<td>2024 likely</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>Oman Vision 2040</td>
<td>Duqm port and industrial zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>304.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by author

Western Responses to the BRI: Relevance for the Gulf

As China has successfully built an attractive global strategy for the participation of states around the world in its projects and infrastructure in the form of the BRI, and as it has grown into the world's second largest economy, it has come to be seen as a serious rival by the US and others.66 Because


China has so far pursued peaceful, largely economic, means to pursue its global interests, the West has attempted to impede its success and contain its expansion by, thus far, similarly non-violent means (propaganda, alliances, and alternative projects). Because GCC states are an ally of the US and other Western countries, some of these Western attempts have included them.

### Table 2: Western responses to the BRI: Impact on GCC states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western response</th>
<th>Objective/means</th>
<th>Does it impact GCC states?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Debt traps</td>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Withdrawal: call on states to withdraw from the BRI</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Alliances: containing China in the Indian and Pacific Oceans</td>
<td>AUKUS and QUAD</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Escalation: military conflict or tension, sanctions that impede commercial transactions</td>
<td>Taiwan, South China Sea, the world</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Global Gateway: alternative EU strategy</td>
<td>Eurasia</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Economic corridor: geopolitical alternative to the BRI</td>
<td>India-Gulf-Europe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by author

1. Debt traps

The West has criticized China for its policy of lending to poor and developing countries, typically those involved in BRI projects, asserting that it leaves them struggling to repay their debts and thus makes them vulnerable to pressure. A study published by Aid Data, housed at the College of William and Mary in the US, found that China’s loans to low- and middle-income countries increased threefold in one decade, reaching $170 billion at the end of 2020. Some forty countries have debt exposure to Chinese lenders equivalent to more than 10 per cent of their annual GDP; debts owed to China by Djibouti, Laos, Zambia, and Kyrgyzstan come to 20 per cent of their annual GDP. China is allegedly using these "debt traps" to gain influence in other states, meaning that these countries end up relinquishing control over key assets if they are unable to repay their debts. China denies these accusations, arguing that no country has fallen into a debt trap as a result of borrowing from it.67

---

It must be emphasized that the question of debt traps is raised largely by Western sources and so should be verified by independent sources. A country that invests billions of dollars in global projects will presumably study the feasibility of these projects using its own tools.

Regardless of the veracity of these claims, the concept of a debt trap is not salient for GCC states, which maintain financial surpluses and are looking to participate in China’s projects as external investors or to serve their own national development plans. China sees these countries as a source of financial liquidity, and some of them are founding members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. As creditors or investors, these states may act as a counterweight to debtor states receiving Chinese loans for BRI projects.

2. Encouragement to withdraw from the BRI

Although European states such as Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy are participating in BRI projects in one way or another, they continue to call on some states to withdraw from the initiative. Italy is a good example because of its position in Europe and because it is the only member of the G7 that is an official member of the BRI.

Chinese investment in European ports becomes a source of concern when it crosses a certain threshold. According to one researcher, this point is reached when "the scale of one project in a single country leads to excessive political influence". By this yardstick, China’s investment in Italy may qualify given the expansive nature of the projects covered by the partnership since 2019. Italy is therefore feeling pressure from its Western allies to reshape its relationship with Beijing, especially since it will assume the rotating presidency of the G7 in 2024. In September 2023, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni indicated that she was still considering whether to withdraw from the initiative or extend Italy’s membership for another five years starting in March 2024.

In fact, the Italian government is sceptical about the economic benefits of its membership in the BRI. Italy has been eager to attract investment and expand the reach of Italian exports to the massive Chinese market, but its arrangements with China have not radically changed the trajectory of their economic relations. Since Italy joined the initiative, its exports to China have increased from €14.5 billion to €18.5 billion, while Chinese exports to Italy have grown significantly, from €33.5 to €50.9 billion. Chinese FDI in Italy fell from $650 million in 2019 to just $33 million in 2021. Additionally, China’s stance on the Ukraine war has prompted many European countries, including Italy, to reconsider their relationship with China. Meloni is a staunch supporter of Ukraine.

