

# **The Dragon And The Eagles: China's Presence In West Asia- From Silk Road To Belt & Road**

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## **ABSTRACT**

China's rise as a global power has significantly reshaped its relationship with West Asia. This paper unveils the intricate dance of this constantly emerging dynamic relationship. It delves into the key pillars of this engagement, including economic ties, energy dependence, Belt and Road initiatives, and security cooperation. From energy pipelines intersecting with Belt and Road ambitions, security alliances finding common ground in combatting terrorism, and cultural bridges being built amidst geopolitical maneuvering, it highlights all the significant aspects of the relationship. This emerging partnership has the potential of having very long-term diversified impacts on the geopolitical landscape of the globe. It has the potential to change the UN-led world order and to even make these changes far-reaching in nature. Not only does it impact the international order concerning US's hegemony but also has very obvious, yet quite interesting implications for the regional dynamics and stability of the region in question, i.e., West Asia. All the efforts undertaken by China are going to elevate its position in the various fields of economy, defense, security, and soft power, but this journey is also not free from challenges and obstacles.

**Keywords:** China, West Asia, Silk Road, Belt & Road Initiative, Trade and Investment, Soft Power, Terrorism, Arms Sales, Global Power

## **INTRODUCTION**

China's growing presence in the West Asian countries is significant on many levels, ranging from the challenges it poses for India to the change it points toward in the global geopolitical landscape. It has taken up wide aspects of strategic importance, including trade and commerce, investment and infrastructure projects, political ties, energy associations, and forming cultural bonds.

West Asia remains a region of utmost significance in the global landscape due to its energy resources. This has now been furthered by more economic clout and technological application. All these reasons combined make it one of the ideal clients for China.

China's aim has been apparent in capitalizing on West Asia's energy resources and geostrategic location. Beyond being a regional power in Asia, China's intentions of becoming a global power, constantly challenging the US is not a hidden agenda. It is out there in the open how China is banking upon every possibility of growing as a world power in a world that is increasingly moving away from seeing the US as its master. What's interesting is how these West Asian countries also see

China as not only an eligible but also a preferable alternative for the US in the region given the relaxation China provides in terms of no conditions to adhere to human rights, ideals of democracy, etc while signing agreements.

In this light, the current engagements of China in West Asian countries range from its various Belt and Road Initiatives to geopolitical intentions and from its cultural exchange programs to the proliferation of arms sales with the region.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### **A. Early Connections and Silk Road (Pre-1949):**

Relations between China and West Asia have existed since the 2nd century BCE via the Silk Road. Mesopotamia and Persia were markets for Chinese goods, and China borrowed technologies like gunpowder and astronomy instruments from West Asia. It was during the time of the Tang Dynasty which ruled from 618 to 907 CE, that the famous Buddhist monk Xuanzang traveled through West Asia, documenting his experiences and enabling cultural exchange. However, the rise of Mongol empires and maritime rivals like Portugal temporarily overshadowed China's direct engagement with West Asia.

### **B. Cold War Dynamics (1949-1978):**

China's connection with West Asia became intertwined with Cold War politics after the Communist Revolution of 1949. China in this period stood against the Western bloc, supporting the USSR and anti-imperialist movements in the region. China was not as prominent in West Asia during this time because of its emphasis on domestic restructuring and the Cold War setting. This was in contrast to the region's considerable Soviet influence in many areas.

### **C. Economic Reforms and Opening Up (1978 onwards):**

It was in 1978 that Deng Xiaoping brought in economic reforms in China which led to modernization and opening up of the economy. This was followed by relations with West Asia as China's newly opening up economy needed energy resources and West Asia was a great source of the same. China established stronger diplomatic and political connections with the region as it became more dependent on it for oil supply. By this time, it has established significant gas and oil contracts with countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, and Iraq.

