香港珠海學院
HONG KONG CHU HAI COLLEGE

黃廷方·信和
NSBRRI
一帶一路研究院

First International Conference on

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES:
EMBRACING MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES



CONFERENCE BROCHURE

17 October 2026
(Saturday)

Published by:
Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute
Hong Kong Chu Hai College, Hong Kong, China

CONTENTS

Conference Programme.....**2**

Abstract.....**6**

From War to a New Economic Order: The Middle East Conflict as a Geoeconomic Shock to the Asian System
Prof. Dr Abdul Jalil (Pakistan) 6

The Middle East from Hong Kong and East Asian Perspective: The Role of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
Lord Edwin E. Hitti (Lebanon) 8

War without Settlement in the Middle East: Partial Control and Escalation Substitution in the Iran–Israel–United States Conflict
Evidence from Twenty-Seven Rounds of Structured Simulation
Dr Mohsen Solhdoost (Iran) 9

Digital Innovative FDI in Israel – with reference to Chinese firms
Dr. Lihong Yun and Dr. Xiaowei Kong (Hong Kong SAR) *11*

The Future of the Arab Gulf States After the US War on Iran
Dr Haytham Mouzahem (Lebanon).....14

What the Israel-Hamas and Iran Wars Reveal About China's Middle East Strategy
Jocelyn Chau (Hong Kong SAR) 15

The Syrian Druze Cross-Border Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Nabi Shuʿayb in Israel and Its Multifaceted Impacts
Liu Han (China) 16

Defiance Over Capitulation: Understanding Iran's Resistance to U.S. Coercive Strategy
Syed Ali Zia Jaffery (Pakistan).....17

Systemic Pressure, Development Orientation, and the Evolution of ASEAN–GCC Relations
Tang Ying (China) 19

Pakistan's Strategic Pivot: From Mediator to Pillar of Middle Eastern Stability
S. M. Fakhar Hayat (Pakistan) 21

Hydrogen Cooperation Between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Multi-Level Perspective
Wu Yongling (China) 22

Gulf Investments in Central Asia and the Role of Public-Private Partnerships in Pursuing a Just Energy Transition
Shaimerden Chikanayev (Kazakhstan) 23

Humanitarian and Development Cooperation in Crisis-Vulnerable BRI Countries
Sumbal Javed (Hong Kong SAR).....25

Conference Programme

First International Conference on

"Middle East Studies: Embracing Multidisciplinary Perspectives"

Venue: Hong Kong Chu Hai College, 80 Castle Peak Road, Castle Peak Bay, Tuen Mun

Date: October 17, 2026 (Saturday)

Venue: Hall 4

Time (HKT)	Session	Details
8:30 - 9:15 AM	**Registration + Networking coffee**	**Main Lobby (outside Hall 4)**
9:15 – 11:50 AM	**Opening Remarks** Zoom ID: **527 287 0622** Password: **210542**	**Prof. Thomas CHAN Man-Hung**, Director, Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chua Hai College. **Dr. Nadeem AKHTAR**, *Organizing Committee Chair* Associate Professor Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chua Hai College. **Moderator: Dr. Zeynab FARHADI**, Assistant Professor, Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chua Hai College.
	Keynote Speeches Zoom ID: **527 287 0622** Password: **210542**	**1. Lord Edwin E. Hitti** President of the Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Arab Cham) in Hong Kong. ***Topic:*** *The Middle East from Hong Kong and East Asian Perspective: The Role of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)* **2. Dr. Abdul Jalil** Professor of Economics, (Director ORIC and Head of Department of Economics), National Defence University Islamabad, Pakistan

		Topic: *From War to a New Economic Order: The Middle East Conflict as a Geoeconomic Shock to the Asian System* **3. Dr. Mohsen Solhdoost** Assistant Professor in the Department of International Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, P.R.China. ***Topic****: War without Settlement in the Middle East: Partial Control and Escalation Substitution in the Iran–Israel–United States Conflict* **Interactive Session and Q&A Session with Keynote Speakers** **Commentator: Mr. Muhammad Fakhar Hayat** Research Fellow at Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chua Hai College. **Appreciation and Photo Taking**
12:00 - 1:40 PM	**Lunch Break** (Green Basil, walk around 10-15 minutes to venue)	
2:00 - 4:00 PM	**Panel 1: Power, Security, and Foreign Policy in the Middle East** Zoom ID: **527 287 0622** Password: **210542**	**Chair: Dr. Mohsen Solhdoost** **1. Syed Ali Zia Jaffery** Deputy Director, Center for Security, Strategy and Policy Research, University of Lahore. *Topic: Defiance Over Capitulation: Understanding Iran's Resistance to U.S. Coercive Strategy* **2. Jocelyn Chau** Independent geopolitical and policy analyst specialising in international relations, colonialism, and forced migration in the Middle East and China. *Topic: What the Israel-Hamas and Iran Wars Reveal About China's Middle East Strategy* **3. Tang Ying** Institute of Middle East Studies, School of International Relations and Public Affairs, Shanghai International Studies University.