---


69 Ibid.

70 David Sacks, "Why Is Italy Withdrawing from China’s Belt and Road Initiative?" Council on Foreign Affairs, 3 August 2023, accessed 6 October 2023, at: https://tinyurl.com/55577d6v.
For the GCC states, any call from the West to withdraw from China's projects and the BRI is likely to go unheeded. As noted above, GCC states are financing their own projects and contributing to China's investments; thus, unlike Italy, they are not likely to be exposed to economic risks that might make them vulnerable to coercion. It is, in fact, GCC states that are seeking involvement in the BRI, motivated by their desire to diversify partners, take advantage of the technology China offers, and link up with its growing global network to avoid exclusion.

3. Alternative alliances to China

The US is working to build geopolitical alliances and blocs to contain the perceived risks from China. These fall under the rubric of its Indo-Pacific strategy formulated in 2017 and 2022.\(^71\) It includes key alliances, such as the AUKUS partnership between the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia, and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), sometimes likened to a 'mini-NATO',\(^72\) which includes Japan, Australia, India, and the US. Geographically, the Indo-Pacific concept refers to the large warm-water sea connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans; in geopolitical terms, it asserts the security linkage between the two oceans and treats them as a single theatre of operations.\(^73\)

These alliances seem to be a response to the BRI, which the West sees not as a peaceful economic project, but as a prelude to future geopolitical hegemony in the regions it covers. Its perceived aim is to build transcontinental roads and interests that will justify protection by China and thus the country's international presence.

These specific alliances, however, are not geographically relevant to the GCC states, being dedicated to the maritime zone between India, Australia, and America — that is, the broad area around China. Nor are they politically or economically applicable to GCC states, which have broad interests with China and which seek to strengthen their partnership with it. They will thus likely avoid involvement in any anti-China international polarization, especially since China has shown no hostility to the Gulf, whether in historical, rhetorical, or practical terms, and GCC states have expressed no fear of a potential threat from China. The situation today is different from the bipolar world of the Cold War; China is not considered comparable to the former Soviet Union, which posed an ideological and political threat to Gulf societies and their political systems.

4. Possible Western escalation against China

The West is expected to escalate its policy of containment and seeking out counterweights to Chinese power in East Asia the more China advances in the world through the BRI. Since 2018, the US has

---


taken several escalatory measures, drawing criticism from China and putting a strain on relations.\textsuperscript{74} Taiwan is most commonly cited as a pretext to step up pressure on China or military arrangements of the US coalition countries in the South China Sea. For China, the case of Taiwan is different from any other issue. It is a question of national dignity because China considers the island part of its territory and it views the movements of foreign countries as interference in its internal affairs.\textsuperscript{75} Nevertheless, it is aware that it is being used as a pretext to contain or possibly impose sanctions on it, so China remains cautious in its responses on the ground. It is mindful of avoiding the consequences of Russia's actions in Ukraine and understands that this escalation should not distract it from its own drive for international status.

The GCC states will likely be exposed to the fallout of any serious escalation between the West and China. Military tensions or wars may affect China's productivity and the flow of Chinese goods in the world, thus curtailing its energy needs and dampening projects that have been integrated into the BRI. Western sanctions could also hamper commercial transactions if the West threatens to impose sanctions on companies doing business with China.

5. The Global Gateway Strategy

The European Union has drafted a plan to achieve parity with China, especially in Eurasia. In 2018, it launched the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy, which includes land, rail, sea, air, and digital networks, with the aim of providing access to Eurasian economies and connecting Europe and Asia. As part of the plan, in December 2021, the EU announced the Global Gateway Strategy. Involving investments of €300 billion in ‘global infrastructure’ and the development of a ‘roadmap for investment in the developing world’, the aim is to respond to the challenges posed by China’s march towards Western Eurasia, with a focus on European values.\textsuperscript{76} However, there are issues that may weaken the competitiveness of the plan and the European position: about half of EU members have signed memorandums of understanding on the BRI,\textsuperscript{77} and trade between China and the EU increased to €856 billion in 2022.\textsuperscript{78}

This strategy may have repercussions for GCC states. It may reduce future investments in the BRI as the EU offers the Gulf investment opportunities in attractive projects, such as the Global Gateway. Even so, these states may be inclined to first closely review the feasibility of investments. As noted above, GCC states are not interested in antagonizing China, do not wish to throw away their growing interests with it, and do not want to be excluded from China’s growing global network, especially if the main goal of the Global Gateway is to act as a geopolitical counterweight to China.