Following this, China's economy grew which led to a need for markets for its infrastructure projects and consumer goods. West Asia came to be seen as a reliable and important destination for its exports and business prospects. As a result, China invested heavily in projects ranging from ports, and power plants to telecommunications across the region. In the status quo, these partnerships extend beyond purely economic interests, venturing into areas like technology, military cooperation, and security.

Even from West Asia's perspective, it was during this phase that the 2008 Financial Crisis came into the picture, and like the entire globe, the Middle East was adversely affected as well. To pull itself out of the economic disaster, most of the West Asian countries turned to China. This further enabled the path of cementing a more reliable and increasingly engaging relationship between West Asia and China.

## **ECONOMIC DIMENSION**

The Economic dimension is one of the major areas of China's larger policy in the region, if not the most important. China has been employing extremely strategic deals to further its cooperation within the region. This section delves into the three major areas under the economic dimension, namely: trade, infrastructure, and investment; the Belt and Road Initiative, and energy.

### **A. Trade, Investment, and Infrastructure Projects:**

**Trade Boom:** China and West Asia share an increasingly consistent bilateral trade relationship that pans out across various sectors ranging from energy to other consumer goods. China shares considerably great relations with many Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, etc. Most of the imports to China from West Asia include petrochemicals and hydrocarbons, whereas its exports mainly comprise textiles, machinery, electronics, etc.

**Investment:** Investment can be said to be one of China's forte, not just in West Asia but around the globe, in all the countries with which it happens to share an economic relationship. Some of the major initiatives that have seen a surge in recent times include projects including, though not limited to ports, roads, telecommunication networks, and power plants. Major state-owned enterprises like China Development Bank and China Petroleum Pipeline Bureau are important actors in this regard.

**Infrastructure Projects:** This is another important bloc of the larger economic plan of China in the region. China has undertaken and continues to undertake significant infrastructural projects.

One of the major projects is The Jebel Ali Port in Dubai which is operated by Chinese logistics giant DP World and serves as a key hub for China's trade with the region. Another extremely significant one is the Saudi Vision 2030 plan which features significant Chinese involvement in building new smart cities and developing alternative energy sources like solar and wind power.

## **B. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):**

The Belt and Road Initiative is one of the most important strategies of China that it has put forward on the global stage. It was launched by Xi Jinping in 2013 and is considered one of the most ambitious and potential economic projects of China. It is essentially an initiative that aims to connect China to Europe and Africa through maritime and land routes. It is focused on facilitating and enabling trade and investment along this route, and one of the major sites of the same is West Asia. For instance, Iraq's strategic location and its trade through the Persian Gulf make it a crucial point in China's BRI<sup>1</sup>. BRI has six corridors, one of which – China-Central Asia-West Asia – is centered around West Asian Countries.<sup>2</sup>

BRI offers West Asian countries access to Chinese finance, technology, and construction expertise for upgrading their infrastructure and diversifying their economies. However, concerns regarding debt traps, lack of transparency, and potential environmental damage have also emerged.

## **C. The Politics of Energy:**

Energy is another very significant aspect of China's economic policy in the region. China relies heavily on oil imports and has been a net energy importer since 1993. It surpassed the US in 2017 as the largest importer in the world.<sup>3</sup> West Asia in this regard, then becomes more important than any other actor. Moreover, at a time when the Russia-Ukraine crisis has re-emphasized the role of traditional energy sources, the significance of West Asian countries is greater than ever. This heavy dependence on the region for oil imports not only shapes China's deal in this matter with the region but also plays an extremely significant role in defining political and diplomatic alliances.