		Topic: Systemic Pressure, Development Orientation, and the Evolution of ASEAN–GCC Relations **4. Haytham Mouzahem** Research fellow at the Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute of the Hong Kong Chu Hai College *Topic: The Future of the Arab Gulf States After the US War on Iran* **5. Syed Muhammad Fakhar Hayat** Research fellow at the Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute of the Hong Kong Chu Hai College *Topic: Pakistan's Strategic Pivot: From Mediator to Pillar of Middle Eastern Stability*
4::00 PM - 4:15 PM	**Coffee Break**	
4:15 PM – 6:15 PM	**Panel 2: Beyond Geopolitics: Sustainability, Society, and Identity in the Middle East** Zoom ID: **527 287 0622** Password: **210542**	**Chair: Dr Abdul Jalil** **1. Lihong Yun and Xiaowei Kong** Lihong Yun: Associate Professor at Faculty of Business, Hong Kong Chu Hai College. Xiaowei Kong: Department Head and Associate Professor at Faculty of Business - Department of Finance, Hong Kong Chu Hai College. *Topic: Digital Innovative FDI in Israel – with reference to Chinese firms* **2. Liu Han** Institute of Middle East Studies, School of International Relations and Public Affairs, Shanghai International Studies University. *Topic: The Syrian Druze Cross-Border Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Nabi Shuʿayb in Israel and Its Multifaceted Impacts* **3. Shaimerden Chikanayev** PhD researcher at the Faculty of Law, Chinese University of Hong Kong

		Topic: Gulf Investments in Central Asia and the Role of Public-Private Partnerships in Pursuing a Just Energy Transition **4. Wu Yongling** Master's student majoring in International Relations at Shanghai International Studies University. *Topic: Hydrogen Cooperation Between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Multi-Level Perspective* **5. Sumbal Javed** Senior research assistant at the Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute (NSBRRI) of the Hong Kong Chu Hai College *Topic: Humanitarian and Development Cooperation in Crisis-Vulnerable BRI Countries*
6:15 – 6: 30 PM	**Closing Remarks** Zoom ID: 527 287 0622 Password: 210542	**Prof. Thomas CHAN Man-Hung**, Director, Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chua Hai College. **Dr. Nadeem AKHTAR**, *Organizing Committee Chair* Associate Professor Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chua Hai College.

From War to a New Economic Order:
The Middle East Conflict as a Geoeconomic Shock to the Asian System

Prof. Dr Abdul Jalil (Pakistan)

Abstract



The closure of the Strait of Hormuz against the backdrop of the Middle East conflict in February 2026 is generally viewed as a security crisis and its spillover effects on the global energy market. Now, the literature is well aware of it. However, this paper will present a different perspective.

We argue that the conflict creates a geoeconomic shock to the Asian system. The effects of this conflict will persist even after the war ends. We frame it as a geoeconomic shock instead of a security shock. It acknowledges that the shock has already altered the fundamental parameters of the pre-war Asian economic order. Because it effects factors like risk pricing for energy routes, supply chain design, the reliability of remittance channels, and existing security guarantees. Therefore, we argue that the Asian economic architecture will depend more on the geoeconomic adjustments of the states and firms instead of security.

We postulate three interlocking transmission channels. First, a well-known adverse impact of energy disruptions on global inflation and the financial conditions of economies. Second, maritime disruptions caused by shipping and insurance costs, as well as supply chain redesign. This has already shifted maritime trade and services from an efficiency-oriented model to a resilience-oriented one. Third, the least discussed, the erosion of confidence in a single security guarantor. This has transformed alliance formation into defense-industrial cooperation.

Beyond these channels, the role of China requires special attention. China is a principal buyer of Iranian oil and a key investor in the BRI project across the Gulf. Despite that China did not act as a mediator but set it priorities on the economic fronts. Therefore, we may argue that this strategy is not undermine the role of China but rather views it as a deliberate strategic choice. China has prioritized deepening economic ties over acting as a security guarantor in the region. This approach indicates that the geoeconomics adjustments in the region and demands further analytical examination.

Pakistan caught a special attention as security mediator. But, Pakistan occupies an ambiguous position in this context. Importantly, this is the central empirical puzzle of the paper. During this period, despite having a central role in mediation, Pakistan has been drastically affected by rising energy import costs, external financing pressures, and a reliance on remittances from Gulf region. On the other hand, Joint Defense Agreements in Makkah with Saudi Arabia and Turkey have opened new avenues for defense-industrial cooperation.

However, this paper does not take an extreme stance. That is, neither these situations are very optimistic nor catastrophic. For instance, Pakistan has managed to offset the vulnerability of its external accounts but has not fully resolved. Similarly, the narrative of a ‘strategic opportunity’ has not yet translated into tangible investment or construction activity or financial flows.

Furthermore, the agreement with Saudi Arabia and Turkey is not being viewed as a 'Muslim NATO'. Therefore, we shall focus on the analysis keeping above mentioned three transmission channels in view. Consequently, this paper aims to provide an analysis rather than deliver a definitive verdict.

The main argument of the paper is that there should be unified framework to analyse energy security, supply chain economics, alliance formation, and the reconstruction of political economies in framing geoeconomic order. The aim is to understand unfolding developments holistically rather than generating fragmented bodies of literature. The main finding of the paper is that the post-war Middle East will not merely alter the pre-war economic order. But, it will also reflect the priorities of key players in the region, such as the Gulf states, Turkey, China, and South Asian economies, regarding how the region's disrupted architecture can be transformed into a durable one.

Keywords: Middle East Conflict, Geoeconomic Order, China, Asian system and South Asia

Prof. Dr Abdul Jalil, Professor of Economics, (Director ORIC and Head of Department of Economics),National Defence University Islamabad, Pakistan, mailto:abdul.jalil@ndu.edu.pk, jalil.hanif@gmail.com Contact: 0312-3199699, https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=h--6riAAAAAJ&hl=en, Citations= 6000, Web of Science Researcher ID R-9968-2019 ,WOS H Index =16, Impact Factor =115

The Middle East from Hong Kong and East Asian Perspective: The Role of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Lord Edwin E. Hitti (Lebanon)

Abstract



This paper examines the Middle East through the lens of Hong Kong and broader East Asia, focusing on the transformative role of the Belt and Road Initiative. It explores how the BRI functions as a contemporary Silk Road, generating infrastructure development, expanded trade flows, and investment opportunities across Arab states through cooperative, mutually beneficial frameworks.

