

compare it with the Washington Consensus that has dominated the second half of the twentieth century. Second, we look at China's involvement in North Africa through the case study of Sudan and analyze how this approach differs from its strategy in the Middle East. Next, we show that China has common interests with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Thanks to the Beijing Consensus—which focuses exclusively on economics and consistently ignores political and cultural circumstances—Chinese energy security policy in the MENA has been particularly appealing to developing states. This is in contrast with the Washington Consensus, which frequently advocates political change in exchange for economic relations. Third, we provide an overview of the current partnerships and contracts between China and Saudi Arabia and Iran. Finally, we look at the challenges China faces in securing oil supplies and potential tensions it may encounter with the United States.

II. THE APPEAL OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Historically, the Middle East has always been the subject of strategic attention for various global powers all the way up to the modern times. After the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and France took control of the region and the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement, which fragmented the region as a result of contrasting colonial influences, was signed. The Middle East was already known for its abundant natural resources, which had been exploited in the past. However, it was during this period of colonialism towards the early 20th century that technological advances led to modern armies assuming the hunt for oil as the newly coveted fuel of automobiles, aircraft, and other uses. Its rich natural reserves of easily extractable crude oil caused large-scale drilling operations to emerge, with the British taking the lead in Iran

in 1901 and the Anglo Persian Oil Company discovering oil in 1908⁴.

This structure of influence was sustained until the aftermath of the Second World War, where the Middle East experienced a shift in terms of the dominant external power. At that point, the United States had a growing economy and global political clout. The nation expanded its presence in the Middle East during the post-war period with an agenda, on which oil supply was a priority. Indeed, the need to fuel growth and compensate for what the United States could not provide from within its own domicile became a centerpiece of the country's foreign policy⁵. The United States saw a potential for secure oil supply in the oil-rich states of the Persian Gulf and the latter saw an opportunity to transform their vast oil reserves into direct wealth for their economies. American foreign policy continued to place an emphasis on strategically increasing its ties with the Middle East, as the country's dependency on oil grew for both domestic and military purposes.

III. CHINA'S FAST-GROWING NEED FOR OIL

With 1.3 billion people and one of the world's largest economies—second only to the United States.— China has a fast-growing need for oil. This need is not only driven by China's economic growth rate, but also by domestic factors like the increasing number of vehicles in the country, which jumped from one million a decade ago to more than 22 million⁶. China

⁴ Keddie, N. *Iran: Religion, Politics, and Society: Collected Essays*. London: Routledge. (1983).

⁵ Little, D. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. University of North Carolina Press. (2008); Cooper, Andrew S. *The Oil Kings: How the U.S., Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East*. Simon & Shuster. (2011)

⁶ Olimat, M. *China and the Middle East: From Silk Road to Arab Spring*. New York: Routledge. (2013)