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Recalibration of China's Policy towards WANA: Greater Political and Security Cooperation?

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China's policy towards the region it terms West Asia and North Africa (WANA)¹ used to focus on economic cooperation, but since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, political and security matters have been gaining importance. China's main goal remains to build its position as the region's key partner, creditor, investor, and contributor to their development. As such, China is now seeking to challenge U.S. interests and even gradually replace it as the key stakeholder in WANA. To secure its own key interests and reduce terrorism threats, China is also seriously considering the possibility of the use of force in the WANA region.

After the period of opening-up in the 1990s, China developed its relations with the WANA region (e.g., re-established diplomatic relations with Israel), but without seeking political influence in the region. Except for Israel, China generally focused on economic and energy cooperation to satisfy its rapid domestic growth needs and to carry out the South-South cooperation model—China's preferred cooperation mechanism between developing countries.² China's strategy towards WANA was to ensure the region's stability (*wei-wen*) and keep the existing formats of political-economic cooperation. China's ultimate goal was to support the Communist Party of China's (CPC) main economic targets, such as growth.

¹ "West Asia North Africa" (WANA, *xiya beifei*) includes countries in the Middle East (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates) and North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia). It is equivalent to MENA (Middle East, North Africa).

² The South–South development model is a cooperation format between developing states (countries of the "Global South"). It implies an exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge.

Consolidating Its Economic Position in WANA

Trade volume increased steadily and China became the main supplier of goods to the region.³ China's share of WANA countries' exports rose from 4% in 2001 to 13% in 2016.⁴ The same period also saw a boost in Chinese investment in the region.⁵

China has constantly tried to reconfigure the structure of its energy resource deliveries and to increase the share of renewable sources. But WANA remains an important source of hydrocarbons.⁶ In 2017, almost half of the crude oil imported to China came from the Middle East, buying \$142.8 million from Yemen to \$15.6 billion from Saudi Arabia.⁷

While engaging economically in the region, China saw a constant deterioration in the regional security situation, culminating in the Arab Spring⁸ and Saudi-Iran rivalry. What particularly affected China was the rise of ISIS and its ties to members of the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang province. In response, China decided to implement solutions that, first, allowed it to have a stabilising effect on the regional situation through political and military means, and, second, challenge and *gradually* push the U.S. out of the region.⁹

Reasons for the Policy Recalibration

A recalibration of Chinese WANA policy took place in the context of broader changes in Chinese foreign policy during Xi's first term in office (2012-2017). Building up China's international position became the central goal. In the longer term, it was also about reconfiguring the global order into a multi-polar one, with China one of the poles. It evolved through the "striving for achievement"¹⁰ narrative into a concept of building a "new era with Chinese characteristics" and a "community of shared destiny".¹¹ The WANA region was where the application of China's new foreign policy priorities became particularly visible.¹²

There were three main motives behind China's changes in policy towards WANA. First, the Chinese evaluation of the Arab Spring. China considered these events as a threat both to its economic interests in the region and to its internal political stability. It saw the process as the result of a conspiracy of "foreign powers" (mainly the U.S.) to overthrow the region's regimes under the pretext of democracy promotion. There was a widespread belief in the Chinese government apparatus that a similar excuse could be used to

³ Between 2000 and 2014, trade between China and the Middle East grew from \$18 billion to \$312 billion. In 2010, China replaced the U.S. as the biggest trade partner in the region. See: S. Hornschild, "China in the Middle East: not just about oil," *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 13 July 2016, www.iss.europa.eu.

⁴ A. Ghiselli, "China and the Middle East: Growing influence and divergent perceptions," *Middle East Institute*, 17 April 2018, www.mei.edu.

⁵ In 2016, China replaced the U.S. as the largest foreign investor in the region with investments worth \$29.5 billion.