Particular attention is given to Hong Kong's distinctive position as a stable financial and commercial hub that can channel capital, expertise, and enterprise between the Arab world and East Asian markets. Opportunities in Islamic finance, sustainable energy, technology, and high-tech innovation are highlighted, alongside practical considerations for overcoming regulatory, logistical, and institutional differences. The discussion underscores the potential for deeper economic integration, risk diversification, and long-term partnership under the BRI, positioning East Asia—and Hong Kong in particular—as a vital partner in the Middle East's evolving global engagement.

***Keywords*:** Hong Kong, Arab World, Middle East, East Asia, Belt and Road Initiative, Islamic Finance

Lord Edwin E. Hitti is the President of the Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Arab Cham) in Hong Kong. He is a prominent leader connecting Greater China and the Middle East. He holds his title by Act of Lineage and has decades of experience as a mediator and policy advisor to heads of state, governments, and private enterprises, specialising in market capitalisation and sustainable cross-border policies. He has a background in economics and commercial diplomacy.

War without Settlement in the Middle East: Partial Control and Escalation Substitution in the Iran–Israel–United States Conflict

Evidence from Twenty-Seven Rounds of Structured Simulation

Dr Mohsen Solhdoost (Iran)

Abstract



The Iran–Israel–United States conflict has become a test of how political and security order is maintained across the Middle East when neither war nor peace adequately describes the regional condition. Direct strikes can subside while coercion persists through maritime restrictions, blockade, sanctions, proxy theatres, nuclear uncertainty, and commercial risk. Negotiated pauses may therefore be neither durable settlements nor simple failures. They can reorganise where pressure is exercised, which actors acquire leverage, and which channels become capable of vetoing a wider agreement. Why do periods of restraint repeatedly reduce one form of violence without producing stable de-escalation, and what does this reveal about the emerging order of the Middle East? This keynote argues that the conflict has produced a regime of partial control sustained by escalation substitution. Partial control exists when the principal actors retain sufficient capacity to prevent continuous maximum escalation but lack the collective authority, trust, and verification mechanisms required to create settlement or restore normal circulation. Escalation substitution describes the related process through which restraint in one channel may be accompanied by renewed pressure in another. Bilateral diplomacy can reduce direct exchanges while leaving maritime enforcement, economic coercion, proxy autonomy, or an excluded theatre to carry the conflict forward. The result is not uncontrolled chaos, but a recurrent redistribution of coercion across military, diplomatic, economic, legal, and logistical domains. The argument draws on twenty-seven sequential rounds of an evidence-adjudicated Israel–Iran–United States conflict simulation. The simulation is used as a structured evidentiary instrument rather than as the subject of the keynote or a claim to predictive certainty. Each round converts public evidence into conditional scenarios while preserving source disagreement, missing information, and uncertainty about occurrence, attribution, and effects. Because the rounds employed evolving evidence windows, model components, and, in some cases, different frozen forecast contracts, their probabilities are not pooled as a homogeneous time series. The analysis instead compares turning points, changes in the modelled centre of gravity, and corrections that altered how the same strategic problem was interpreted. Issued forecasts also remain separate from subsequent events: post-cutoff developments provide current context but do not retroactively modify a completed round. The cross-round sequence reveals four recurring patterns.

First, ceasefires can be operationally real yet strategically incomplete. Round 15 reduced immediate rupture pressure but retained pathways for theatre leakage and renewed coercive bargaining. Second, risk changes location as well as intensity. Rounds 16–17 moved the centre of the crisis towards maritime enforcement and connected pressure at Hormuz with Bab al-Mandeb and the Red Sea. Third, the present condition and the forward pathway must be kept analytically separate. Rounds 23–24 demonstrated how a non-saturated current escalation state could coexist with a serious high-end scenario tail when maritime access, diplomatic implementation, and cross-theatre control remained unresolved. Fourth, later rounds show a change in the form of escalation

rather than a linear movement towards either peace or regional collapse. Round 25 was led by sharp escalation over the short and medium term and by sustained direct war at the longest horizon. Round 26 placed sustained high-intensity direct war at the centre of every horizon. Round 27 then shifted to an almost even first-week division between bounded coercion and sharp retaliatory expansion – 49.93 and 49.56 per cent respectively – before sharp escalation became dominant. Sustained direct war and regional control loss remained small in that round. This does not indicate normalisation. It marks a movement from sustained direct war towards protracted retaliation without verified standdown. Developments through 26 August sharpen this interpretation without serving as a mechanical validation of Round 27. Large-scale United States–Iran hostilities had largely subsided, but the June memorandum's negotiating period expired without a wider settlement. Shipping attacks continued, Washington intensified economic pressure, Iran continued to assert authority over selective passage, and Iran and Oman were discussing a temporary navigational corridor and joint mine-clearing arrangements. Military de-escalation and coercive institutionalisation were thus unfolding at the same time. The broader contribution is to distinguish containment from settlement. Regional security cannot be assessed only by counting strikes or estimating the probability of catastrophic widening. A condition of partial control may avoid the worst scenario while remaining violent, economically damaging, and institutionally durable. A viable security architecture must therefore govern transitions between fighting, ceasefire, and normal circulation. This requires linked verification across theatres, mechanisms for managing actors capable of vetoing bargains, accepted arrangements for maritime passage, and attention to commercial indicators such as insurability, documentation, and route confidence. For Asian and Hong Kong audiences, the significance of the conflict lies not only in dependence on Persian Gulf energy. It lies in how an unstable Middle Eastern order reallocates risk across shipping, finance, trade, and interregional connectivity.

