

China as a Conflict Mediator: Interests, Influence, and Implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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Sino Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership is an Israeli policy organization that specializes on China-Israel relations. SIGNAL empowers Israeli policy practitioners by cultivating in-depth knowledge of China and presents an informed understanding of Israel and the Middle East to China's current and future leaders. Harnessing its global China policy network, SIGNAL seeks to strengthen Israel's regional and international position and serves the national interest of Israel.

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Executive Summary

This applied research inquiry sets out to shed light on the interests driving China's global conflict mediation efforts as well as the principles and practices employed by Beijing to resolve violent conflicts. The study serves to create a framework to interpret China's mediation dynamics and strategic priorities, generating actionable knowledge for Israeli policymakers that contextualizes Beijing's proposal to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within its global strategy. The present inquiry evaluates China's mediating role in the Afghan civil war, Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, DPRK-US nuclear talks, the Democratic Republic of Congo civil war, Iran nuclear talks, Myanmar civil war, Nepali government mediation, the Darfur crisis, the conflict in South Sudan, Yemeni civil war, and Zimbabwe regime change. The paper then examines whether and how the interests, principles, and practices identified apply to the case of Israel-Palestine.

Principal Findings

China only seeks to involve itself as a mediator in conflicts where it has significant interests. Its choice of action is determined by what will best serve Beijing's specific goals regarding the parties involved, other international actors, and China's domestic audience. Beijing's interests span material, domestic, and normative domains. On the material front, securing economic interests, protecting its citizens abroad, and ensuring its national security have been identified as key factors influencing where and to what extent Beijing chooses to involve itself in any given conflict.¹ At the same time, China's desire to portray itself as a "responsible stakeholder" in the international arena commensurate with its newfound great power status serves as a soft power tool that generates substantial normative power, thus enhancing Beijing's ability to reshape global governance. The principle of "peace through development" is but one practice that Beijing has been trying to establish as a global norm - in stark contrast to the western-inspired "liberal peace" model that has dominated international affairs and conflict mediation since its resurgence in the 1980s. China's tendency to restrict its mediation efforts to high-profile conflicts generating significant media attention, coupled with its preference for multilateral engagement, is also tied to its normative revanchist aspirations connected to righting the 'century of humiliation'. All four interests mentioned above also harbor an intrinsic domestic component: Communist Party of China's legitimacy is considered by its

¹ That China has significantly increased its mediation efforts since the BRI was launched in 2013 is telling of the significance of economic interests in driving its mediation efforts. Its evacuation of tens of thousands of people from Libya set a precedent to provide protection for its nationals that have migrated abroad, while its involvement in the chaos in Myanmar and Afghanistan reflects its determination to protect its national security.

leadership to be intimately intertwined with ensuring economic prosperity, safety, and security for its people, as well as fulfilling its promise of achieving "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people."

China is wielding its growing economic, diplomatic, political, and perhaps to a lesser extent, military power in its conflict mediation efforts to maneuver rival parties to submit to its will. The degree to which China employs such statecraft in mediation varies between contexts, and its ability to realize desirable outcomes through such means in many cases remains limited. In regions where China's economic presence is limited, future economic development prospects serve as leverage in its own right. At the same time, China often involves itself in conflicts to create levers of influence, typically over Western powers, as is evident from its engagement in the Iran and North Korea nuclear talks. China claims to follow a principle of non-interference in other states' internal affairs. However, as Beijing's international footprint has expanded, it has arguably become challenging for China to strictly adhere to this principle. Beijing often justifies its involvement in other countries' affairs on the grounds of "Responsibility to Protect" and "consultative intervention."

The Case of Israel

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, China's material interests in the region are minimal. Since Israel and China established formal diplomatic relations, trade between the two countries has significantly increased. However, these economic relations are not significantly affected by the conflict. Based on trade data, the Palestinians are of negligible commercial significance to China. The Israel Palestinian conflict presents no imminent threats to China's national security, nor have any of the few Chinese nationals residing in Israel been harmed due to the conflict. More broadly, when it comes to the success of China's Belt and Road Initiative, China does desire a stable Middle East. This fact, coupled with China's conviction that the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is the core issue of the middle east, however rightly or wrongly, provides some -albeit small- incentive for China to get involved.

Beijing's official rhetoric and actions during the most recent battle between Israel and Hamas in May of 2021, including calling for war crimes investigation and three emergency meetings in the UN, were demonstrably anti-Israel. At the same time, its state media apparatus was called out by the Israeli government as being "blatantly antisemitic." Such bias calls into question China's credibility as a neutral arbiter. While China has long voted against Israel at the United Nations, its actions and involvement in May 2021 were unprecedented. These actions arguably constitute a breach of the non-intervention principle. China's response to the Gaza attack in May 2021 exemplifies how it uses conflict mediation to advance its