⁶ China's import of oil from OPEC countries in 2017 increased by 7.1% compared to 2016, See: T. Paraskova, "China Becomes World's Next Top Oil Importer," 6 February 2018, www.oilprice.org. In 2017, China's imports of LNG grew by about 46% to 38 million tonnes and Qatar accounts for a fifth of those supplies. See: Liu Zhen, "Crisis-hit Qatar looks to China for a fresh natural gas demand and investment," *South China Morning Post*, 22 April 2018, www.scmp.com.

⁷ Saudi Arabia is second (13.3%); Oman, fourth (\$11.1 billion, 9.6%); Iraq, fifth (\$10.7 billion, 9.1%); Iran, sixth (\$9.4 billion, 8%); Kuwait, eighth (\$4.8 billion, 4.1%); United Arab Emirates, 10th (\$3.9 billion, 3.3%). See: D. Workman, "Top 15 Crude Oil Suppliers to China," 13 January 2018, www.worldstopexports.com.

⁸ "Arab Spring" as used here is defined by the author as a political process in Arab states that started in Tunisia in December 2010 and ended with the formulation of a new Libyan government in October 2011.

⁹ Guo Xiangang, "Middle East: Power restructuring and continuous turmoil," Qu Xing (eds.), "The CIIS Blue Book on International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs (2017)," Beijing 2018, p. 163.

¹⁰ See: M. Przychodniak, "China's Foreign Policy during Xi Jinping's First Term," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No 3/2017, pp. 5-18.

¹¹ See: J. Szczudlik, "Towards a 'New Era' in China's Great Power Diplomacy," *PISM Policy Paper*, No. 1 (161), 15 March 2018, www.pism.pl; N. Roland, "Beijing's Vision for a Reshaped International Order," *China Brief*, Vol. 18, Iss. 3, 26 February 2018, jamestown.org.

¹² E. Fardella, "China's Debate on the Middle East and North Africa: a critical review," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2015, pp. 5-25.

undermine the status quo in China.¹³ The Chinese authorities assessed that the Arab Spring had destabilising effects on WANA,¹⁴ especially in Libya's case.¹⁵ As a result, the Chinese leaders opined that the country's level of involvement in WANA was inadequate.

The second factor was rooted in the concept of "big power diplomacy" (*da guo wai jiao*).¹⁶ WANA became a testing ground for challenging the U.S. as part of Xi's aspirations to increase the area of China's foreign policy. Chinese experts perceived the Barack Obama administration's policy of backing off on the Syrian chemical weapons issue as the first signal and proof of the U.S.'s weakening position,¹⁷ especially in terms of its capacity to act as the decisive power in the region. The current U.S. policy towards WANA even strengthened these views. They saw as unconstructive the Donald Trump administration's decision to strike Syrian targets in response to a chemical attack in April 2017. They also considered the U.S. pro-Saudi and pro-Israeli policies as another source of destabilisation of the region. China's new policy on WANA aimed to exploit these opportunities.

The third factor was the terrorist threat. Both the presence of ISIS in WANA and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement's activity in Xinjiang put China's political and economic interests in jeopardy. ISIS was a direct threat to Chinese investments and workers in Iraq and a destabilising factor for WANA countries. China became one of the targets of "global jihad" and potential terrorist attacks.¹⁸ ISIS even distributed propaganda documents in Mandarin. Chinese authorities constantly evaluated the number of ISIS fighters of Chinese origin at 300 to 1,000. The number of terrorist attacks in China also increased, with about 15 major terrorist incidents between 2011 and 2016. Most of them happened in the Xinjiang region (assaults on police stations, military posts), but some took place in big Chinese cities such as Kunming (2014) or even Beijing (2013).

New Policy Concept

China's new policy concept for WANA was described in its first-ever "China-Arab Policy Paper" published by the government in January 2016. China identified development under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the key element to stabilisation in WANA. China assured regional countries of its support in the "struggle to uphold sovereignty and territorial integrity (...) as well as combat external interference and aggression".¹⁹ The first part of the document not only mentioned high-level exchanges and intergovernmental consultations but also declared China's willingness to strengthen "coordination on major international and regional issues". The paper also mentioned military and antiterrorist units and information exchanges as confirmation of China's changing priorities towards WANA.