Keywords: Middle East, United States, Iran, Diplomacy, Persian Gulf Energy

Prof. Mohsen Solhdoost is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, P.R.China

Digital Innovative FDI in Israel – with reference to Chinese firms

Dr. Lihong Yun and Dr. Xiaowei Kong (Hong Kong SAR)

Abstract




Foreign direct investment (FDI) has long been recognized as a central mechanism through which firms internationalize, expand their global footprint, and integrate into diverse host economies. The theoretical foundation most widely applied to explain FDI dynamics is Dunning's Eclectic Paradigm, or the OLI framework, which emphasizes the interplay of ownership, location, and internalization advantages. While the paradigm has traditionally been applied to developed economies—where firms rely on advanced ownership advantages such as patents, R&D, and brand equity, and host countries offer sophisticated infrastructure and regulatory frameworks—its relevance to emerging economies remains profound. This study seeks to extend the application of the OLI framework by examining Israel's FDI trajectory as a case study and deriving lessons for China's outward FDI strategy under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly in the context of non-traditional security threats.

Israel provides a compelling example of how a small economy can achieve disproportionate influence in global FDI flows. Despite persistent geopolitical challenges and security risks, Israel has emerged as a "Start-up Nation," leveraging its innovation ecosystem, human capital, and strategic geography to attract multinational corporations in sectors such as technology, pharmaceuticals, and defense. Ownership advantages in Israel are rooted in strong intellectual property regimes, world-class universities, and a culture of entrepreneurship that fosters continuous innovation. Location advantages stem from Israel's position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, coupled with government incentives, tax breaks, and R&D grants that enhance its attractiveness to foreign investors. Internalization advantages are evident in the way Israeli firms safeguard proprietary technologies and maintain operational control, ensuring that sensitive innovations are not easily replicated by competitors.

Together, these factors illustrate how the OLI paradigm operates in practice within a developed economy marked by unique geopolitical constraints. The Israeli case also underscores the importance of resilience in the face of non-traditional security threats. Unlike traditional security concerns centered on military conflict, non-traditional threats encompass cybersecurity risks, public health crises, environmental challenges, and transnational crime. Israel's ability to attract FDI despite these challenges demonstrates that innovation-driven economies can mitigate risks by embedding resilience into their investment strategies.

For China, which seeks to expand its global footprint through the Belt and Road Initiative, the lessons are particularly salient. The BRI spans diverse regions, many of which are characterized by weak institutions, fragile infrastructures, and heightened exposure to non-traditional threats.

Chinese firms must therefore adapt their outward FDI strategies to account for these vulnerabilities. This study highlights three strategic pathways for Chinese firms under the BRI, derived from Israel's experience. First, strengthening ownership advantages is critical. Chinese enterprises must move beyond cost-based competitiveness and invest in intellectual property protection, R&D, branding, and technological leadership. By emulating Israel's emphasis on innovation, Chinese firms can enhance their global competitiveness and reduce dependence on low-cost production. Second, leveraging location advantages along the Belt and Road offers opportunities to access emerging markets and resource-rich regions. Infrastructure projects, energy investments, and digital connectivity initiatives can broaden China's global presence, but firms must remain cognizant of host-country vulnerabilities and embed risk management strategies into their investment decisions. Third, safeguarding internalization advantages is essential. Chinese firms must protect proprietary technologies and ensure operational control, particularly in joint ventures and partnerships where risks of technology leakage are high. Internalization strategies also help firms navigate regulatory uncertainty and political risk, ensuring sustainable integration into diverse host economies. The research adopts a dual methodological approach.

A literature review synthesizes recent scholarship on FDI patterns, with emphasis on developed economies where innovation-driven industries dominate investment flows. A case study of Israel illustrates how the OLI paradigm operates in practice, focusing on high-tech clusters, government incentives, and multinational R&D centers. By synthesizing Israel's FDI experience with Dunning's OLI framework, the study underscores the enduring relevance of the eclectic paradigm in explaining investment flows in developed economies.

At the same time, it highlights strategic pathways for Chinese firms to leverage OLI advantages in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, thereby integrating innovation-driven strategies with global economic expansion. Beyond theoretical contributions, the study emphasizes the practical implications of non-traditional security threats for FDI. Cybersecurity risks threaten intellectual property and data integrity, requiring firms to invest in robust digital defenses. Public health crises, such as pandemics, disrupt supply chains and investment flows, underscoring the need for contingency planning and diversification. Environmental challenges, including climate change, affect resource availability and infrastructure resilience, necessitating sustainable investment practices. Geopolitical volatility, including terrorism and transnational crime, complicates investment decisions and requires firms to embed resilience into their global strategies.

Israel's ability to attract FDI despite these challenges demonstrates that innovation-driven economies can mitigate risks by embedding resilience into their investment strategies. For China, operating along the Belt and Road means confronting diverse host environments where non-traditional threats are often more pronounced. Chinese firms must therefore adapt their outward FDI strategies to account for these vulnerabilities. In conclusion, Israel's FDI trajectory, viewed through Dunning's OLI framework, underscores the enduring relevance of ownership, location, and internalization advantages in shaping global investment flows.

Despite facing non-traditional security threats, Israel has leveraged innovation and strategic geography to attract disproportionate levels of FDI. For China, the Belt and Road Initiative represents both opportunity and challenge. By strengthening ownership advantages through innovation, harnessing location advantages across diverse regions, and safeguarding

internalization strategies, Chinese firms can achieve sustainable integration into global markets. At the same time, they must remain vigilant against non-traditional security threats, embedding

resilience into their outward FDI strategies. Ultimately, the Israeli case offers valuable lessons for China's global economic expansion: innovation, resilience, and strategic control are indispensable in navigating the complexities of international investment in the 21st century.