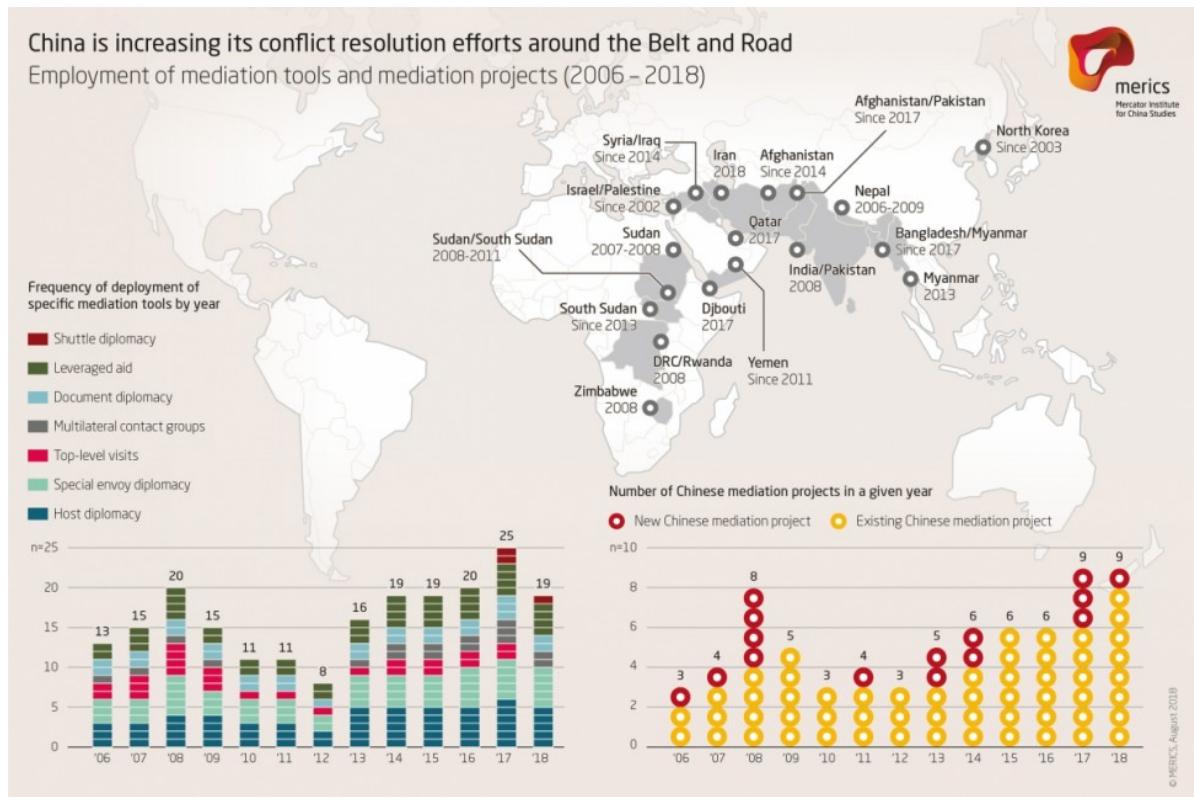
interests. Beijing exploited the Israel-Hamas conflict to 1) create a lever of influence against the US and promote itself as a “responsible great power,” one that cares about the plight of Muslim people in order to shore up support from Muslim states regarding Xinjiang. 2) Show Israel to be amoral and, by association, undermine US moral standing, thereby weakening the impact of Washington’s criticism of China regarding HK, Xinjiang, and Tibet. China seeks to secure votes at the UN to support its policies. Some Israeli analysts argue that the US was, in fact, the primary target of China’s polemics. Leveraging the conflict to appease the Muslim states where China harbors significant interests, particularly in the realm of energy, is more likely a corollary achievement.

Final Takeaways and Recommendations for Israel

- China has come to view Israel and the conflict as tools in its strategic competition with the US and its quest to regain what it perceives to be its rightful place atop the hierarchy of nations. As US-China tensions continue to escalate, it is likely to impact how China approaches Palestinian-Israeli relations, and the risk of Israel becoming collateral damage may well grow. Within this context, identifying how to stave off Chinese involvement while advancing its own goals could serve Israel’s interest. Until China shifts its political attitude to one of neutrality -by not publicly aligning itself blatantly against Israel in multilateral institutions- Jerusalem should take steps to secure its interests when China seeks involvement in any official conflict resolution efforts.
- Beijing adopts a dual approach in its relations with Israel: it supports commercial cooperation but politically aligns itself against Jerusalem. Israel could seek to formulate its own version of this duality that cordons off economics from matters sensitive to its national security. The Israeli government can benefit from preventing China from losing face while ensuring it is not facilitating Beijing’s aspirations at Jerusalem's expense.
- Equipped with the right tools, including knowledge of Chinese culture, its system, principles, and practices, it is certainly in Israel’s interests to continue expanding economic cooperation with China.
- Supporting Chinese involvement in the Quartet could serve Israel’s interests.
- Egypt has long played an important role in defusing Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Israel should keep this in mind regarding its calculations with Beijing.²

² Despite Chinese diplomats claiming that Beijing was responsible for reducing tensions between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, it was ultimately Egypt, not China, that brokered the ceasefire between the two parties.

- When considering participation in Chinese-sponsored peace initiatives, Members of Knesset and other officials would benefit from receiving briefings on the implications of such events. Israel must recognize that Beijing could perceive participation in Chinese-sponsored initiatives as grounds for justifying interference based on the principle of "consultative intervention."