¹³ One of the examples used to justify such an evaluation were calls posted on the overseas Chinese news website boxun.com in February 2011. They were edited as a letter to the Chinese National People's Congress and signed by the "organizers of China's Jasmine gatherings," See: P. Foster, "China facing new calls for jasmine revolution," *The Telegraph*, 23 February 2011, www.telegraph.co.uk.

¹⁴ See: Sun Lixin, "The Middle East in 2012: Exacerbation of the Turmoil," Qu Xin (eds.) "The CIIS Blue Book on International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs (2013)," pp. 114-125, Beijing 2013; Shen Yamei, "Drastic changes in West Asia and North Africa and Their Strategic Implications."

¹⁵ In 2011, China decided not to vote on UNSC Resolution 1973 securing a "no-fly" zone in Libya, which passed and provided the legal justification for bombing Libya. The attacks helped oust the Gaddafi regime and eventually led—as viewed by the Chinese leadership—to the permanent destabilisation of Libya. China also was forced to organise a rapid evacuation of more than 36,000 Chinese citizens from Libya.

¹⁶ Li Weijian, "Zhongguo zai zhongdong: shuohua yu xianshi" (China in the Middle East: discourse and reality), 10 May 2017, Shanghai Institute of International Studies, www.siiis.org.cn.

¹⁷ J. Dorsey, "China and the Middle East: Embarking on a Strategic Approach," 16 September 2014, *The Huffington Post*, www.huffingtonpost.com.

¹⁸ On 4 July 2014, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi mentioned China at the top of a list of countries violating Muslims' rights; See: M. Chaziza, "China's Middle East Policy: the ISIS factor," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2016., pp. 25-33.

¹⁹ "China's Arab Policy Paper," 13 January 2016, *Xinhua*, www.xinhuanet.com.

Two weeks after the Arab policy paper was published, Xi visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran—China’s key WANA partners along with the United Arab Emirates.²⁰ Egypt is important because of its geographical location and large population, making it an attractive partner in the BRI.²¹ Good relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran are crucial to greater influence in the region as well as ensuring China’s oil supply. During Xi’s visit, a comprehensive strategic partnership was formally established with each of the three countries. This status signals an important distinction in Chinese diplomacy terms.

The main policy message was presented by Xi in his speech at the Arab League headquarters and can be summarized as an “equal diplomacy” concept. Xi emphasized that China had no interest in building alliances and searching for proxies in the region. He claimed that China would pursue a pragmatic policy in WANA regardless of whether its regional partners are divided by conflict. Xi suggested an enhancement of the political dialogue in WANA, rejected a “Cold War mentality” (associated with the U.S. policy under Obama and Trump), and suggested an acceleration of regional development with China as the main partner. He offered the formula of “1+2+3” cooperation (as presented in the Arab policy paper), with energy as the “1st” dimension (oil and gas cooperation model), infrastructure development and trade and investment as the “2nd”, and nuclear energy, aviation satellite, and new energy (high-tech sectors) as the “3rd” dimension. This idea is described as a “new model of economic diplomacy”.²² It specifically emphasizes energy security, industrial progress, financial cooperation, and wealth fund investment, and fits into the model of South-South cooperation.²³

Xi’s speech was designed to present an alternative to previous U.S. models of engagement in the region. The Obama administration identified three troubling issues in WANA: radical Islam (terrorism), the Israeli-Palestine conflict, Iran’s nuclear and missile programmes, and a lack of democracy. The U.S. president emphasized the need for social and political change in the region but didn’t focus much on the economy and regional development. Xi delivered a different message, focused on development and without demands for democratic or political changes from the countries involved.²⁴

