

China's Potential Role in the Remaking of Regional Order in the Middle East: Motivations, Opportunities and Challenges



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ABSTRACT

Can the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provide a remedy to current problems in the Middle East? What are the driving forces, opportunities and challenges for China to play a constructive role in the Middle East? These are some of the questions that this article will attempt to answer. Domestic academia in China had extensively discussed the “westward strategy” before the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward. At that time, this strategy was conceived of as a hedge against the “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” of the United States. However, under the Belt and Road Initiative, China is also engaged in strengthening its interactions with Middle Eastern countries, which will be an important way to further strengthen China’s Western front as an extension of China’s opening up to the outside world, a further acceleration of Eurasian linkages, and an effort towards further strengthening globalization. The “Belt and Road Initiative” faced severe Western criticism. Yet in fact, this initiative is not modeled on the post-World War II Marshall Plan as a Chinese conspiracy. The initiative is not a geopolitical tool, but it is intended to serve as a practical cooperation platform. The Middle East is an important site on the strategic roadmap of the Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, achieving regional stability is in line with China’s overseas strategic interests. Without getting on the train, however, China will not learn how to drive. It is through participation in the practical process of addressing these problems that China can accumulate greater experience in managing international conflicts and improve its ability to deal with complicated international disputes.

Keywords: Belt and Road, Turkey, Middle East, globalization, geopolitics

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE WORLD witnessed the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of World War I. Both of these two events had an epoch-making influence on the Middle East. Nowadays, the regional order in the Middle East has changed quite significantly, especially after the Arab Spring in 2011. The Syrian war has entered its eighth year; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has once again become a hot issue under Trump’s pro-Israel “biased policy”; the Yemen crisis still cannot see any hope for resolution; the sectarian conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has become more intense; and the importance of regional countries has grown. There is no doubt that even though one hundred years have passed since World War I, the Middle East is still trapped in the dilemma of war and peace.

In retracing and exploring the transformation of the Middle East over the past 100 years, we are

compelled to ask ourselves how the geopolitical order of the modern Middle East has evolved in this particular way. Why has this order presented itself as so awry since the Arab Spring? Is it possible to achieve a transition from turmoil to peace in the Middle East? What role can China play for the reconstruction of a stable and peaceful order in the Middle East? Can the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provide a remedy to current problems in the Middle East? What are the driving forces, opportunities and challenges for China to play a bigger role in the Middle East? These are some of the questions that this article will attempt to answer.

The Centuries-Old Evolution of the Middle East Order

The Ottoman Empire’s history stretches across 623 years, if it is considered that the Ottoman Dynasty started in 1299 and the last Sultan was dethroned

in 1922. Alternatively, the Ottoman Empire has a history of 465 years, if the year of 1453 as the fall of Constantinople is counted as the beginning and the year 1918 as the year of the empire's disintegration (Sanyi, 2018, p. 1). Whether it lasted 623 or 465 years, the Ottoman Empire achieved a so-called "Pax-Ottomanica" in the vast areas of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and North Africa.

Just as Bernard Lewis argued, "the Ottomans had erected a political structure which endured and a political system which worked. They had also created a political culture which was well understood and in which each group and indeed each individual knew his position, his powers and limits and, most important, what was due from him and to him, to whom and from whom. The Ottoman system had fallen on bad times, but despite many difficulties, it was still functioning. It had lost the loyalty and acceptance of most of its Christian subjects, but it was still accepted as legitimate by most of the Muslim population. During its last decades, the Ottoman order was beginning to show signs of recovery and even of improvement. Any such development was, however, diverted and terminated by the Ottoman entry into the First World War and the resulting end of the Empire — the collapse of the state and the fragmentation of its territories." (Lewis, 1995, p. 342)

As a result of World War I, the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire collapsed following military defeat, while Tsarist Russia was conquered by the storm of the October Revolution. Britain and France continued to rule the world as winners. During the Paris Conference in 1919, the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and other related predatory treaties were signed after fierce quarrels. Thus, the so-called new order of the "Versailles System" was established by imperial countries in Europe after World War I. According to the Treaty of Sevres, the countries, which were newly established after the dissolution



Anti-government demonstrations during the Tunisian revolution, 23 January 2011.

of the Ottoman Empire, became the mandated territories of Britain and France. However, the Turkish War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk interfered with the Allies' intention to carve up the Ottoman Empire and made the Treaty of Sevres abortive. At this time, the United States' presence in this region cannot be compared to that of the European powers and the principal contradiction in that era was that between the peoples of West Asia and North Africa and British and French imperialism.