Source: Mercator Institute for China Studies

Introduction

In recent years, China has extended multiple offers to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first such offer was made during a visit of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to China in July 2017 and was followed by a peace symposium in Beijing in December of that year (Gao, 2017). China's offers to mediate have been repeated several times since, and with a greater sense of urgency during the latest round of violence between Israel and Hamas in May of 2021 (Burton, 2018). Adopting a more active role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would constitute a major escalation of Chinese involvement in Middle Eastern politics, raising serious questions regarding China's interests and intentions. Beijing's involvement in the conflict may alter the diplomatic calculus, incentives, and strategic orientations of all sides involved, with wide-ranging implications for Israel, the Middle East (ME), and the US.

Pundits have posited that Beijing's increased involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes as part of China's attempts to assume a more active role as a conflict mediator globally, following 50 years of a strongly inward-focused People's Republic of China (Legard, 2018). Under Xi's leadership, China has expanded its mediation efforts from three conflicts in 2012 to nine in 2017, spanning a broad range of types, regions, actors, contexts, and connections to China. It is not only the Israelis and the Palestinians that China has invited to Beijing to sort out their differences. Chinese 'host diplomacy' events have persistently increased from 3-4 a year to 5-6 a year over the past decade. Despite these numbers, China has yet to bring about long-term solutions to any of the conflicts in which it has become involved.

This applied research report is based on a thematic analysis of the literature examining different conflicts in which China has sought a mediating role. The study serves to illuminate the interests, principles, and practices that drive Chinese mediation efforts worldwide. This inquiry does not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of how Chinese mediation influenced the political economies of these countries, nor does it attempt to capture the complexities of each respective conflict in its own right. Rather, the study aims to construct a model/framework to make sense of Chinese mediation dynamics and strategic priorities, empowering policymakers to better understand the ensuing challenges and opportunities by generating actionable knowledge that contextualizes Beijing's proposal to mediate within its global strategy.

In preparing this report, the author has evaluated China's role in the following mediatory efforts: Afghan civil war, Afghanistan-Pakistan, DPRK-US nuclear talks, DRC civil war, Iran nuclear talks, Myanmar civil war, Nepali government mediation, the Darfur crisis, the conflict in South Sudan, Yemeni civil war, and Zimbabwe regime change. The author acknowledges that all these cases are embedded in a fundamentally

distinct context from that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, there exist parallel processes that can lend insight into China's motivations, intentions, and actions within the wider context of its global aspirations. As mediators rarely publicize the content of their discussions, primary source materials on mediation efforts are scarce in the public domain. Empirical assessments in the present study were thus based on government statements, official speeches, media reports, academic literature, and interviews with subject matter experts.

Findings

In this examination of China's history of mediation, the author identified eight key elements through which to make sense of China's role as a conflict mediator. The first four represent the interests driving China's global mediation efforts and include: **protecting China's economic interests, protecting security interests, protecting citizens abroad, and projecting the image of a responsible stakeholder**. The subsequent four represent some of the principles and practices characteristic of Chinese mediation and include: **levers of influence, non-interference, multilateral cooperation and collaboration, and peace through development**. Part one of this report will present an overview of the interests driving China's global mediation efforts. Part two will present the principles and practices of Chinese mediation. Part three will examine whether and how these elements apply to the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Part I. Interests driving China's Global Mediation

Protecting Economic Interests

Among the most important determinants of where China chooses to involve itself in a mediation process is the impact of a foreign conflict on China's economic interests. Since Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping introduced opening up and reform in 1978, China has catapulted to the ranks of second-largest economy in the world. Under Hu Jintao and later Xi Jinping governments, Beijing developed massive infrastructure projects and diplomatic relations along vital sea lanes, from the Asia Pacific, to the Indian Ocean, through the Middle East, and across Africa (Hirono et al. 2019). Both Hu and Xi sought to ensure the flow of much-needed energy and trade necessary to fuel China's development while at the same time cultivating new economic opportunities for the People's Republic of China.³ In an effort to secure China's maritime trade routes, China invested in the commercial operation, ownership, and construction of trading ports along these critical sea lanes, including Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), and Sittwe and Madaya Island (Myanmar), among others.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping launched his signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): a modern-day silk road that aims to enhance trade and economic integration across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Projects initiated before this period have since been folded under the BRI umbrella. Today the multi-trillion-dollar global mega infrastructure project spans 139 countries that include 63% of the world's population and account for 40% of global GDP (Sacks, 2021). As China's commercial (and diplomatic) interests expanded, it provided strong impetus for Beijing to promote peace to secure its interests abroad.

Africa - When it comes to protecting economic interests, China's mediatory involvement in sub-Saharan Africa is perhaps most telling.⁴ While this region has seen numerous conflicts in the past several decades - some particularly bloody - foreign diplomatic involvement in these has largely not extended beyond deployment of multinational peacekeeping forces. China, however, has involved itself in several such conflicts: the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Darfur crisis, the South Sudan civil war, and the 2017 coup in Zimbabwe. Beyond a common region, these crises share strong resource ties to China: oil supplies in Sudan and later South Sudan; mining operations in the other two.

³ Xi Jinping still seeks to secure Chinese energy and trade interests and cultivate new economic interests to this very day.

⁴ For the purposes of this report, sub-Saharan Africa includes Sudan.