Xi’s speech was a clear signal of China’s conviction of a failure of the U.S.’s WANA strategies. This observation was reinforced by recent U.S. unilateral policy moves, such as moving its embassy to Jerusalem, withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), and emphasis on relations with Saudi Arabia. These have given China the opportunity to present itself as the defender of stability in the region and a promoter of multilateral political agreements (such as JCPOA). China uses its global position to create an image of a credible patron to such partners as Qatar, Palestine, Egypt, the UAE, or Iraq, which may be sceptical of future U.S. security guarantees for WANA.²⁵

Although the Chinese government has claimed to adhere to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, in practice its development model has increased economic dependence on China among WANA countries. Chinese researcher Niu Xiuchun²⁶ claims that China needs first to reinforce its commercial

²⁰ Wang Zesheng, “China-Arab Relations: Opening a New Chapter for Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation,” Qu Xing (eds.), “The CIIS Blue Book on International Situation and China’s Foreign Affairs (2017),” Beijing 2017, pp. 532-548.

²¹ In 2019, China–Egyptian cooperation is supposed to reach \$17 billion in both investment and financial cooperation. China also pledged to support the construction of a new Egyptian administrative capital with an amount of \$50 billion and new Suez Canal cooperation zone. Another important partner is the United Arab Emirates, which Xi visited in August 2018. Bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$53 billion in 2017 and the port in Dubai is the regional headquarters of more than 230 Chinese companies.

²² Xi Guigui, Chen Shuisheng, “Yi dai yi lu beijing xia zhongguo de zhongdong jingji waijiao” (One belt one road. China-Middle East economic diplomacy), *Alabo shijie yanjiu*, No. 6, November 2016, pp. 48-59.

²³ Besides its presence in Egypt, China is also conducting many different economic projects in WANA, e.g., “Sino-Oman Industrial City” (\$10.7 billion), as well as ports, railways, and high-tech sector investments in Israel. China also offered a special \$15 billion loan for industrialisation and a \$20 billion joint investment fund with the UAE and Qatar.

²⁴ These policies were delivered in President Obama’s speech in Cairo in 2009 and President Trump’s speech in Riyadh in 2017.

²⁵ China recently declared it would provide \$2.35 million for the Gaza food programme in 2018 under the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian refugees. It was in response to agency calls for funding after the U.S. decided to cut its assistance. See: “China to provide \$2.35 million for Gaza food program,” *Ma’an*, 8 August 2018, www.maannews.com.

²⁶ The head of Middle East research at the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations, a leading Beijing-based think tank on international affairs.

relations with regional partners to increase their reliance on the Chinese economy and eventually to acquire the capacity, if needed, to exercise pressure on them via economic means (e.g., via debt recoverability). According to Niu, China should, therefore, try to transform the economic dependency in WANA into influence by increasing the sensitivity (*minganxing*, the speed and dimension of impact) and vulnerability (*cuiruoqing*, the degree of unavoidable damage) of economic relations between China and its regional partners. Part of this process should also be a careful strengthening of China's military power and counterterrorism forces in the region.²⁷

Policy Instruments

In political and security relations with WANA countries, China has been using tools such as bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, a special envoy role, permanent membership on the UN Security Council (UNSC), and antiterrorism cooperation.²⁸

The intensity of contact between Chinese and regional leaders can be seen in both high-level visits,²⁹ frequent bilateral communication (with meetings on the sidelines of the Syrian dialogues and Iranian negotiations), and consultations between various ministries and institutions. They are intended to strengthen the global message of China's substantial involvement in "hotspot" issues, e.g., through its communication with different parties in the Syrian conflict.³⁰

The multilateral formats China has been using to cooperate with WANA include regular contacts with the League of Arab States and Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as meetings at the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, a special platform dedicated to the development of Sino-Arab relations.³¹ China uses its dominant position in the communication with groups of countries to promote an image of coordination and regional patronage. Such platforms could easily be compared to the China-CEEC cooperation under the "16+1" initiative,³² but unlike it, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum also serves to focus debate (and win WANA support for) on China's views on such issues as the international order, globalisation, and global trade.