However, China does recognize the harms and vulnerabilities that come along with relying solely on traditional sources of energy and hence, it has been increasingly investing in alternative energy sources within the region. To diversify its energy component and reduce dependence on fossil fuels, it has employed partnerships for solar and wind power projects in countries like the UAE and Saudi

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<sup>1</sup> [Economic Times](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Research Gate](#)

<sup>3</sup> [ChinaPower CSIS](#)

Arabia. A concrete example could be the China-Qatar \$60-billion, 27-year agreement that talks about supplying 4 million tons of LPG per year to China.<sup>4</sup>

## **GEOPOLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The rise of China in the international arena has significantly reshaped the global order, making it an extremely significant actor not only in the economic arena but also an overpowering political and diplomatic power in the global landscape, being facilitated and reinforced by its actions in West Asia. This section delves into the twin pillars driving China's engagement in West Asia: its burgeoning global power ambitions and the undeniable strategic importance of the region itself.

### **A. Global Power Intention of China**

Something that goes without saying is the fact that all the efforts that China is making today in West Asia, or any other part of the globe for that matter, are aimed at one end goal: a world where China is the most important Global Power. China's intentions of being a global power go far beyond just being equal and as important as the US, but rather surpassing it on the global stage to lead the world towards a more China-driven world order.

To be able to achieve this ambition, it must first be able to secure its position in the varied fields of economy, trade, security, defense, etc. And West Asia assists China in achieving this in various forms. West Asia becomes a stage for this projection of power, offering opportunities to challenge the existing US-led global order and carve out a sphere of influence for China.

China's growing presence in West Asia provides an alternative to the dominant role of the United States, particularly in countries experiencing strain in their traditional alliances. This allows China to cultivate strategic partnerships with regional players like Iran and Saudi Arabia, diversifying its global alliances and challenging the American unipolar moment.

### **B. The Strategic Importance of West Asia**

As mentioned, to be able to materialize its ambitions, it requires a place to manifest it, and in contemporary times, West Asia as a region has become the best option for it. Given its strategic importance, West Asia assists China in this regard.

Beyond securing resources, West Asia occupies a central role in China's energy security strategy. By diversifying its supply sources and establishing infrastructure partnerships in the region, China aims to mitigate the risks associated with dependence on a single supplier. This includes

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<sup>4</sup> [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

investments in pipelines, storage facilities, and alternative energy sources within West Asia. West Asia remains a key arena for US military presence and counterterrorism operations. China's growing presence serves as a counterbalance to US influence, allowing it to challenge the American security architecture in the region and assert its strategic vision.

Apart from the economic, energy, and military aspects, West Asia is also an area of imperative nature for China due to its strategic location. It acts as a passage between the west and the east. And China has banked upon exactly this part of the partnership through its numerous Belt and Road initiatives.

## **SECURITY COOPERATION**

China's growing presence in West Asia extends beyond economic and geopolitical considerations, venturing into the complex realm of security cooperation. This engagement unfolds across various fields, from combating terrorism and safeguarding maritime routes to bolstering regional militaries and influencing the overall stability of the region. China has changed its role in the security apparatus in West Asia and has strategically used the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the West to its benefit. It has become an active participant in the related affairs of the region now and has been offering solutions for security issues. Some of the principles endorsed by it in the region include sovereignty, impartiality, non-interference in internal affairs, and peaceful governance.<sup>5</sup>

### **A. Terrorism**

Threats continue to come from various extremist and terrorist groups in West Asia, posing significant security challenges to regional governments and international partners. China recognizes this threat and has engaged in counterterrorism efforts strongly in the region. China's solutions target both traditional and non-traditional security threats. China attaches importance to building global anti-terrorism cooperation and establishing a comprehensive international counterterrorism cooperation system.

China has focused on information gathering and sharing by establishing databases and exchanges of information on terrorism, strengthening its anti-terrorism measures on the Internet to stop the use of social media to spread extremist ideology, prevent terrorist group tactics and financing of terrorism, and promote de-radicalization. China's major steps in this regard include intelligence sharing, strengthened border controls, training, and equipment, among others.