In September 2007, China signed a \$9 billion resource-infrastructure deal with the DRC that would allow Chinese companies to extract large amounts of copper and cobalt, two metals critical to the electronics industry, from local mines (Wallis, 2008). In return, Chinese contractors pledged to provide financing for the construction of roads, railways, hospitals, and schools (Witness, 2011). The country was experiencing severe unrest at the time, and an insurgency of CNDP rebels led by Laurent Nkunda and supported by the Rwandan government threatened the security of the mines. The CNDP started severely criticizing the Congolese government for the Chinese mining contract, which they deemed exploitative (ICG, 2009b). In response, China sent its Special Envoy for African Affairs, Liu Guijin, to mediate between Kinshasa and Kigali in December 2008, and followed this with a visit by Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun to Rwanda the following month (Mears, 2011). Both visitors insisted that Nkunda's anti-China defamation campaign be halted (ICG, 2009a). The DRC government began direct negotiations with the CNDP, and Nkunda was arrested in a surprise joint Congolese-Rwandan operation that January, thereby securing China's mining interest (Lewis, 2009).⁵⁶

In Zimbabwe, China maintained warm relations with the Mugabe regime, which allowed it access to its tobacco, diamond, and power industries. In return, Zimbabwe received low-interest loans and agreed to add the yuan to a basket of accepted currencies in the country in 2014 (Reuters, 2015).⁷ Additionally, China used its veto power twice to shield Mugabe from UN sanctions following accusations of sponsoring election fraud in 2008 (Macfarquhar, 2008) and published a vague statement lending some credibility to these elections (中国新闻网, 2008). Mugabe later nationalized Zimbabwe's diamond mines and pushed foreign firms out of the country, leading him to fall out of favor with Beijing. Media reports have speculated that China may have played a key role in ousting him from power in a 2017 coup (Chandran, 2017).

For years, Sudan provided China with roughly 5% of its oil needs (Nyabiage, 2020). China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has been a key player in the region since the 90s. In addition to purchasing oil, China began supplying the Sudanese government with advanced arms when that regime was highly

⁵ Today, violence remains prevalent across the DRC, particularly in the Ituri, Kasai, and Kivu regions. Over 100 armed groups are still active in the region, including the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces. Despite the presence of sixteen thousand UN peacekeepers, rebel forces continue to terrorize local communities and control weakly governed areas (Global Conflict Tracker, 2021).

⁶ By 2020 Chinese companies controlled 70% of the DRC's mining portfolio. According to RWR (2021) the government plans to "review its \$6 billion "infrastructure-for-minerals" deal with Chinese investors over concerns that many mining deals in the country did not sufficiently benefit the Congo."

⁷ This basket was introduced following the abolishment of Zimbabwe's own hyperinflated currency in 2009.

ostracized by the West.⁸ In 2005, During the Darfur crisis, China came under intense international pressure to cease these sales, which included tanks, APCs, and combat aircraft, to a regime committing atrocities against its own citizens (Hartung, 2008). In October 2007, the Darfur-based rebel group Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attacked the Defra oil field run by the Chinese led-consortium, Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (Chaziza, 2018). Following the attack, JEM commander Mohamed Bahr Hamdeen released a statement saying: “The latest attack is a message to the Chinese companies in particular. [They] are the biggest investors in the Sudanese oil industry,’ and that JEM ‘consider [all foreign oil companies] killers because they help the government buy the weapons which they use to kill women and children.” December of that year saw JEM attack the Heglig oil field in South Kordofan, operated by a subsidiary of CNPC - Great Wall Drilling Company. At the time, JEM’s leader Khalil Ibrahim said, “China is trading petroleum for our blood.”

It was only ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and against the backdrop of harsh international criticism towards China for watering down UN resolutions in Darfur and refusing to apply leverage on Khartoum to curb violence in the region that Beijing began taking a more active role as a mediator in the conflict. In February 2007, then Chinese President Hu Jintao traveled to Khartoum, urging his Sudanese counterpart to cooperate with the international community and accept a UN peacekeeping mission. According to Ahmed (2010), the statement by President Hu signaled to Khartoum that China would no longer take a stand against Western actions regarding Sudan. At the time, Sudan’s leadership was concerned that the deployment of such forces “was a prelude to ousting of the ruling regime and the imposition of Western control over Sudan’s internal affairs” and warned that such an event might come to threaten Chinese oil interests in the region. Ahemd (2010) notes that “Hu Jintao reportedly told Al-Bashir that first he would have to accept the UN peacekeeping forces and facilitate their task, after which China would negotiate with Washington and London to abandon the punitive measures that they intended to bring before the UN Security Council.” In May 2007, Beijing also dispatched Liu Guijin as special envoy to the region (Sultan and Sun, 2020). As violence in Darfur intensified throughout July 2007, China supported Western pressure on the country and voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 1769, authorizing the dispatch of 26 000 peacekeeping forces to the region. China subsequently dispatched some 275 engineering troops and 100 transportation troops to assist with logistics for the peacekeeping mission, as well as 60 medical personnel (Sultan and Sun, 2020).

⁸ The US designated Sudan as a sponsor of terrorism in 1993, and the country hosted Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda in 1994-6 before they moved to Afghanistan.