As part of multilateral diplomacy, China uses its permanent UNSC membership. Its engagement there is directed towards observation rather than suggesting new solutions to the Council and engaging in proactive diplomacy. It maintains this silent observer status unless issues concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (then supports the Palestinians) and Iran (supports JCPOA) are being discussed.

China has also frequently used special envoys to enhance its political influence in the region. These usually are representatives of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their main responsibilities are to keep regular political contact with WANA countries, share official statements, and arrange possible agreements with regional partners as a way for China to influence the regional situation. Special envoys allow for rapid

²⁷ Niu Xinchun, "Yi dai yi lu xia de zhongguo zhongdong zhanlve" (China's Middle East strategy within the "One Belt One Road" framework), *Waijiao Pinglun*, No. 4 (2017), pp. 32-58.

²⁸ See Annex on China's position on the main WANA hotspot issues.

²⁹ To now, Xi has visited WANA countries twice: in 2016 (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran) and 2018 (UAE). WANA leaders have come to China on multiple occasions since 2014 (e.g., the Egyptian president has paid four visits; the Iranian president attended SCO summits and met Xi three times in total).

³⁰ In January 2016, Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign affairs minister, met with the president of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces two weeks after hosting a visit by the Syrian deputy foreign minister.

³¹ During a high-level meeting at the China-Arab Cooperation Forum in Beijing in July 2018, Xi once again pointed out China's idea of development and a comprehensive strategic agreement was signed with the Arab League. He also promised assistance of \$15 million for Palestinians and \$91 million for Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. China can also provide special assistance (ca. \$150 million) for "building social stability," which the Chinese view as, among others, censorship regulations, extra-legal detention, etc. Xi also called on Arab countries to speed up the process of FTA negotiations between China and 21 Arab countries.

³² A format for multilateral cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries established in 2012 in Warsaw.

ad hoc reactions to changes in WANA's unstable political and security environment.³³ They have been dispatched immediately during regional crises, such as those involving Syria and Qatar.

China has also increased its engagement in military and anti-terrorism cooperation to advance its political interests and secure its development plans, as well as counter-terrorism in WANA. In December 2015, China passed an anti-terrorism law that legalised the possibility of deploying its military and People's Armed Police overseas for anti-terrorism operations. These missions would be allowed as long as the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, the norms of international law, and the sovereignty of the host country are fully observed.³⁴ According to recent unconfirmed reports, China is even considering use of force in certain areas, such as support for the Assad government in its fight with "terrorists" in Idlib province.³⁵ A recent Chinese analysis of the Russian military engagement in Syria highlighted arguments that support such intervention.³⁶ According to Chinese experts, Russia's actions accelerated the defeat of ISIS, enhanced Russia's international position and self-confidence, and took the initiative in its "struggle with the West". Importantly, China considers the Russian intervention legal because it came at the invitation of the Syrian government.³⁷ The Chinese involvement in regional security also includes trade, since China is an important arms exporter to WANA countries,³⁸ as well as the growing exchange of contact between the Chinese army and regional armed forces.³⁹

Prospects

Depending on the changing international situation, as well as the course of events in the WANA region, there are two main scenarios possible for future progress of China's engagement under the implementation of "equal diplomacy" and its "new model for economic diplomacy".

The first, and less likely, scenario implies that China's economic engagement **will be jeopardised by security issues**. The rapid deterioration of the situation due to mass-migration, the still unresolved conflict in Syria, and downgrading of U.S.–Iran relations will be too difficult for China to overcome in the short term. Coinciding with the potential for internal economic problems, such as the trade disputes with the U.S., means China also must slow the progress of BRI projects in WANA. China's inability to substantially contribute to the region's security will prompt WANA countries' to divert their attention towards other key partners, such as the U.S. or Russia, and lower interest in China's development offer. As a result, China will need to limit its political involvement in WANA and accept leading roles for the U.S., Russia, or Turkey in shaping the security environment in the region.