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<sup>5</sup> [Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies](#)

China cooperates with local security agencies, particularly in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, to share intelligence on extremist groups, travel plans, and possible attacks, to build local response capabilities to increase and curb terrorist activities. Moreover, recognizing the role of psychological and socioeconomic factors in enforcing austerity, China encourages alternative narratives and supports policies that address socioeconomic grievances in disadvantaged communities. This indirectly thwarts terrorist recruitment efforts and stabilizes the situation. China provides security training and equipment to countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, to enhance their counter-terrorism capabilities. This includes training in areas like counter-insurgency, intelligence gathering, and border security.

## **B. Maritime Security**

Maritime Security is another important aspect of the larger security apparatus of China the West Asian Region. It is a distinctly significant one because of the very fact of its geography. West Asia lies at the very intersection of key maritime trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. These are important routes for global energy and good transportation and thus it becomes of regional as well as international significance to safeguard them. To be specific, due to the heavy reliance of China on these routes, it has been positively contributing toward it. China uses certain tactics in this regard such as maintaining a naval presence, anti-piracy efforts, and Infrastructure investments in the area.

First, China's growing naval presence shows its commitment to maintaining maritime security. It collaborates with various countries in the region to conduct joint military exercises in the water. For example, Russia, China, and Iran conducted a naval exercise in the Gulf of Oman in mid-March, 2023, called 'Maritime Security Belt 2023'.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, China has also been quite active in its efforts in anti-piracy initiatives. The Gulf of Aden is one such area where the safety of critical shipping lanes is focused on due to the severity of piracy in the region. In November 2008, Somali pirates captured two Chinese commercial vessels and took many Chinese crew members as hostages. Since then, China felt compelled to take steps to strengthen security at sea and enhance Somalia's maritime security capacity. Motivating factors include the desire to secure Chinese interests abroad, expand China's influence, and provide opportunities to train the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, China also contributes to maritime infrastructure building such as port development, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> [IDSA](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The Carter Centre](#)



However, there is a flip side too. China's continued presence in the maritime region also raises concerns. The unclear nuclear intentions and potential militarization of its infrastructure projects spark anxiety for regional players as well as the US.

### **C. Arms Sales**

Arms sale is another front on which China has been quite successful, especially in the West Asian region. It has not only secured major arms deals with countries including UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq but has also become one of the major suppliers of military equipment to the region. It supplies drones, missiles, armored vehicles, and other weapons systems. China has been remarkable in challenging the traditional US monopoly in this market of the region leading to potential risks of proxy conflicts due to intensified geopolitical rivalries.

Over the past 10 years, Chinese arms sales in West Asia have jumped by 80 percent, as Beijing has shown a willingness to deliver weapons faster and with fewer roadblocks than Washington.<sup>8</sup>

Recently, Falcon Shield 2023 which was a military exercise between China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), took place in August 2023 and was the first joint air force training between the two countries. The intention was to improve pragmatic interaction and collaboration between the two countries. In this manner, China has been increasing its arms sales, military exercises, and similar action on this front in West Asia.

### **D. Implications for Regional Stability**

China's continued role in the Security Apparatus of West Asia has several implications for the stability of the region. China has adopted its distinct Policy of Non-Interference. Adhering to its age-long approach, China refrains from taking sides and continues to be in line with its non-interference policy. But this in no way has hindered its role in acting as a mediator.

One of the major reasons why China is increasingly getting more successful in establishing itself as a strategic partner in the region is because of its role as a peacemaker in the region. The most important and recent example is the China-brokered deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries after seven years of severed ties. The deal is expected and intended to boost regional stability and growth.

However, on a more critical note, on the one hand, China's counterterrorism efforts and contributions to maritime security offer valuable resources and enhance regional capabilities.

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<sup>8</sup> [The Cradle](#)

Whereas, on the other hand, its arms sales, increasing military presence, and lack of transparency in its security engagements raise concerns about potential destabilization and intensified geopolitical competition.