Over the following 20 years, Germany gradually gained a foothold in Iran and Afghanistan, and Italy's influence expanded into Ethiopia and Yemen, gradually advancing toward the Fertile Crescent, the core areas of British and French influence.

However, World War II ended with another victory for the Allies, and the fascist forces of Germany and Italy were completely driven out of the Middle East. Unfortunately, the Allies would later continue to compete quietly in this region. This is mainly manifested in three aspects. The first is the confrontation between Britain and France in Syria and Lebanon. The second is the competition over the Middle Eastern oil between Britain and the United States. The third is the opposition between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union in Iran, where the competition for Iran is due not only to political and economic, but also to ideological reasons. Unsurprisingly, some would therefore argue that, earlier than anywhere else in the world, the Cold War began in Iran. The rivalry between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union in Iran unraveled as a prelude to the post-war global struggle between the East and the West, and once again pushed Iran to the forefront of this global conflict.

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union began a cold war for global hegemony, which resulted in a bipolar world order. In the eyes of the United States, the Middle East was a cornerstone in both military and economic terms to the survival of the United States, Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Therefore, any attempt by outside forces to control the Persian Gulf was regarded as a serious attack on the vital interests of the United States. In the Soviet Union's view, the Persian Gulf region was the main target and site for a breakthrough in the Soviet Union's endeavors to achieve its South Strategy. It was also an important strategic goal for the Soviet Union to flank Europe and contend with the United States. Therefore, both the United States and the Soviet Union regarded the Middle East as an important strategic region for global hegemony. Competition has thus been fierce for decades. The presence and competition of foreign forces in the Middle East after World War II

marks the history of the two competing powers in the Middle East.

After the collapse of the bipolar order, the United States was eager to extend its influence across the entire Middle East in order to maximize its global hegemony. It hoped to politically control the Middle East and to achieve US-led stability so as to obtain more realistic and long-term economic benefits. The strategic goal of the United States was to establish a new order in the Middle East guided by the American model first and then to institute a new world order dominated by the US. To this end, the underlying policy of the United States at that time was to "promote peace talks in the west, contain Iraq and Iran in the east, and strengthen allies." (Zhao, 2000, p. 365) Meanwhile, the turbulent domestic political situation in Russia and the impending collapse of the country's economy have left Russia unable to pay more attention to Middle East affairs. It is possible to say that the United States has assumed a dominant position in the Middle East, so that it was able to arbitrarily launch the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Therefore, a retrospective of the past 100 years of the Middle East shows that since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the people, nations and countries in the Middle East have never become the masters of this region. Throughout the 20th century, it has always been the Westerners who have ruled. The old order collapsed, but a new order has never been established.

Disorder in the Middle East After the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was triggered by the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia. On December 17, 2010 Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit vendor, set himself alight in order to protest unemployment. As a high-school dropout who had to carry his family's financial burden, Mohamed Bouazizi was unable to find a job. As a street vendor, he was treated brutally

by the local police. Subsequently, the revolutionary tide swept the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisian Prime Minister Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had to step down, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh handed over power to his deputy, and Syria descended into civil war. Later, the formerly oppressed Islamic forces came into power, causing fierce political games in the region. When the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, won the elections on June 24, 2012, the “Arab Spring” turned into the “Islamic Spring”. The conflict between Islamic forces and secular forces thus became more and more intense. In Egypt, this led to a military coup through which Mohamed Morsi was overthrown. In this chaos, an extremist Islamic group called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) came into being, recruiting a large number of young people from all over the world, collecting a large amount of money by selling oil, and occupying a large part of land in northern Iraq and Syria. With Russia’s strong intervention in Syria, fighting ISIS became the main concern of the international community. In the meantime, extremist Islamic forces have been weakened. Currently, with Turkey’s strong presence in northern Syria, new difficulties and challenges seem to have their share in shaping the future of the Middle East.