\textsuperscript{75} Paul Dibb, "How the Geopolitical Partnership between China and Russia Threatens the West", Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2019, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{76} Ehteshami, pp. 32–33.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Arendse Huld, "EU-China Relations: Trade, Investment, and Recent Developments", China Briefing, 4 April 2023, accessed 6 October 2023, at: https://tinyurl.com/mw4ex2tj.
6. The economic corridor

The most significant Western response to the BRI, and in which the Gulf constitute a cornerstone, is the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

IMEC was announced at the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September 2023 and was signed by the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the EU, France, Germany, and Italy. It consists of two separate corridors: the eastern corridor (India- Gulf) and the northern corridor (Gulf-Europe), the latter passing through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and the Mediterranean Sea. The project is expected to open up numerous opportunities for participating countries by creating a trade route that strengthens supply chains and entails railway projects, port linkages, electricity and hydrogen grids, and data transmission cables. US President Joe Biden hailed the corridor as a "historic agreement", describing it as "game-changing".79 "With a rail link, that will make trade between India and Europe 40% faster," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.80 India, which aspires to become a major industrial power, hopes IMEC will allow it to capture a share of global production of goods, while Israel asserted that the project will "change the face of the Middle East" and that it would "contribute with all its capabilities, all its experience, and its full commitment to make this cooperation project the largest in our history".81

Map 2: India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

Source: Prepared by the author, with the assistance of Souhail Jellaoui

---


Looking at the trajectory of the economic corridor, the participating countries, and the nature of the projects involved, it is clear that it is quite similar to the BRI and was conceived to compete with it. First, it extends from the Asian continent to Europe, by both land and sea routes. Second, India, China’s primary geopolitical rival in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, is the departure point. Third, the corridor seeks to build a new global network in the countries it transits that will be an alternative to China’s emerging network. Fourth, the corridor specifically targets the GCC states in order to deter them from greater involvement in China’s projects or prevent China from further interfering in regional affairs as its interests in the region grow, as was seen in the reconciliation agreement it sponsored between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023. Fifth, the project revives plans – these were first coupled with the peace agreements of the 1990s – to integrate Middle Eastern states into economic ventures with the goal of ending the conflict with Israel and normalizing Arab Israeli ties.

GCC states will be highly impacted by IMEC given its geographical arc, the nature of its competing projects, the participation of some GCC states in it (Saudi Arabia and the UAE have already signed agreements), and its sponsorship by major states as a geopolitical competitor to China’s strategy and presence in Europe. Hence, it is a direct rival to BRI in the region.

However, it must be borne in mind that there are fundamental differences between the BRI and IMEC, which have serious, practical implications for the scope of GCC states’ engagement with each initiative over the long term.

A. BRI

1. It is based on a clear strategic vision of Chinese foreign policy.
2. China alone oversees and implements the initiative.
3. China has allocated funds for the project and successfully obtained investments to finance it.
4. The initiative is proceeding, successfully so far, in accordance with a decade-long timetable (2013–2023), and most agreements China has signed with participating countries, including in Europe, are operative.
5. There is no fundamental problem in political relations with the countries involved in the initiative.

B. IMEC

1. The project does not reflect the vision of one specific state.
2. It involves multiple partners, each with their own, perhaps divergent, interests.
3. There is no major state funding the project, which will instead rely on various investments from numerous states and institutions.
4. A practical timetable for the project remains unclear.
5. Israel is central to the project, which remains the biggest obstacle. Participation in the project is not popular, and there are risks that implementation may be suspended at any time due to
the ongoing anti-normalization efforts in the region and the possibility of sporadic war, combat operations, or tension with Israel, such as the current war on Gaza and Lebanon.

6. There are doubts about economic feasibility because the project was conceived primarily in geopolitical terms rather than as a purely economic endeavour. Moreover, the starting point is India, which is much weaker than China geopolitically, financially, and productively.

7. The competitiveness of the IMEC as an alternative is undermined by the fact that some of the participating states are also partners in the BRI.

In short, the IMEC is a competitor of the BRI, but with the increasing involvement of GCC states in BRI projects, the sharp increase in trade, and growing interdependence with China, its competitiveness is relative, and it is not an alternative to closer partnership with China, for these states will likely not agree to harm their own interests and undermine BRI projects.