## **SOFT POWER AND CULTURAL TIES**

China's engagement in West Asia is not only limited to the more tangible areas of economy and security but also spills over the areas guided by soft power. In a geopolitical landscape where the US dictates not only through hard power but also through soft power, for China to compete with the US, it must focus on such cultural aspects. And so, it does.

### **A. Education and Media Outreach**

**Building Educational Bridges:** China actively promotes Mandarin language learning in West Asia through Confucius Institutes, universities, and online platforms. This effort aims to increase linguistic skills, attract potential Chinese tourists and investors, and foster closer intellectual exchange. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have all taken significant steps to incorporate Mandarin into their educational systems. This shift is particularly notable in Iran, where Mandarin's introduction stands in stark contrast to the continued ban on non-Persian ethnic languages, such as Azerbaijani. Mandarin has become the kingdom's third educational language, alongside Arabic and English.<sup>9</sup> China offers scholarships to West Asian students to study in Chinese universities, and collaborative research projects and faculty exchanges between universities in China and West Asia are promoted.

**Shaping Narratives through Media:** China operates media outlets like CGTN Arabic and China Arab TV, broadcasting news and cultural programs in regional languages. These platforms present China's perspective on international events and showcase its cultural offerings, aiming to shape public opinion and counter Western narratives. Moreover, social media engagement between the people of the two sides leads to softening of any negative perceptions.

### **B. Cultural Exchange Programs**

The two sides have set an example of South-South cooperation for exchanges of hearts and minds. Through the process, strategic cooperation between China and Arab countries has been enriched, which is an important means to enhance China's soft power in the Arab world. Both exercise

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<sup>9</sup> [Chennai Centre for China Studies](#)

cultural exchange via collaboration on several fronts like Sister City Partnerships, tourism exchange, joint archaeological projects, etc. Organizing joint cultural festivals and exhibitions celebrates common cultural heritage and showcases artistic expressions from both regions. Establishing sister city partnerships between cities in China and West Asia promotes direct cultural exchange and collaboration. China actively engages in interfaith dialogue initiatives with different Muslim communities in West Asia.

## **CASE STUDIES**

### **A. Iran - A Chessboard of Nuclear Aspirations and Energy Dependencies:**

The relationship between China and Iran is foundationally based on China's energy needs and Iran's ability to provide natural resources for those needs. However, the partnership is not limited to this aspect only and also includes cooperation in areas of defense, political, and non-energy economic ties.

One extremely significant area of the China-Iran partnership is the assistance China provides in encouraging Iran's nuclear weapon capabilities, going against the US. The Iranian nuclear program remains a focal point of China's strategic move in the region. While China publicly supports efforts to ensure a peaceful nuclear program, it stands apart from the Western pressure campaign due to its concerns about nuclear proliferation and its close economic ties with Iran. This nuanced position allows China to play a potential mediatory role while safeguarding its economic interests. China assists Iran in the defense and nuclear sector by transferring military technology, arm equipment, etc.

For China, Iran acts as a crucial alternative energy source, diversifying its import portfolio and mitigating dependence on Saudi Arabia. Both countries signed a comprehensive 25-year strategic partnership in 2021, featuring heavy Chinese investments in Iranian infrastructure and energy projects in exchange for secured oil supplies. This deal strengthens China's energy security while bolstering Iran's economy and potentially empowering its regional influence.

### **B. Saudi Arabia - An Oil Alliance with Cautious Diversification:**

China and Saudi Arabia are major allies and this partnership has become even more significant in recent decades. Saudi Arabia aims to build a "comprehensive strategic partnership"<sup>10</sup> with China. At the heart of this partnership lies an oil alliance as Saudi Arabia is China's primary source of oil

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<sup>10</sup> [Arab News](#)

imports. This oil trade is then reciprocated by China in terms of more infrastructural projects and investments that keep the two-way cycle of bilateral diplomacy going.

However, again, China does realize the need to diversify its sources and not rely on a single country for all its imports. Thus, it also maintains active partnerships with other regional players like Iraq which serves the purpose of cautious diversification.