After this round of uprisings and turmoil called the Arab Spring, the geopolitical order of the Middle East has undergone significant changes, mainly resembled in the following characteristics: First, the ability and willingness of major powers, especially the United States, to control the Middle East have diminished. The aim of the US now is to intensify the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, even expecting direct war between the two countries. Second, after the weakening of the great powers, regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, Israel,



Protesters marching to Sanaa University in Yemen, 1 March 2011.

and Saudi Arabia have started to play a more active role. This is a phenomenon not seen in the past 100 years, and the autonomy of regional countries has continued to increase. These countries began to compete for regional dominance. Third, proxy wars continue to ravage this region. For example, armed forces supported by foreign powers continue to fight in Syria, Yemen, and Libya and there is no sign of an end to these conflicts. Fourth, extremist forces such as ISIS have declined under the attack of major powers, especially Russia. Fifth, Russia’s strong intervention in Syria through military means has increased its legitimacy, not only because Russia was invited by the Syrian government, but also because Russia was able to defeat a common enemy of the international community. Therefore, Russia was able to occupy a high moral ground. At the same time, Russia strengthened coordination with Turkey and Iran through the Astana process, thereby gaining a steady foothold in Syria. Sixth, a new wave of nationalism is emerging in the Middle East. In the context of political instability, economic decline, and constant wars, the Middle East is facing a greater crisis.

What are the underlying reasons for this series of changes in the Middle East? Professor Yang

Guang, the President of the Chinese Association of Middle East Studies, commented that “peace” and “development” are still the two main themes in Middle Eastern politics and that none of them has been solved despite a 100 years of effort. This is mainly due to the following: First, the long-term persistence of socio-economic problems; second, the large number of younger population of the Arab region; third, the economic and social problems of Middle Eastern countries are further exacerbated in the era of globalization; fourth, the significant impact of information technologies on political movements; fifth, Western countries have long advocated Western-style “democracy and freedom”, which are not compatible with the reality of Middle Eastern countries. (Huang, 2016, pp. 227-238)

The Syrian war has entered its eighth year and the civil war seems to continue despite Russia’s success. So how can we evaluate the changes in the Middle East since the Arab Spring? The only criterion for judging whether social revolutions such as the “Arab Spring” have promoted social progress or caused social decline is the following: Is there a relative improvement in the people’s standard of living after the “revolution” compared to the situation prior to the “revolution”. In Tunisia, it can be observed that the unemployment rates across the country currently are above 20% in 2018, thereby far exceeding the pre-revolutionary average. (Wang, 2018)

Moreover, what can the Western countries learn from this transformation? The Western intervention and the “color revolutions” they promoted did not allow these countries to reap the fruits of “democratic transformation” and plunged the region into endless chaos. Under political turmoil, economies further deteriorated, and sectarian and tribal conflicts became even more prominent. The whole world has been affected by a global refugee crisis and terrorist attacks.

China’s Expanded Presence in the Middle East

China’s Middle East diplomacy is an integral part of its overall diplomacy. For a long time, however, the Middle East does not figure as important as the “big powers” and the “neighboring countries” in China’s diplomatic layout. In his talk *Our Diplomatic Policies and Tasks* on April 30, 1952, Premier Zhou Enlai had made the comment that “with respect to the countries in the Islamic world, we are less engaged in the relationships and have less influence. We should work to gradually change this.” (*Selected Works of Zhou Enlai’s Diplomacy, 1990, p. 54*) Yet in fact, since the Bandung Conference in 1955, China has successively established diplomatic relations in the vast regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, especially with major countries in the Middle East. This undoubtedly broke the diplomatic isolation and greatly enhanced China’s international prestige. Now, with the Belt and Road Initiative and China’s increasing interest in the Middle East, Middle Eastern affairs will have a greater impact on China. Middle Eastern peoples and businesses have already started to grow a keen interest in China’s increasing global presence. Although China is still unwilling to intervene in the region, it has to respond to the current situation as its status rises and its interests expand.

First, from the perspective of political interests, China has become more active in the region, and its role has been increasingly valued by all parties involved. The contribution of Eastern wisdom has been well received, which has also enhanced China’s influence. China’s position on issues such as the Palestinian issue, the Syrian crisis, the Yemen crisis, and the Libyan crisis, can be exchanged for regional countries’ positions on key issues such as Taiwan, the One-China policy, and the South China Sea. In addition, as one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China’s position

on many international issues can win greater support and respect through its constructive role in regional affairs.