A second, more likely, scenario includes **rapid growth of China's development plans in WANA countries**. China will serve as facilitator of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation, as well as a contributor to Iran's economic and political modernisation, though in the context of the U.S. withdrawal from JCPOA. Development assistance will be followed by a **China's growing political influence in relations with WANA countries**. The "Equal diplomacy" and "development plans" policies will steadily build a network of partners whose patron is China. The countries of the region, especially those in need of reconstruction and financial assistance, will grab the opportunity, even at the cost of growing political dependence. One recent

³³ The position of China's special envoy to WANA was created in 2002. Until now there have been three envoys: Wang Shijie, Sun Bigan and Wu Sike (current). Also, there is Xie Xiaoyan, a special envoy of the Chinese government on the Syrian issue.

³⁴ M. Chaziza, *op. cit.*

³⁵ "Chinese Ambassador to Syria: We are Willing to Participate 'In Some Way' In the Battle for Idlib Alongside the Assad Army," *The Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch*, No. 7602, 1 August 2018, www.memri.org.

³⁶ Zhu Changsheng, "Eluosi zai xuliya fankong junshi xingdong pingxi" (Review of Russia's Counter-Terrorism Operation in Syria), *Eluosi dong ou zhong ya yanjiu*, No. 5 (2017), pp. 17-35.

³⁷ Lyle J. Goldstein, "China is Studying Russia's Syrian Gambit," *National Interest*, 26 March 2018, www.nationalinterest.org.

³⁸ Between 2013 and 2017, there were major increases in China's arms exports to, e.g., Israel and Turkey. In 2017, China signed an agreement on UAV deliveries to Saudi Arabia and agreed to open a facility to manufacture military drones there. See: C. Thomas, "Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy," 11 October 2017, fas.org; D. Kliman, A. Grace, "China Smells Opportunity in the Middle East Crisis," *Foreign Policy*, 14 June 2018, www.foreignpolicy.com.

³⁹ Since 2010, the Chinese navy has conducted port calls in every nation of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Egypt, Israel, and Iran. One significant example was the China-Iran joint naval exercises near the Strait of Hormuz in July 2017.

example of this kind of engagement in WANA was the presence of a Qatari representative at the ministerial meeting of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum in Beijing.⁴⁰ The ongoing modernisation of China's military forces⁴¹ and legalisation of overseas anti-terrorism activity could mean that China will be able to project power in WANA, for example, by buttressing the BRI projects with security guarantees.

Implications for the EU

China's WANA policy presents both challenges and opportunities for the EU in the region. The Chinese commitment to regional development, growing level of investment, and trade volume could raise the quality of life in WANA. This could translate into reduced migration to the EU. It also provides cooperation opportunities for the EU and China in engagement in WANA.⁴²

China's and the EU's declarations on Syria, Yemen, or Libya seem to have some things in common.⁴³ Both sides have expressed scepticism of the U.S.'s current regional engagement and share views on such issues as the status of Jerusalem and Iran (economic relations and future of JCPOA). However, what is concerning and challenging for the EU is the apparent gap between China's declarations and actions. The Chinese financial contribution to multilateral aid programmes remains limited. Contrary to EU values, China aims to uphold regimes (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria) instead of promoting self-determination, deeply rooted in the EU's political principles (despite its recent unclear policy towards the protests in Iran). The EU is stuck between a pragmatic policy of cooperation with China on regional development and stabilisation efforts, on one hand, and keeping its stance on people's right to self-determination and humanitarian issues, on the other. But in the end, the EU should not stop pressuring China to make greater commitments—adequate to its capacity and actual declarations—to aid refugees and support reconstruction efforts in WANA. It should use China's growing political engagement in the region and appeal to China's political ambition to play a more important global role and rebuild its international position. The EU's goal should be to accelerate the process of regional stabilisation with China as a credible partner to all sides in the conflicts (as in the "P5+1" negotiations with Iran or the Chinese attempts to establish a dialogue among the parties in Afghanistan). There is also the potential for growth of security cooperation in counter-terrorism against ISIS and in fighting maritime piracy with Chinese and EU naval forces involved in mutual operations under the EU NAVFOR *Operation Atalanta*⁴⁴ and the possible use of China's military base in Djibouti.