### **C. UAE - A Flourishing Trade Corridor:**

Trade is the major component based on which the China-UAE relationship thrives. UAE is of vital importance to China due to its location and therefore, the access that it can provide China with into the markets of the Middle East. In reciprocation, China is possibly one of the best sources of investment and infrastructural projects necessary for the UAE's economic development, given it is already a key trade partner for China due to its advanced logistics infrastructure. China's investments can be seen in sectors ranging across real estate, renewable energy, ports, etc.

Moreover, both the actors benefit from duty-free zones that they've developed as well as other joint ventures. This partnership between China and the UAE is an interesting one. As UAE is an aspiring global innovation hub, its active collaboration with China in diverse technological fields ranging from fintech and artificial intelligence to smart city development can take this partnership to new heights.

## **CHALLENGES**

### **1. The US Question**

The waning of the US's political and diplomatic clout in West Asia has given way to Chinese ambitions. Mr. Biden's West Asia strategy has two parts<sup>11</sup>. The major focus has been on bringing Saudi Arabia and Israel, the US's two allies in the region, together. The second has been to convince its allies that West Asia is still important to the US. However, that is certainly not the case. This stands as one of the most pronounced challenges to the US in the increasingly China-influenced region of West Asia. The US has deprioritized West Asia due to its shift in focus to newly emerging strategic areas such as the Indo-Pacific. This shift has created a vacuum in the region which is constantly being very well appropriated by China. China has not only forged great economic and infrastructural deals under its Belt and Road Initiatives but has also emerged as a peacemaker, threatening the US's traditional role as the "Guardian of Ensuring Peace".

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<sup>11</sup> [The Hindu](#)

The post-9/11 landscape also has considerable implications in this regard. US's "War on Terror" largely targeted the Islamic world through military deployment in the region again providing an opportunity for China to seize. China has been working successfully to establish itself as a trusted partner in this context.

What's more interesting is the fact that the West Asian countries consider China a better diplomatic partner than the US due to its non-interference in the domestic affairs of these countries, unlike the US. China works with them without making them liable to adhere to human rights or the liberal democratic ideals of the West. China has offered them better alternatives than the Bretton Woods institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. The US today is increasingly discussed, in the words of former US Secretary of Defence Robert M Gates, as a "dysfunctional superpower"<sup>12</sup>.

## **2. Challenges for India**

India has had historical relations with West Asia due to both, geographical proximity as well as a shared cultural history between the two. And today, even in the status quo, India has emerged as one of the significant strategic partners of the region due to its partnership with the region in the last few decades. West Asia is extremely significant for India, especially in terms of Oil and Gas. Saudi Arabia was India's largest supplier of crude oil, meeting 20 percent of India's needs, valued at US \$ 21.8 billion in 2014- 2015.<sup>13</sup> On the security front, India has stood for diplomacy and dialogue concerning the issue between Saudi Arabia and Iran but has been against being a mediator due to its opposition to the Third-Party Mediation Policy which comes from the Kashmir issue.

However, the increasing presence of China in West Asia, especially on the technological front has the potential to pose new challenges to India in the region. China has maintained and is increasingly continuing to make new developments in its economic relationship with the region along with the highly advanced trajectory of defense and energy security. At such a juncture, when the 'tech rush' has become the new path in West Asia in an increasingly globalized world where technology dictates almost everything, from economic design to military requirements, India needs to change and adapt its outlook towards the region accordingly.

Another point to be mentioned here is the second wave of expansion of the membership of BRICS which brought in West Asian countries of UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran into the grouping. This serves as another site of contestation between India and China.