Secondly, in terms of strategic interests, the “Western Front”, which concerns the Middle Eastern countries, can serve as a strategic backing for China, allowing it to contain Western expansionism and calmly meet challenges from the sea on the

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“Eastern Front”. Domestic academia in China had extensively discussed the “westward strategy” before the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward. At that time, this strategy was conceived of as a hedge against the “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” of the United States. However, under the Belt and Road Initiative, China is now engaged in strengthening its interactions with Middle Eastern countries, which will be an important way to further strengthen China’s Western Front as an extension of China’s opening up to the outside world, a further acceleration of Eurasian linkages, and an effort towards further strengthening globalization.

Third, in terms of economic benefits, the Middle East is the world’s largest region for energy exports and the main source of China’s energy imports. Today, oil from the Middle East accounts for more than 50% of China’s imported oil. The Middle East is increasingly important for China’s energy needs. At the same time, the development of energy transport routes from the Middle East to China will have a significant impact on China’s oil import and energy security.(Gao, 2014, p. 45) The deterioration of the

situation in the Middle East will not only directly harm China’s national interests. In September 2019, the drone attacks on Saudi oil fields also sounded an alarm regarding China’s energy security.

In addition, the bilateral trade volume between China and the Middle Eastern countries is rising. At the beginning of 2016, it was close to US \$300 billion, making China the largest trade partner of many Middle Eastern countries. The bilateral trade volume is likely to increase to US \$600 billion over the next 10 years. (Gao, 2015, p. 14) This shows that there is great potential for cooperation between China and Middle Eastern countries. Specifically:

1) The consumption potential of Middle Eastern economies is huge because young people dominate the regional demographic structure. Regional infrastructure construction is developing rapidly, and expanding markets need stable capital inflow for continuous output. China’s banks and enterprises have large capital reserves and possess many business contacts in Turkey, Iran and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Continuous capital flow will bring considerable financial benefits.

2) Strong Chinese military enterprises will greatly contribute to arms sales to the benefit of regional stability.

3) The development and utilization of fossil energy (oil, natural gas) and new energy (solar energy, nuclear energy) will help China’s advanced energy technology to be employed for new uses. The intended cooperation with Egypt, Iran and Turkey will blow the horn of China’s energy technology to the world.

4) In terms of security interests, the situation in the Middle East is complex in the sense that the region faces both traditional and non-traditional security threats. Especially in recent years, extremist forces and terrorists have taken advantage of continued regional instability, extremist ideologies and

terrorist activities. This can easily cause damage to China's overseas interests, to people's lives and properties, and to the security of Western China. It greatly increases risks associated with China's endeavors to promote the construction of the "Belt and Road" in the Middle East.

With respect to securing China's interests in the Middle East, there are two kinds of approaches to the region in China: the "soft defense" position and the "hard defense" position. "Soft defense" is based on "demilitarization" and seeks to maintain good relations with the countries of the region and to maintain legitimate rights and interests; the "hard defense" approach emphasizes the strengthening of military forces in the Middle East in defense of national interests. Whether China's presence in the Middle East will take the path of "soft defense" or "hard defense", eminent questions for the future are: if and how one can adhere to the "non-interference policy" in the new situation; and if it is ever possible to participate in Middle Eastern affairs by way of "creative" or "constructive" intervention.

China's Role in the Reconstruction of Order in the Middle East

The current regional situation is still increasingly dynamic. Middle Eastern countries seem to be transitioning "from chaos to order". However, there is still uncertainty given that great powers and regional forces have also been adjusting their strategic policies to the ever-changing situation since the Arab Spring. Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative in the Middle East is therefore a challenge for China, but it simultaneously comes with a lot of opportunities.

First, China's foreign policy towards the Middle East is being increasingly recognized by the region. Since the Arab Spring, however, the domestic situation in these countries has varied greatly. Coun-

tries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen are still suffering from frequent crises and wars. So far, their economy still performs badly, and it is difficult to find a way out of the crisis. There is also another group of countries, which are in a period of transition (e.g. Egypt and Tunisia). Politically, these countries have achieved relative stability, but they are still trapped in serious economic difficulties and cannot find any solution to get out of the crisis by themselves. The third group of countries is composed of GCC countries, for example Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whose stability is challenged due to the adverse effects of the Yemen crisis and oil price fluctuations, although they are relatively stable as a whole. In this cycle of transformation in the Middle East, China has always adhered to the solution of political dialogue and "development for stability". Although it was not fully recognized by Middle Eastern countries from the very beginning, the eight years since the Arab Spring have proved China's proposition right.