Keywords: FDI, Dunning's Eclectic Paradigm, Innovation Ecosystem, Belt and Road Initiative

Dr Yun, Lihong (雲麗虹) is an Economist, with a background in Applied Econometrics, Applied Economics, Development Economics, Scandinavian Economies, Labour Economics, International Trade, E-commerce, Digital Leadership and Strategy Management.
Dr KONG Xiaowei (孔笑微) is Head of the Department and Associate Professor, Department of Finance, Chu Hai College of Higher Education. Contact Information: 80 Castle Peak Road, Castle Peak Bay, Tuen Mun, N.T., Hong Kong; Tel: +852-62715856; Email: viviankong@chuhai.edu.hk

The Future of the Arab Gulf States After the US War on Iran

Dr Haytham Mouzahem (Lebanon)

Abstract



Since the victory of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Arab Gulf states have viewed the Islamic regime in Iran as a threat to their own systems and security, for several reasons. Following the outbreak of the US-Israeli war on Iran on February 28, 2026, Iran launched surprise attacks on the Arab Gulf states and Jordan, using missiles and drones, in a trajectory marked by gradual escalation and an expanding scope of targets. Despite the Gulf states' commitment to restraint and their interception of these attacks with anti-missile systems, serious questions are now being raised about the future of the Gulf regional security system.

The strategic conclusion is clear: the matter of open-ended US guarantees for the Gulf states is over. What is required is not a break with Washington, but a redefinition of the relationship through transitioning from reliance on America to partnership with it, building genuine self-defence capabilities, not just arms accumulation, enhancing regional coordination to reduce collective vulnerability, and diversifying international relations, as seen in the Mecca Defence Agreement between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan.

Keywords: Arab Gulf States, Iran, US, Defence, Israel

Dr Haytham Mouzahem, a research fellow at the Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute (NSBRRI) of the Hong Kong Chu Hai College. He is the founding director of the Centre for Asian and Chinese Studies in Lebanon. Contact: hmouzahem@chuhai.edu.hk

What the Israel-Hamas and Iran Wars Reveal About China's Middle East Strategy

Jocelyn Chau (Hong Kong SAR)

Abstract



Over the past decade, the US and China have responded to events and instability in the Middle East through markedly distinct strategic postures. As the ongoing Iran war and recurrent military interventions have eroded Washington's diplomatic credibility and its standing as a reliable security guarantor, analysts have increasingly looked to Beijing as a potential counterweight or alternative pillar in the post-war regional order. Paradoxically, China has expanded its economic and diplomatic footprint across the region while conspicuously avoiding direct entanglement in military conflicts, prompting sustained debate over the nature and direction of great-power competition in the Middle East.

This paper contends that great-power influence in the Middle East cannot be adequately understood through material capabilities alone; rather, it is co-constituted by discursive framing and political identity construction. Military presence, institutional aid, and bilateral trade volumes acquire strategic salience only insofar as they are mediated by the normative and identity-based lenses through which great powers perceive and engage the region. Accordingly, this study advances a comparative qualitative analysis of US and Chinese foreign policy discourses, interrogating how each power conceptualizes its role in the Middle East and how these conceptualizations translate into divergent policy outcomes.

The analysis juxtaposes the longstanding American paradigm, characterized by a securitized "Othering" framework that constructs a binary "Us vs Them" divide, particularly in the post-9/11 era, with China's alternative approach, which frames Arab states as "equals" and "partners" through the principles of sovereign equality, non-interference, and win-win cooperation. While US policy has been predominantly shaped by threat perceptions and military-centric responses, China's strategy of "economic relationalism" prioritizes trade, energy security, and infrastructure investment, eschewing security commitments in favor of flexible, issue-specific partnerships. By tracing how these distinct normative paradigms inform military interventions, strategic alliances, and diplomatic responses to regional crises, the paper illuminates the mechanisms through which identity constructions shape great-power behavior and, in turn, reconfigure the Middle East's evolving multipolar order.

Keywords: US, China, Middle East, Us vs Them

Jocelyn Chau is an independent geopolitical and policy analyst specialising in international relations, colonialism, and forced migration in the Middle East and China. She spent a year in Amman, Jordan, where she reported for the Jordan Times on bilateral diplomatic relations between Jordan and China, the Kingdom's acute water scarcity challenges, and the regional refugee crisis. She also gained hands-on experience at the Education Department of UNRWA, where she worked closely with Palestinian refugee communities. Email: jocelynchau20@gmail.com

The Syrian Druze Cross-Border Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Nabi Shuʿayb in Israel and Its Multifaceted Impacts

Liu Han (China)

Abstract



Pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prophet Shu'ayb, as an important religious ritual for the transnational Druze community, serves multiple functions, including fostering religious faith, strengthening communal identity and reinforcing collective memory; it also provides a vital window through which to observe the transnational connections and regional political interactions of minority groups in the Middle East. This article examines the origins and current status of the pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Prophet Shu'ayb. It explores the historical background and process of Syrian Druze pilgrimages to the holy site prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948; the reasons why Syrian Druze pilgrimages to Israel were obstructed following the state's establishment; and the circumstances surrounding the 2025 cross-border pilgrimage by Syrian Druze to Israel. The article further explores the impact of this pilgrimage on Israeli-Syrian relations. It is concluded that this pilgrimage has, in the short term, restored cross-border pilgrimage ties and religious exchanges between the Druze communities of Israel and Syria, reinforced Israel's narrative of 'protecting its Druze brothers', and simultaneously deepened political tensions between the Syrian Druze community and the new Syrian government.

Keywords: Syria; Israel; the Druze community; the Shu'ayb Tomb pilgrimage; Israeli-Syrian relations

Liu Han is a doctoral student in Middle East Studies at Shanghai International Studies University. Her research focuses on the modern history and contemporary politics of the Middle East, with particular interests in Syrian political transition, international recognition, minority-state relations, refugee issues, environmental governance, and the regional politics of Druze communities.