Peace and stability have been highly elusive in the region, but China has done what it deemed vital to protect its oil supplies. Beyond participating in multiple peacekeeping missions, China also engaged in bilateral negotiations with the Sudanese government and the breakaway SPLM faction led by former Vice-President Riek Machar, which later became the South Sudanese government. In 2015, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson asserted: “Both sides have the responsibility to protect oil infrastructure in South Sudan, as oil is a critical resource in its reconstruction and economic development during the country's peaceful transition period” (Large, 2016). The spokesperson’s peculiar choice of wording supports the idea that China’s mediation efforts were less about altruism and more about securing Chinese energy interests.

The above-mentioned examples highlight the extent to which China is willing to use diplomatic capital to protect its economic interests abroad. In Libya, on the other hand, China did not get involved during the chaos that enveloped the country during the Arab Spring and paid a dear price. Before the uprising in Libya, Chinese investment in the country was estimated at \$20 billion (Ramani, 2019), with upwards of 75 companies operating in the country. As the country crumbled in 2011, China stood by diplomatically and instead focused on evacuating tens of thousands of its citizens, incurring billions of dollars in damage to its facilities (Zerba, 2014).

In Asia, China has largely focused its mediation efforts around its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is most apparent in Myanmar and Pakistan, both of which share land borders with China and have access to the Indian Ocean. Both countries are thus key players in China’s ambitions to become a maritime power in the Indian Ocean and eliminate the bottleneck its exports face in the Straits of Malacca by shipping them directly to the Indian Ocean.⁹

Myanmar, in particular, has been a central focus of Chinese foreign policy, and China has poured significant sums of money into developing a deep-water port at Kyaukpyu. The port is located in Rakhine State, home to the Rohingya minority, which was the target of a massive military crackdown starting in 2017. Weighing its concerns over the future of this major project and international accusations of state-sponsored ethnic cleansing and genocide, China blocked action in the UNSC against the Burmese government and insisted that the crisis was an internal affair (AFP, 2020a). Following the military coup in February 2021, China lent its support to the military junta and continued to block international action on the matter, refusing even to acknowledge the existence of the coup (Tower, 2021). While supporting the regime on the one hand, on

⁹ This geostrategic challenge is known as the “Malacca Dilemma”, a term coined in 2003 by then-president Hu Jintao.

the other, China did deploy troops to a border region in July in a highly unusual move speculated to be a precaution in case Chinese pipelines in the country were threatened (Walsh, 2021).

The Chinese government's attempts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table since 2014 and willingness to work closely with the US in trying to resolve issues between the Taliban and Afghan governments are also intimately tied to economic interests (Hirono, 2019). China's \$3 billion copper mining project in Mes Aynak has been attacked by Taliban forces at least 19 times. Meanwhile, the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has also come under threat by radical Islamic elements from Afghanistan as well as inside Pakistan itself. In addition to security concerns that will be addressed in later sections, these economic realities help contextualize China's mediation efforts with the Taliban and Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. Economic calculations have also played a role in China's decision to involve itself diplomatically in Nepal, another BRI country, and Yemen, which straddles a crucial Chinese maritime trade route to Europe.

Protecting Citizens Abroad

Since launching China's "going global strategy" and later the Belt and Road Initiative, which both sought to create employment for Chinese abroad, China's expanding economic presence has been accompanied by massive out-migration of Chinese citizens across the globe. This includes locations that are stricken with instability, such as Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Southeast Asia. China does not publish or provide official data regarding the exact number of Chinese living and working abroad. There are few Government statistics documenting foreign nationals abroad, and China's Foreign Ministry has yet to publicize consular registration statistics. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, approximately one million Chinese workers were employed overseas in 2019 - on tourist visas or in other unofficial capacities (Hillman, & Tippet, 2021). The United Nations database estimates that the number of Chinese migrants living overseas is upwards of 10 million (Goodkind, 2019). Pakistan is reportedly building a city to house 500 000 Chinese citizens as part of the CPEC in Gwadar. As more Chinese nationals left the country to work abroad, the number of cases in which a conflict has directly threatened Chinese people living abroad has increased significantly.

The aforementioned attacks on the Mes Aynak by the Taliban in Afghanistan were accompanied by the kidnapping of dozens of Chinese engineers and workers. Meanwhile, Balochi rebels in Pakistan attacked the Chinese consulate in 2018, resulting in an hour-long gunfight with local security forces that left seven people dead. The skirmish was the 12th attack on Chinese interests across the region in 2018 alone (Brewster, 2018). As recently as August 2021, a suicide attack targeting a motorcade carrying Chinese

nationals at the Gwadar Eastbay Expressway Project killed two Pakistani children and injured one Chinese worker. Just a month earlier, nine Chinese nationals were killed when a bus carrying Chinese engineers and workers to Dasu Dam was attacked in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Global Times, 2021). In Sudan and South Sudan, scores of Chinese nationals have been kidnapped. Chinese private security firms have even been dispatched to rescue 29 of these workers. As China ramped up participation in UN peacekeeping missions, it has also placed these personnel in harm's way. Chinese peacekeepers have since been killed during operations in Haïti, Mali, and South Sudan, among others.