Moreover, India's stand of not intervening in bilateral issues such as the one between Iran and

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<sup>12</sup> [ORF](#)

<sup>13</sup> [MEA](#)

Saudi Arabia has given China the open space to act as a mediator and establish itself as a peacemaker in the region, contributing to regional stability, even though India was seen as a potential mediator by the actors in the region. Thus, challenges from China demand a change in the approach of Indian Foreign Policy towards West Asia.

Nonetheless, it shouldn't be ignored that India still holds an important position as a strategic partner in the region. This can be highlighted by the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, announced at the G-20 summit. It seeks to build an economic corridor from India's western coast, through the Gulf (the UAE and Saudi Arabia), Jordan, and Israel, to the Mediterranean, bringing India and Europe closer. Moreover, India's presence in a grouping of the Abraham Accords countries can be seen as a legitimate recognition of India's presence in the region.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In this context, where China's growing presence in West Asia is a cause of concern for all the actors that see themselves in aspirational roles in the future, India must also shape its policies concerning West Asia accordingly. Some recommendations in this regard are given below.

1. **Beyond the Conventional Buyer-Seller Relationship:** There is an urgent need to move beyond the conventional buyer-seller relationship<sup>14</sup> and move toward a more strategic and intricately connected partnership. There needs to be a shift toward a multifaceted approach. China's relationship with the region is all-encompassing and if India needs to deal with China's rise in West Asia, it needs to adjust its foreign policy accordingly for the region. There are certain areas which are less explored as compared to the major ones like trade and energy sector. Such areas include counter-terrorism and extremism. Terrorism is an area where both the actors, India as well as West Asian countries have converging interest since both of them face issues related to it. Thus, it can be an interesting area of cooperation.
2. **Increased Bilateral Ties:** For India to have a strategic relationship with West Asian countries, it must also treat them in that manner. What Devin T. Hagerty has said about India and the US that "India wants to be treated like an ally but not be one" holds for West Asia as well.<sup>15</sup> There needs to be an increase in bilateral diplomatic visits and ties including but not limited to yearly rotational bilateral summits, ministerial-level dialogues, etc. This

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<sup>14</sup> [MEA](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Oxford Academic](#)

will help in fostering more trust, as a result of which more cooperation can be acted upon.

3. **The Cultural Push:** It has very well been discussed above how China has used its cultural influence and soft power to create an impact in the region. Its constant endorsement of the Chinese culture through education and media has bore its fruits. This is precisely why India needs to focus on increasing cultural ties with the region. S Jaishankar has very well highlighted in his *The India Way* how Nehru emphasised on seas being the building blocks of India's relationship with the Gulf and West Asia at large due to its historical and cultural significance. Moreover, India should turn to its rich culture of epic texts like Mahabharata and use them as a point of conjunction between India and West Asia. There is a need to create more people-to-people interaction.
4. **Push for Financially Responsible Initiatives:** India was among the first countries to warn the globe about the dangers of BRI. India has made its stance clear on the issue very well. Now it is to India's benefit that it pushes for internationally acceptable and financially responsible initiatives. India stands for globally accepted values of good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency, and equality. In May 2017, India took the lead in the global debate on connectivity. It vouches for principles of financial responsibility to avoid projects that would create unsustainable debt burdens for communities.<sup>16</sup> Pushing for such internationally acceptable initiatives will help India gain more ground in West Asia and act as a resisting factor to further consolidation of China's BRI Projects in the region.

## CONCLUSION

China's presence in West Asia goes far beyond the mere individual political or economic aspects of it. China's strategy in the region is a well-thought multifaceted one, in the sense that it is a dance of regional as well as global ambitions, moving on the tunes of cultural exchange and interdependent strategic development. China hasn't only relied on hard power aspects of the economy or military but has also very well made use of soft power in terms of creating a long-lasting impact through the tools of language and culture.

While the future of this partnership between China and West Asia remains to be seen, it does hold the potential to reshape the regional geopolitical landscape as well as redefine global alliances and the future narrative of the global village we live in.

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<sup>16</sup> Jaishankar S. *The India Way*

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