Defiance Over Capitulation:
Understanding Iran's Resistance to U.S. Coercive Strategy

Syed Ali Zia Jaffery (Pakistan)

Abstract



The ongoing U.S.–Israeli war of aggression against Iran has demonstrated the limits of U.S. coercive power. Threats of annihilation, the use of excessive military force, and economic punishment have failed to coerce Tehran into accepting Washington's core demands. Iran has neither agreed to abandon its nuclear program nor relinquished its control over the Strait of Hormuz. This apparent coercive failure is explained by burgeoning scholarship on coercion, which finds that material superiority does not guarantee coercive success. Scholars have identified several factors that make coercive success difficult, including inadequate coercive assurances, demand magnitude, and the target's fear of incurring the reputational costs associated with compliance. While these factors have certainly contributed to the failure of U.S. coercion, this paper investigates another aspect of the puzzle: why has Iran consistently chosen defiance over capitulation?

This paper argues that Iran's resistance is a key plank of its grand strategy, which seeks to safeguard the country's sovereignty and strategic autonomy in the face of Western aggression. According to this standpoint, Iranian resistance is not only attributable to its Islamic ideology. Rather, the Iranian leadership views capitulation to U.S. coercion as costlier than resistance. To Iran, the abandonment of its nuclear program, the surrendering of strategic leverage over the Strait of Hormuz, and the acceptance of U.S.-imposed strategic constraints could make it vulnerable and externally dependent. Therefore, Iran has shown a greater willingness to endure significant military and economic punishment while continuing to defy the U.S. and impose costs on its adversaries.

It builds on recent scholarship by Vali Nasr and Sino Azodi, which warns against seeing Tehran's behavior primarily through an Islamic ideology prism. Their work underscores the significant role of Iran's historical experiences, security sensibilities, strategic autonomy, and resistance to external domination. This paper extends that scholarship by examining how these strategic imperatives have shaped Iranian behavior during the ongoing war. It asks this question: Why has Iran continued to resist U.S. coercive pressure despite the escalating costs of non-compliance, including the actual use of brute force?

The paper answers this question by carrying out a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, emphasizing statements by senior Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, from the onset of the war on February 28, 2026. It assesses Iranian responses to successive U.S. demands, threats, military actions, and diplomatic initiatives to identify how Tehran has determined the costs of resistance and compliance. The findings suggest that Iran's behavior defies this conventional logic: increasing the costs of resistance should eventually exact

compellence. The paper finds that Iran sees acquiescence as anathema to its sovereignty, security, and strategic autonomy.

I conclude the paper by examining the broader strategic implications of this resistance for not only the Gulf but also the entire Middle East. Iran's proven ability to resist coercive pressure despite U.S. military superiority raises questions about the effectiveness of U.S. coercive strategy in establishing a propitious regional order. It also highlights that when coercion relies on the use of brute force and seeks to threaten the target's survival, conflicts could become intractable.

Keywords: Coercion, Grand Strategy, Resistance

Syed Ali Zia Jaffery is Deputy Director, Center for Security, Strategy and Policy Research, University of Lahore, and Associate Editor, Pakistan Politico Ali was a Visiting Fellow at the Stimson Center, Washington, D.C. Ali regularly writes on strategic issues for national and international publications, to include Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Routledge, South Asian Voices , The National Interest, The Atlantic Council, Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN), CSIS, The Diplomat, Dawn, and 9DashLine, among others. Ali is an alumnus of Woodrow Wilson Center's Nuclear Proliferation International History Project's Nuclear History Boot Camp.

Systemic Pressure, Development Orientation, and the Evolution of ASEAN–GCC Relations

Tang Ying (China)

Abstract



The evolution of ASEAN–GCC relations is fundamentally shaped by the interaction between systemic pressure and development orientation, exhibiting clear stage-based characteristics and a logic of hierarchical progression. Across different periods, variations in the intensity of these two variables and their modes of coupling have determined both the form and depth of interregional cooperation.

From 1990 to 2008, under a U.S.-dominated unipolar order, systemic pressure remained relatively low and external structural constraints were insufficient to stimulate deeper interregional cooperation. The United States maintained close security and economic ties with both ASEAN and the GCC, largely satisfying their external needs and reducing incentives to pursue cooperation for hedging or diversification purposes. At the same time, both regions prioritized internal integration and institution-building, reflecting a predominantly inward-oriented development trajectory. Consequently, ASEAN–GCC interactions remained sporadic and loosely structured, with relations largely confined to an initial formative stage.

Between 2009 and 2020, the gradual transition toward a more multipolar international system and intensifying great-power competition increased systemic pressure on both regions. As important geopolitical nodes in the evolving strategic landscape, ASEAN and the GCC faced growing security and economic uncertainties. Simultaneously, divergences with the United States on selected functional issues weakened existing dependency structures. Nevertheless, institutional fragmentation, divergent member-state interests, and persistent regional conflicts continued to constrain both organizations. These challenges absorbed significant political and diplomatic resources, limiting their capacity for sustained external engagement. As a result, although development orientation displayed a partial outward shift, it failed to generate a stable cooperative momentum, and ASEAN–GCC relations remained largely functional and symbolic, characterized by limited cooperation.

Since 2021, systemic pressure has intensified further as great-power competition has expanded into institutional, technological, and developmental domains. Divergences between ASEAN, the GCC, and the United States have increasingly reflected differences in development pathways and strategic autonomy rather than specific policy disputes. Meanwhile, both regions have strengthened internal coordination and organizational cohesion, while a relatively improved regional security environment has created greater space for external engagement. The combined effect of heightened systemic pressure and a more outward-oriented development orientation has promoted ASEAN–GCC relations toward a more institutionalized stage of cooperation.