Concluding Remarks

China appears to be pursuing a peaceful approach to international relations that serves the BRI abroad and is based on the idea of an interest community or mutual profit. It continues to promote the five principles of peaceful coexistence, anti-imperialism and anti-hegemony, and especially the principle of non-intervention, and it seeks to enhance its image as a reliable, non-interventionist partner in the Middle East, setting itself apart from the zero-sum politics of Western powers in the region.\(^{82}\)

But linking the interests of the world's countries to China through BRI projects creates a sense of threat in competing powers such as the US and India, which see China under the Communist Party as an expansionist, hyper-nationalist, totalitarian country and a military and economic powerhouse. Some Western researchers believe that the expansion of China's navy demonstrates its quest for hegemony and liken its increased naval power to that of the most powerful country in the world. By 2030, the Chinese navy is expected to be twice as big as the US Navy.\(^{83}\)

If this perceived threat fuels responses designed to disrupt and imperil BRI projects, China may abandon its peaceful, defensive posture and go on the offensive to protect its interests around in the world.

In the Gulf in particular, China's vital interests in energy and investments and its newfound role in dispute mediation may incur a variety of reactions from the US and its allies. How will China act when its interests are directly harmed? Will its foreign policy approach shift? And will it impact the Gulf?

China's military strategy aims to "build a strong military for the new situation, implement the military strategic guideline of active defence [...] and resolutely safeguard China's sovereignty, security, and development interests".\(^{84}\)

82 Chen, pp. 116–117.


In the Gulf, some believe that China will not become more politically assertive in Gulf affairs despite stronger economic ties, and this for at least two reasons. Firstly, China is diligently avoiding excessive political activity in the region to avoid the appearance of undermining GCC states' relations with the US or massive US interests in the region. Secondly, China has long emphasized the principle of non-intervention and anti-imperialism, and it is keen on abiding by these principles lest it besmirch its international reputation, especially among developing countries, as this would undoubtedly harm its role and interests in the GCC states. The choice for China, then, is to encourage peaceful resolutions or to intervene non-militarily, through regional or international organizations.

On the other hand, China's closer economic ties with GCC states, especially in the energy sector, mean that it can no longer distance itself from complex regional politics. It is impossible to "insulate itself from the adverse effects of events that transpire in the region". Some researchers argue that although China is increasingly engaged in regional issues through mediation – which burnishes its image and boosts its soft power in the region – it may begin to take a more proactive stance and engage directly in regional issues if it wants to effectively protect its long-term interests in the region.

Accordingly, increased intervention and involvement in regional issues, at least to resolve disputes that may impede China's interests, must weigh two factors. The first is its desire to preserve its international reputation, especially with the Third World. That is, in maintaining its approach based on non-interference in domestic or intra-regional affairs, it distinguishes itself from the West, which has eased its path into several regions and countries. It is therefore keen to preserve this image. Secondly, it needs to protect its growing interests against any attempt to obstruct them or establish projects that undermine its initiative. Ultimately, China wants a return on its long-term investment and it does not seem likely to yield if other powers try to undermine its efforts, investments, and, most importantly, its access to energy sources in the Gulf, which are vital to its continued high productivity.

Finally, each major power clearly has its own interests in the Gulf and makes its own calculations, and China is no exception. If it takes a cooperative, peaceful approach, it is largely driven by its estimation of the benefits of doing so; conversely, if it takes an interventionist or politically active security approach, it has certainly calculated the costs of not doing so. As such, it is up to GCC states to define their own priorities. In other words, they should consider the strategic, economic, political, and security benefits of engaging in projects and counter-projects led by the competing major powers because the repercussions will be felt primarily in the region.

---

85 Chen, p. 108.
86 Ibid., pp. 110–111.
87 Ibid, pp. 109–110.
Sources


Chen, Chien-Kai. ‘China in the Middle East: An Analysis from a Theoretical Perspective of "Path Dependence"’. East Asia, no. 38 (2021).


Lampton, David M. 'China and America'. Foreign Policy Association, January 2018.


Webster, Joseph and Joze Pelayo. 'China is Getting Comfortable with the Gulf Cooperation Council. The West Must Pragmatically Adapt to its Growing Regional Influence'. Atlantic Council, 5 April 2023. https://tinyurl.com/mr2yu3yt.