Second, China's development road is being increasingly respected by Middle Eastern countries. In the course of 70 years of development, China has always adhered to the principle of "gradual reform" and maintained a basic level of social stability. In economic terms, China has carried out a reform of the economic system at home, consolidated the relationship between the government and the market, reduced the government's excessive intervention in the economy, promoted the healthy functioning of the private economy, and strengthened the development of its infrastructure and human resources, thus laying the foundation for steady economic development (Guang, 2019). Moreover, China will continue to increase the depth and breadth of its opening to the outside, constantly attract foreign investment, and strengthen trade dependence with other countries in the world. Interestingly, a com-

parison of the development paths taken by China and Turkey shows that both countries share similar experiences in terms of political and economic development, which can also provide useful lessons for cooperation between China and other Middle Eastern countries.

Third, China's Belt and Road Initiative is being increasingly accepted by Middle Eastern countries. Since the day the Belt and Road Initiative was put forward, many countries and forces in the West have attempted to defame this initiative through various arguments, including the "geo-expansion theory", the "economic predatory theory", "neo-imperialism" and the "environmental destruction theory". In particular, the negative reports of the US think tanks can easily increase the doubts of Middle Eastern countries, especially the Gulf States, concerning the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the great role of Middle Eastern countries in the initiative must be rooted in the profound understanding of the initiative itself. Recently, the opening of the Sino-Euro train between China and Turkey has played a greater exemplary role in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative in the Middle East.

China's diplomacy in the Middle East has achieved a lot of things, but this is rarely acknowledged. Therefore, China has been criticized for not having a great impact on the settlement of issues in the Middle East. Compared with the United States, Europe, Russia and other large countries or regions with deeply intertwined historical trajectories and extensively interlinked interests, China's diplomatic resources in the Middle East are still limited (Ding, 2016, p. 154). This being said, in recent years China has done a lot of work to solve the Middle East's current problems, while the principles embodied by China are increasingly being accepted. First, the fairness of China's position is coming to light. China has

always adhered to the policy of non-alignment and non-interference in internal affairs and has maintained good relations with Palestine and the Arab world. Therefore, China is not led by selfishness or self-interest in promoting the settlement of difficult challenges in the Middle East, and its position is acceptable to all parties involved. Second, the stability of China's policy is to be acknowledged. Although there may be short-term fluctuations in the relationships between China and the Middle East, a simple change of government will not lead to dramatic changes in basic diplomatic principles, and China can be trusted by Middle Eastern countries, which is in sharp contrast to Western countries. Third, interference by great powers, especially US intervention, constitutes the root of many problems in the Middle East. China however does not intend to replace the United States, but seeks to carry out balanced and neutral interactions between all parties concerned and wants to play a greater constructive role.

Opportunities, Challenges and Limits of the BRI in the Middle East

In 2017, Xi Jinping's report at the 19th CPC National Congress included the development and implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" as an important part of China's overall layout of economic development and all-round diplomacy. In addition, the 19th Congress passed a resolution regarding the constitution of the Communist Party of China (Amendment), including the development of the Belt and Road Initiative into the party constitution. This means that the Belt and Road Initiative will become a long-term policy, which fully demonstrates that under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, China attaches great importance to the development of the Belt and Road Initiative and firmly promotes international cooperation.

There are 65 countries along the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt” in the Belt and Road Initiative, of which 31 countries are Muslim countries. Eighteen of these are Middle Eastern countries, thus approaching 1/3 overall. Of course, the initiative has currently expanded into Africa, Europe and Latin America. More importantly however, these Middle Eastern countries serve as a bridge to link China to Europe and have an important influence for the smooth progress of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The “Belt and Road Initiative” faced severe Western criticism. Yet in fact, this initiative is not modeled on the post-World War II Marshall Plan as a Chinese conspiracy. The initiative is not a geopolitical tool, but it is intended to serve as a practical cooperation platform. It is not a foreign aid plan, but a joint development initiative in order for countries to jointly build and share prosperity. Finally, the initiative is not to replace the existing mechanisms for regional cooperation but to promote the coordination of development strategies among various countries and to achieve complementary advantages.