⁴⁰ See: Jun Mai, "Top-level China forum to bring Qatar back to Arab League table," *South China Morning Post*, 6 July 2018, www.scmp.com.

⁴¹ See: M. Przychodniak, "Xi transforms the PLA: How the Military is Being Adopted to China's Changing Global Position," *PISM Policy Paper*, No. 7 (160), 31 October 2017, www.pism.pl

⁴² European Bank of Reconstruction and Development recently decided to loan \$52 million to Chinese company Angel Yeast for investment projects in Egypt., See: N. Zgheib, "EBRD supports Chinese investment in Egypt with loan to Angel Yeast," *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, 15 February 2018, www.ebrd.com.

⁴³ The joint statement after the 20th EU-China Summit explicitly mentions both parties' support for a political solution to the Syrian conflict through UNSCR 2254, as well as efforts by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Libya and his Action Plan presented in September 2017. "Joint statement of the 20th EU-China Summit," 16 July 2018, www.consilium.europa.eu.

⁴⁴ *Operation Atalanta* was launched in 2008 and is a counter-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia in accordance with UNCSC 1816 and subsequent resolutions in response to the rising level of piracy and armed robbery off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean. See: "Horn of Africa-Red Sea: Revised EU Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan, Regional and Global Maritime Affairs," *European Union External Action Service*, 26 June 2018, eeas.europa.eu.

Annex: China's policy position on the main issues in WANA.⁴⁵

Issue	Main actors	Level of importance (political and economic interests)	Instruments	Policy priorities
Future of JCPOA and relations with Iran	U.S., Germany, France, Russia, UK, EU, Saudi Arabia, Israel	High	Multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, special envoy	Keep JCPOA; strengthen economic cooperation; maintain regional balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran
War in Syria	Russia, EU, U.S., France, U.K., Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syrian regime (Assad), Syrian opposition, ISIS, other terrorist groups	High	Humanitarian and development aid, special envoy, U.N. Security Council, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, military cooperation	Twin approach: fight terrorism and push for a ceasefire between the Syrian government side and the opposition; and, reconstruction, including the creation of industrial zones, growing economic presence, political and military support for the Syrian government, ability to stabilise the situation
Fighting ISIS	Syria, Russia, U.S., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq	High	Development aid, special envoy, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, military cooperation	Support Syria in training, intelligence-gathering, logistics and field medicine with Chinese military equipment; unconfirmed use of Chinese special forces against ISIS
Palestine-Israeli conflict	Israel, Palestine, U.S., Egypt, Jordan.	Average	Special envoy, multilateral diplomacy, development aid (Palestine)	Political dialogue (five-point peace plan from July 2017); supports the establishment of a Palestinian state with 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital; suggested hosting trilateral talks in 2017 on restarting the peace process; advanced economic cooperation with Israel (high-tech and agriculture)

⁴⁵ Based on own analysis, with table provided by Sun Degang and He Shaoxiong, *op. cit.*

War in Yemen	Saudi Arabia, Iran, Gulf Cooperation Council, UAE	Average	Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, special envoy, UNSC, development aid	Member of the "Group of Ten"; support the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the National Dialogue Conference, and UN-led peace talks; limited support of Saudi Arabian policy through muted response to military actions in 2015; support for anti-Saudi UNSC resolutions in 2015; unsuccessful mediation in 2017
Qatar crisis	Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE	Average	Multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, development aid	Mediation efforts
Situation in Libya	EU, U.S., Libyan authorities	Low	Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, development aid.	Supports UN action plan.