The Chinese government has been subjected to significant domestic blowback when failing to protect the safety of Chinese overseas. Two separate incidents that occurred back in 2004 in Kunduz (Afghanistan) and Gwadar (Pakistan) that claimed the lives of 14 Chinese nationals were particularly notable: The events sent shockwaves through media outlets across the mainland, causing the central authorities to reassess the importance of protecting its overseas citizens. According to Duchâtel and colleagues (2014), “the year 2004 was therefore pivotal because it was the first year in which the Chinese Government realized that its nationals abroad could also be targets of terrorist attacks.” In addition to Chinese citizens, influential ‘private’ companies and state-owned enterprises alike have demanded that Zhongnanhai [leadership’s compound] improve the protection of Chinese abroad by helping to mediate domestic and international armed conflicts (Huotari et al., 2017).

The case of Libya, as described in the previous section, is a reflection that these calls did not go unnoticed. As the country descended into civil war in 2011, China rushed to evacuate more than 36,000 of its nationals from the country (Zerba, 2014). In December 2013, when conflict erupted between forces loyal to South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and the rebel group SPLM, Chinese companies were forced to evacuate approximately 400 Chinese oil workers (Duchâtel et al, 2014). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi subsequently called for an immediate ceasefire and a political dialogue between the warring parties in South Sudan. In 2015, when fighting broke out between Iranian-backed Houthis and pro-Hadi fighters in Yemen, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) assisted in the removal of roughly 600 citizens and 200 foreign nationals from the country (Hirono et al, 2019). As Duchâtel and Colleagues pointed out back in 2014, “the Chinese Government’s policy is typical of a recent trend in Chinese diplomacy in which it must be seen to be responsive to public opinion.”

The Central Government’s apprehension regarding the safety of overseas Chinese workers has thus only created further impetus for China to involve itself in global mediation efforts, particularly in unstable regions where its citizens are exposed to increased security risks.

Protecting Security Interests

There exists a strong connection between China's security interests in a region and the extent of its mediation efforts in that region. Many of China's most high-profile mediation efforts have concerned conflicts in its near abroad, which pose significant threats to its national security, and this is no coincidence.

First and foremost, this includes Islamist terrorism on its western borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. These conflict-stricken regions share a border with Xinjiang, a fact which has occupied a central role in China's security perception over the past several years. Beijing is concerned that radical and separatist Islamist sympathies among the local Uyghur minority population will be fed by militants over the border, including fighters from the Islamic State who have made their way to safe havens in the region from Syria and Iraq (Seldin, 2017; Zenn, 2013). Committed to zero tolerance for terrorism within its borders, China has pursued a series of policies in Xinjiang that have drawn intense international scrutiny. Additionally, China seeks to more actively promote stability in the troubled regions to its West. Notably, Afghanistan produces over 90% of the world's opium, and Beijing has been concerned about the links between Afghan drug trafficking and Islamist terrorism, particularly with regards to empowering the Uyghur separatists and other extremist entities that threaten China (Chaziza, 2018). The Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of land in Afghanistan, extending East to China's Xinjiang Province and separating Tajikistan from Pakistan, is but one geographical factor of particular security concern to Beijing. Over the past five years, China has been establishing outposts in the adjacent province of Badakhshan, Afghanistan. The modest facilities which host PLA forces provide Chinese security forces a springboard into the Wakhan corridor (Shih, 2019).

As early as 2014, China's foreign minister Wang Yi himself said that "The peace and stability of [Afghanistan] has an impact on the security of western China, and more importantly, it affects the tranquility and development of the entire region," leaving no room for doubt as to China's interest in the country (Harooni, 2014). There are also geopolitical and economic factors influencing China's security considerations: Afghanistan is a potential destabilizing factor for central Asian Countries, and the BRI's success is largely contingent on maintaining regional stability. The experience of China along the Pakistan-based CPEC, which, as mentioned previously, has been the target of scores of terrorist attacks, only reinforces China's impetus to maintain regional stability. As the Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan, Yao Jing, noted in 2016, "Without Afghan connectivity, there is no way to connect China with the rest of the world" (Li, 2021).

With NATO forces beginning to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, China intensified its efforts to mediate between the warring factions in the country, using economic incentives and its perceived

impartiality to bring the different sides to the table (Hirono, 2019). Results of China's mediation in Afghanistan, however, have been elusive. Observing the western troop withdrawal, Beijing indicated its trepidation regarding the security implications with its repeated insistence that withdrawal be done in a "responsible and orderly manner" (CGTN, 2021). Pakistan has also played an important role in this calculus. China has long attempted to use its significant economic leverage over Islamabad to get it to curb the militancy and lawlessness within its borders (Khalil, 2018).