Besides, there are important internal reasons for its initiative. Since 2010, the United States has been implemented the strategy of “Asia Pacific Rebalancing Strategy” (or “Returning to the Asia Pacific Strategy”), which aims to confront China directly. By enhancing its military and diplomatic presence in the Asia Pacific region, the US seeks to dilute and inhibit China’s growing strength, contain its strategic development as much as possible, and curb its rise. Hence, a group of experts on international issues represented by Wang Jisi proposed that China, located in the center of the Asia-Pacific region, should not confine its vision to coastal areas, traditional competitors and partners, but should consider the strategic plan of moving westward to promote the rebalancing of China’s geo-strategy.

As a matter of fact, the “westward strategy” has long been carried out by China. Prof. Fei Xiaotong, a prominent political scientist, has put forward a macro model of China’s development, taking Shanghai as the leader, Jiangsu and Zhejiang as the two wings, the Yangtze River as the backbone, the Southern Silk Road and the Eurasian land bridge going out of Yangguan in the West as the tail. He also put forward the idea of “two markets, hit with both hands”, which means paying equal attention to the domestic market and the international market. The idea here is to address China’s unbalanced development between the East and the West, especially the remaining gap after the policy of opening up. In contrast to “Western development”, which has always been an official policy of China, due to the vagueness of its motivations, goals, paths and means, the “westward strategy” has not become a national policy, i.e. it has not

“At present, no country, not even the United States, can control the Middle East.”

been upgraded to the status of a national diplomatic strategy yet. Moreover, it is to be noted here: Xinjiang’s stability and development are not only related to China’s territorial and energy security, but also ensure the smooth progress of the three economic corridors of China-Pakistan, China-Central Asia-West Asia and the new Eurasian Continental Bridge.

In terms of the geopolitical order of the Middle East, the world’s big powers still play an important role in shaping the region, even though the desire and ability of Western powers to intervene is significantly reduced as compared to the past. At present, no country, not even the United States, can control the Middle East. For 100 years since World War I, regional countries have not been able to decide their fate independently, but now they have joined

as players on the Grand Chessboard. Two opinions are being voiced now. One is that the influence of the United States is declining, the other that it is gaining strength. Objectively speaking however, the United States still plays a leading role, and it is still the most important factor affecting developments in the Middle East (Zhang, 2013, p. 45).

Two recent events help to illustrate the present situation. First, in 2018, the United States announced that it would move its embassy to Jerusalem, causing a great uproar. However, while the Israelis were grateful to the United States, the Arab League led by Saudi Arabia did not actually condemn it loudly, but acquiesced to the situation. Second, on May 8, 2018, the United States announced its withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement, which also brought great pressure to bear on both the European Union and China. The current US strategy is not only to put pressure the Iranian government, but also to crack down on all companies cooperating with Iran, which shows that the US still has a strong influence.

Conclusion

At present, there are voices in the world calling on China to rise to the occasion, proceeding from the observation that the United States has failed to solve the Middle Eastern problem. Can China use its wisdom to contribute and propose its own plan? If in fact, the United States cannot solve the region's problems, then how can China solve them? Moreover, countries concerning themselves with the solution of the Middle East's problems need to show political determination, wait for the right conditions, and act with the support of the international community. In their attempt to solve the region's problems, foreign countries cannot act on behalf of the region's countries. If the Middle Eastern countries cannot unite and agree upon a unified position,

then no one can solve these issues. Therefore, China's support has to base itself on the premise of mutual interest and acceptance by these countries. On this basis, China will support any useful proposals and suggestions. China will offer its support in the absence of objecting voices in the region.

Today, the Middle Eastern countries, the European Union, and other countries increasingly have come to realize that China's position is correct, which further strengthens China's position in the Middle East. Simultaneously, the improvement of its international standing will lead China to face even more challenges. The promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative could be met with controversy, misunderstanding, slander and even condemnation in international public opinion. This is a necessary stage for China on its way to becoming a great power, a stage the country must put up with. However, China is required to act. There is urgent need for China to reinforce its presence in the Middle East in order to enhance its "soft power" and to demonstrate its "hard power". The Middle East is an important site on the strategic roadmap of the Belt and Road Initiative. Achieving regional stability is in line with China's overseas strategic interests. Without getting on the train, however, China will not learn how to drive. It is through participation in the practical process of addressing these problems that China can accumulate greater experience in managing international conflicts and improve its ability to deal with complicated international disputes.

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