

Sager, Olimat and Kemp¹ have underlined the complexity of the relationship between China and oil-rich MENA countries, the direct benefits of such relationship for the states in partnership, as well as its global impact for other MENA oil-importers. Well known to protect Middle Eastern oil-sources to ensure that American energy needs are satisfied, one cannot analyze China's involvement in the region without touching on the United States' role. In *The Vital Triangle: China, the U.S., and the Middle East*, John B. Alterman and John W. Garver look at the trilateral relationship between China, the U.S., and the Middle East, arguing that all three regions' economies are intrinsically connected like the three sides of a triangle. The authors contextualize this complex relationship where each region's decision impacts the other two. China's trade relationships with some of the traditional U.S. allies (Saudi Arabia) and simultaneously with contested candidates (Sudan and Iran) has led to a deep politicization of China's involvement with these countries. Combined with the nature of oil as the most traded commodity in the world, China's oil interests has sparked discussions to say the least.

This paper explores China's energy policy in the MENA region by studying three cases: Sudan in North Africa and Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East. We argue that China's oil policy is very much driven by the Beijing Consensus which advocates pure economic growth, and that Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran

all have important mutual oil interests with China. Where necessary, we incorporate the concerns of the United States on diverse faces of the Sino-Sudanese, Sino-Saudi Arabian, and Sino-Iranian partnerships. We find that despite the apprehension exhibited by the United States regarding the increasing relations between China and the Middle East, China wishes to avoid direct confrontation with Washington and vehemently avoids the use of threat for economic gains. China's Middle East policy aims to mitigate or circumvent potential tensions with the US. Wu argues that China's involvement in the Middle East is only motivated by energy interests and is absolutely not going to weaken its relationship with the United States². Likewise, Chubin argues that China has constantly been cautious with the United States and has avoided provoking Washington³. By expanding its reach in MENA, China is also diversifying its trade relations—a concept that is encouraged by the Beijing Consensus—and so are simultaneously Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Hence, the web of oil partnerships is shifting from an omnipotent bilateral relationship between the United States and oil-rich developing states to a more diverse arena where multidimensional relationships are possible between developing states.

We first examine China's growing need for oil, its strategy to ensure a steady supply, and its reasons for expanding its influence to the MENA. Since Chinese oil politics take place within the framework of the Beijing Consensus, we explain the dynamics underlying it and

¹ Sager, Abdulaziz, 'GCC-China Relations: Looking beyond Oil-risks and Rewards', in Abdulaziz, Sager, Geoffrey, Kemp (eds), *China's Growing Role in the Middle East*. Washington, DC: Nixon Center, 2010, Pp. 1–22. Yuan, (2010); Olimat, Muhamad S. "The Political Economy of the Sino-Middle Eastern Relations." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 15 (2010): 307–35, and G. KEMP, *The East moves West: India, China, and Asia's growing presence in the Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, 2010, Pp. 232.

² Wu, L. *The Middle East Oil and the Sino-U.S. Relations*. Cambridge: *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 3(4), 2007.Pp-34.

³ Chubin, S. *Iran and China: Political Partners or Strategic Allies, in China's Growing Role in the Middle East: Implications for the Region and Beyond*. Washington: The Nixon Centre (2012). Available from <http://cftni.org/full-monograph-chinas-growing-role-in-me.pdf> [Accessed 21 November 2015].