Chinese efforts to promote peace and stability in the regions to its west arguably extend all the way to Syria itself, where China has been a vocal supporter of Russian and Western efforts to combat extremism. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Chinese government estimates that upwards of 5000 Uyghur militants have traveled to the region to receive training and fight alongside other Jihadist groups against Bashir Al Assad's regime (Shih, 2017). There have been reports that several hundred have joined the ranks of the Islamic State. In 2017, ISIS issued a direct threat against China in a 30-minute video in which one of its members reportedly declared: "Oh, you Chinese who do not understand what people say. We are the soldiers of the Caliphate, and we will come to you to clarify to you with the tongues of our weapons, to shed blood like rivers and avenging the oppressed" (Gramer, 2017). Around the same time the ISIS video circulated, threats from alleged Turkistan Islamic Movement militants appeared on Chinese social media, proclaiming that "when the Syrian War ends, that is the day when China's biggest fear begins" (Pauly & Marks, 2018). In 2015 and again in 2019, China reportedly sent special forces units - "Siberian Tigers" and the "Night Tigers" - to assist Syrian government troops in their counterterrorism efforts (Ball, 2019). During his second tour of the Middle East in 2021, Wang Yi "urged outside countries to stop seeking another power transition in Syria, scrap unilateral sanctions against the country, endorse its fight against terrorism and help the nation fix its internal political rifts" (Yunbi, 2021).

The civil war in Myanmar is another security threat that has driven China to become involved in a foreign conflict. While the Myanmar conflict is the longest-running civil war in the world, in recent years it has begun to assume more direct security implications for its powerful neighbor. China is particularly troubled by a potentially large refugee crisis on its border. There have been reports of ex-PLA mercenaries fighting with rebel organizations in the border region of Kokang (AP, 2015). Some of China's security concerns in Myanmar are more subtle, and analysts have speculated that Beijing has long been concerned about an encroachment of Western influence along its southwestern frontier, though this appears less likely after the February 2021 coup (Tower, 2021).

A final example of security concerns driving diplomatic involvement is China's mediatory position between US allies and the DPRK. The Kim regime routinely threatens South Korea, Japan, and the US with nuclear annihilation. However, it presents China with a different security threat, one which has provided an incentive to maintain its stability. While Beijing enjoys having North Korea as a buffer state between China and American forces in Japan and South Korea, it also fears that a regime collapse could trigger a massive refugee crisis on its border (Blank, 2021). This explains why the bilateral trade between China and North Korea increased tenfold between 2000-2015 and has often been subject to criticism for helping it circumvent international sanctions in an effort to ensure the stability of the Kim regime (Kuang, 2017).¹⁰

'Responsible Stakeholder' in Reshaping Global Governance

Since 2008, conflict mediation has emerged as one of the methods deployed by Beijing in its attempts to be perceived as a 'responsible stakeholder' in the international system committed to global peace and stability. On the domestic front, Chinese citizens have come to expect the country to play a more prominent role in international affairs, commensurate to the size of its economy and in line with Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" (中国梦). The "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People," after having suffered a "century of humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers, runs at the core of the "Chinese Dream" and drives Chinese policymaking. A more active China with regards to mediation thus sends a message to its people that it is acting in congruence with the country's great power status and expected emergence as a global superpower. Some scholars have gone as far as to suggest "that the current legitimacy of the Chinese communist regime comes not only from maintaining domestic economic growth but also from the image of a respected "responsible great power," able to protect its interests in the international sphere" (Hirono et al., 2019).

Internationally, China's push to present itself as a responsible stakeholder is intertwined with President Xi Jinping's broader desire to reshape global governance and create a more multipolar international system in which China is not beholden to the American-dominated institutions that form the backbone of the postwar system. As Hirono and colleagues (2019) point out, "Beijing must accomplish this while deflecting global criticisms about an assertive Chinese strategic agenda, especially given ongoing security concerns closer to Chinese frontiers, such as the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea." These desires govern both the types of conflicts in which China gets involved and the way that it does so: China has focused on conflicts gaining widespread coverage in global media and largely restricts its involvement to high-profile actions. Where other mediators often employ a 'bottom-up' approach to diplomacy, China very much acts as a 'top-down'

¹⁰ In 2019, China accounted for 91% and 94% of North Korean exports and imports, respectively (Buchholz, 2019). This gives China an iron grip on the North Korean economy.

mediator, engaging in high-level meetings between senior officials in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the target countries, shuttle diplomacy, and high-profile peace conferences (Legarda, 2018). This method is instrumental in Beijing's efforts to project a specific image as a mediator and draw political capital away from the US in the international system by generating extensive media coverage.

China thus carefully chooses where to get involved and is notoriously obtuse in its decisions which are often shrouded in nebulous ideas. This allows Beijing to avoid involvement in conflicts that do not serve its interests while implying that it practices a value-based foreign policy. These ideas, which often come into contradiction,¹¹ include "responsibility to protect" (R2P), multilateralism, and non-interference. China's interpretation of the R2P principle typically encompasses a limited view of necessary humanitarian intervention in other countries, to be performed only as a last resort in dire circumstances, without a responsibility to rebuild the target state following the intervention, and under the auspices of the UNSC (Gegout and Suzuki, 2020). China used this concept to justify voting for international action against Syria in the UNSC and supporting the disarmament of its chemical weapon arsenal, but generally relies on its narrow view of humanitarian obligations to assert normative power in reshaping the standards of international interventions (Garwood-Gowers, 2015). As to multilateralism and non-interference, their roles in China's selective mediation efforts will be discussed in the next section of this report.