This process has also been accompanied by a structural transformation from predominantly bilateral interactions to multilateral coordination and cross-regional networked cooperation. The

ASEAN–China–GCC Trilateral Summit in 2025 marked an important shift from a dual-actor framework to a broader multi-actor cooperative mechanism. Beyond reflecting growing strategic convergence among participating actors, this development highlights an emerging Global South practice of enhancing collective action through institutional innovation, thereby strengthening strategic autonomy and contributing new forms of stability within an increasingly uncertain international system.

Keywords: ASEAN; Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Systemic Pressure; Development Orientation; Interregionalism

Ying Tang is affiliated with the Institute of Middle East Studies, School of International Relations and Public Affairs, Shanghai International Studies University. Mailing Address: Shanghai International Studies University, No. 1550 Wenxiang Road, Songjiang District, Shanghai 201620, China Contact E-mail: 3467633384@qq.com、0234101560@shisu.edu.cn

Pakistan's Strategic Pivot:
From Mediator to Pillar of Middle Eastern Stability

S. M. Fakhar Hayat (Pakistan)

Abstract



In an era of cascading crises across the Middle East, Pakistan has rapidly transformed from a cautious peripheral actor into an indispensable stakeholder and potential stabiliser in the Middle East. As the sole nuclear-armed Muslim-majority state—bolstered historically by Saudi financial and political support—Pakistan brings unique strategic weight to the region. Its deep, decades-old defence partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Turkey culminated in the August 2026 Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, a NATO-style collective security pact that treats an attack on any one member as an attack on all. This alliance, activated in October 2026 amid Houthi threats to the holy sites, positions Pakistani forces and deterrence capabilities at the heart of protecting Mecca, Medina, and Gulf security.

Simultaneously, Pakistan's successful mediation of the Islamabad Memorandum between the United States and Iran demonstrated its rare ability to bridge adversarial divides, leveraging geographic proximity to Iran, historical ties across the Muslim world, and credible channels to all major parties. With its western border running through restive Balochistan and the strategically vital Gwadar Port at the core of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Islamabad's own security is now inextricably linked to Persian Gulf stability. Amid emerging alliances among India, UAE, and Israel, the Middle East has become a chessboard for regional players, particularly with the formation of I2U2. Pakistan's dual-track approach—firm collective defence commitments paired with persistent diplomacy—reflects a broader shift toward regional self-reliance. In balancing military depth, nuclear deterrence, and diplomatic agility, Pakistan is no longer merely reacting to Middle Eastern turbulence; it is actively shaping the emerging security architecture and emerging as a pivotal force for de-escalation and durable order.

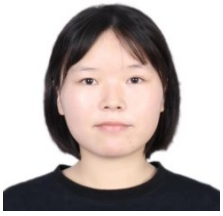
Keywords: Middle East, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Mecca Pact, Islamabad Pact, I2U2, Stability

S. M. Fakhar Hayat is a research fellow at the Ng Teng Fong Sino-Group Belt and Road Research Institute at Hong Kong Chu Hai College. Has authored a book under War Chronicles, explaining how the conflict in the Middle East has had a deep impact on South Asia and Central Asia for the last four decades.

Hydrogen Cooperation Between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council: A Multi-Level Perspective

Wu Yongling (China)

Abstract



This paper argues that developing hydrogen energy is central to countries achieving energy transition and fulfilling their nationally determined contributions in the climate domain. The immature nature of the hydrogen industry in areas such as technology and regulations has spurred international cooperation. The foundation for EU-GCC hydrogen collaboration lies in: complementary resources and markets in hydrogen production;well-established hydrogen strategies reducing cooperation barriers; and prior energy cooperation experiences providing valuable references.The driving forces behind this collaboration include the urgency for both regions to fulfill their NDCs, the necessity to safeguard regional energy security, and the shared objective of enhancing global energy governance influence through hydrogen cooperation. Key areas of collaboration encompass interregional mechanism development, regional and national standard alignment, and comprehensive value chain partnerships between nations.Challenges to EU-GCC hydrogen cooperation manifest in three key areas: inconsistent hydrogen production standards, policy divergences between the EU and GCC, and the presence of alternative external hydrogen cooperation partners for both sides. To address these challenges, the EU and GCC should expedite mutual recognition of standards, advance regional policy coordination, and conduct practical hydrogen implementation workshops to deepen bilateral cooperation.

Keywords: Hydrogen energy cooperation; EU-GCC relations; Clean energy

Wu Yongling is a second-year master's student majoring in International Relations at Shanghai International Studies University, with her primary research focus on Middle East studies.

Gulf Investments in Central Asia and the Role of Public-Private Partnerships in Pursuing a Just Energy Transition

Shaimerden Chikanayev (Kazakhstan)

Abstract



Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are widely recognised as important legal instruments and policy tools for attracting private investment in energy infrastructure, and there is growing acknowledgement of their potential to enable a just energy transition. A just energy transition is generally understood as a low-carbon transition that is fair, inclusive and leaves no one behind, whereas PPP is understood as a special category of contracts in which the State or a public entity is the counterparty. The presenter argues that the success of the just energy transition worldwide depends on the promotion of the new "PPPs for Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) concept, which requires not only "value for money" but also "value for people" and "value for the planet". The Gulf investments in Central Asian renewable energy projects currently being implemented provide a useful case study of how a failure by local governments in Central Asia to use PPP as a legal instrument for attracting Gulf investment can enable an unjust energy transition in the region.

Since 2022, Gulf states have significantly increased clean energy investment in Central Asia, with investment stock reaching USD 22.8 billion in 2025, a 2.5-fold rise over five years. Over sixty active projects now operate in the region, making Gulf capital a structural component of Central Asia's investment landscape. The power sector has been the main beneficiary, its share of total investment stock growing from 2 per cent to 33 per cent.

This paper examines the legal instruments facilitating this investment, asking whether they promote sustainable infrastructure and a just energy transition or risk entrenching dependency and unjust outcomes. It compares two approaches: Kazakhstan's reliance on *ad hoc* legal regimes combining intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) as international treaties that prevail over conflicting provisions of local law, government investment agreements and power purchase agreements with a single state-owned offtaker; and Uzbekistan's use of universally applicable domestic law on PPPs as the preferred legal instrument for renewable energy development with Gulf investors.

Methodologically, the paper combines doctrinal analysis of domestic laws and ratified intergovernmental agreements with a comparative case study of two flagship projects: the Masdar-led Zhambyl wind and battery storage project in Kazakhstan and ACWA Power's Samarkand solar photovoltaic projects in Uzbekistan. It draws on publicly available project documentation, investment treaty texts and legal and policy frameworks.

The paper finds that Kazakhstan's approach, which grants certain foreign investors from certain foreign countries exclusive tax exemptions, guaranteed power purchase tariffs and insulation from domestic regulatory changes and currency risks through confidential and opaque investment contracts awarded without any open public tender, does not enable a just energy transition. Projects

developed under such *ad hoc* regimes are unlikely to deliver the "value for people" and "value for planet" dimensions of the SDG agenda. By contrast, Uzbekistan's PPP-based approach offers greater transparency and alignment with international standards, since it relies on universally applicable domestic PPP law that promotes competition and transparency. The choice of legal instrument is therefore not merely technical but carries profound implications for just energy transition and sustainability of energy infrastructure.

The paper concludes with policy recommendations for Central Asian governments. Greater reliance on generally applicable domestic PPP laws, which provide for competitive tendering aligned with international PPP standards, would enhance legal predictability for Gulf investors, preserve the integrity of domestic legal systems and advance the just energy transition imperative. For Gulf sovereign wealth funds, shifting towards PPP legal frameworks would reduce legal risk by embedding project protections in general domestic law rather than in bespoke legal arrangements negotiated with local governments through IGAs, which can be challenged as unconstitutional and may provoke resentment among local populations in Central Asia.

Keywords: Public-Private Partnership (PPPs), Legal Framework, Central Asia, Gulf States

Shaimerden Chikanayev is a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Law, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a Partner at GRATA International Law Firm, one of the leading law firms in Central Asia. He is a qualified advocate of the Almaty City Bar, Kazakhstan, with more than fifteen years of legal experience across the Commonwealth of Independent States, with particular focus on Central Asia. His academic credentials include an LL.M. from Duke University School of Law (USA), a specialist degree (JD equivalent) in Law from the Eurasian National University Faculty of Law (Kazakhstan), and a non-degree course of studies for foreign diplomats at the China Foreign Affairs University (PRC). He is currently on a study sabbatical from GRATA International until 2026 while completing his doctoral research in Hong Kong.

Humanitarian and Development Cooperation in Crisis-Vulnerable BRI Countries

Sumbal Javed (Hong Kong SAR)

Abstract



This policy brief examines how existing partnerships can strengthen continuity between humanitarian assistance, recovery and long-term development in selected crisis-prone Belt and Road (BRI) countries in the Middle East. It considers how bilateral, multilateral, national and local relationships contribute to institutional capacity, country ownership and responsiveness at each stage of a crisis (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021, 2023). The brief uses qualitative policy analysis, drawing on publicly available government documents, BRI cooperation statements, multilateral reports and independent scholarship. It reviews five dimensions of partnership: institutional coordination, consistency with national priorities, participation of local actors, exchange of knowledge and capacity, and continuity between emergency response and development.

It also separates activities formally designated as BRI projects from the wider cooperation that takes place in BRI partner countries. These partnerships add value because their strengths complement one another. Governments bring national leadership and a grounded sense of domestic priorities. Multilateral organizations contribute technical expertise and operational reach. Chinese institutions offer development experience, implementation capacity and a South–South cooperation perspective (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Local actors add contextual knowledge and trusted links to communities impacted. Through this integration, duplication is reduced, further helping to preserve institutional knowledge, moving from emergency to recovery, and ensuring that short-term interventions continue to be aligned with longer-term national priorities. Partnership quality therefore deserves as much attention as the scale or visibility of any single activity. This is reflective of a wider policy emphasis on comparative advantage, national ownership and local participation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019).

Therefore, three priority areas are identified: utilizing existing coordination platforms; strengthening communication, collaboration and institutional learning across partnerships; and bringing national and local institutions into priority-setting and implementation earlier on. Together, these measures can deepen relationships and ensure that planning reflects those who will sustain results. (OECD, 2019). By combining these complementary competencies with

national ownership and sustained local participation, BRI cooperation can support a more coherent and context-sensitive path from immediate assistance to recovery and resilience instead of imposing a single model: more practical learning across very different partnership settings must be encouraged (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019; State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

Keywords: Belt and Road, Middle East, Humanitarian, Development, Crisis

Sumbal Javed is a senior research assistant at the Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute, Hong Kong Chu Hai College. Research interests focus on public health policy, global health governance, health financing, and international development, with particular attention to the Belt and Road Initiative and the Health Silk Road. Additional interests include cross-border cooperation, institutional partnerships, and equitable health systems, examining how policy and collaboration can support sustainable health and development outcomes across diverse regional contexts.

香港珠海學院
HONG KONG
CHU HAI COLLEGE

黃廷方·信和
NSBRRI
一帶一路研究院

Ng Teng Fong · Sino Group Belt and Road Research Institute
Hong Kong Chu Hai College

80 Castle Peak Road, Castle Peak Bay,
Tuen Mun, New Territories. Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2972 7337
Fax: (852) 2972 7367
Email: obor@chuhai.edu.hk
Website: https://obor.chuhai.edu.hk/