¹¹ Contradictions are not merely a source of dissonance for China's leadership. They are also used as a tool. At an expanded meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee back in 1991, Then General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Jiang Zemin, delivered a speech in which he stated: "One of the important issues in our strategic guidance is to make good use of contradictions, flexibility, and initiative," adding that "In the struggle against hegemonism and power politics. . . . We use all possible contradictions to expand our freedom of maneuver." Jiang stressed that "Sometimes there is a conflict between these short-term and long-term interests, and we will not hesitate to subordinate short-term interests to long-term interests" (Doshi, 2021).

Part II. Principles and Practices in China's Global Mediation

Levers of Influence

China's meteoric economic growth and position as the linchpin of global manufacturing have gained it substantial leverage and influence around the world. In some cases, China uses its influence over a state experiencing conflict to position itself as a necessary component of any viable resolution, thereby gaining leverage over other parties - oftentimes Western powers - involved in the negotiation process.

This use of leverage is most obvious in the multilateral nuclear talks with the DPRK. Observers have noted that the effectiveness of Western sanctions against the country largely depends on its economic patron's willingness to comply with them, and China regularly shields North Korea from harsher forms of international action (USIP, 2019). In 2019, China also played a critical mediating role between the US and the DPRK when President Trump attempted to reach an agreement with Supreme Leader Kim, even as tensions between the US and China were escalating (Sim, 2019). This briefly provided Beijing with a critical lever of influence over Washington, as the DPRK issue gained traction in American media and China appeared to control the only way forward. Following the failure of the direct negotiations between Trump and Kim, the US reduced its involvement in the conflict. At this point, Korean observers noted the possibility of China mediating between the two Koreas, clearly demonstrating the connection between a Western power vacuum and Chinese mediation efforts (Kang, 2020).

China's use of mediation as leverage can also be seen in its relations with Iran within the context of the JCPOA. As a member of the P5+1, China was a crucial component of the 2015 agreement. Following its dissolution in 2019, China improved its relations with Iran, signing a 25-year bilateral cooperation agreement in March 2021. That same month, Western media reported that Chinese imports of Iranian oil had hit an all-time high, despite punitive American sanctions prohibiting them (Reuters, 2021). The US threatened to take action against China (Manson, 2021), but there were no indications that this actually occurred. At the same time, the Biden administration was attempting to return Iran to the negotiation table and reach a new nuclear deal. To do so, it needed China's collaboration, putting China in a unique position of leverage. This benefited China economically and politically as it took the lead in the talks. (Murphy, 2021).

Kelemen (2020) explains that Chinese mediation efforts in Yemen have also served as a lever of influence designed to delegitimize the US. In December 2019, Chinese Ambassador to Yemen, Kang Yong, sent a letter to Muhammad Ali al-Houthi expressing China's desire to promote peace in the county. However,

according to Kelemen (2020), "a close examination of the letter's contents suggests it is actually part of a larger public relations campaign by Beijing to counteract Western accusations that it is violating human rights in Xinjiang." Moreover, Kelemen (2020) points out that, "the timing of the letter coincided with other Xinjiang-related activities undertaken by the Chinese embassy in Yemen, including a symposium on the Xinjiang issue organized for the Yemeni media and Yemeni officials residing in Riyadh."

Carrot and Stick - In addition to creating levers of influence through mediation, China has also employed carrots and sticks within its mediation practices. That China is the primary importer of South Sudan's oil has enabled it to apply pressure on the government in Juba to come to the negotiating table with rival factions (Bodetti, 2019). Meanwhile, the prospects of receiving security aid from China as well as Beijing's potential to apply leverage on Islamabad to enter into talks with the Taliban served as bargaining chips that led Afghanistan to arrest and deport 15 Uyghur militants to China in 2015 (Khalil, 2016). China has also provided capital to establish regional conflict response initiatives, including an international monitoring mechanism to identify ceasefire violations in South Sudan in 2014 and the African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crises.

In countries where China's existing economic leverage is limited, Beijing has still been able to apply a certain degree of leverage through promises of future economic engagement. Countries that descend into civil war need significant resources to rebuild their countries.¹² In Afghanistan, China has even floated the idea of connecting the country to its BRI through CPEC. As Syed Nooruzzaman (2016) points out, "both the government in Kabul and the Taliban are looking towards Beijing for all kinds of assistance for their nation rebuilding efforts." In a meeting between Pakistani, Afghan, and Chinese Foreign Ministers in June 2021, the countries agreed to "deepen high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, support substantive expansion of cooperation in Afghanistan, and enhance connectivity among the three countries and in the region at large" (FMPRC, 2021). Senior Taliban Members reciprocated a month later, expressing their desire for China to "play a bigger role in future reconstruction and economic development" (FMPRC, 2021). In this context, China's investment prospects can thus be characterized as a form of indirect "reward power" (Hirono, 2019).

¹² That China seeks to rebuild Syria once (or perhaps if) the country stabilizes has been a topic of widespread discussion. Pauly and Marks (2018) even suggest that China's modest military deployment to the region afford it "more influence in the economic and geopolitical reconstruction of post-war Syria, possibly leading to joint ventures and investment deals that help Beijing's broader trade and expansion ambitions." At the same time, these economic prospects may also provide Beijing with "indirect leverage" over the Assad regime.

Non-Interference

The principle of non-interference is a core tenet of Chinese Communist Party diplomacy. Time and again, Beijing has insisted that solutions to political issues must be accepted from within, not imposed from without. The principle has a long history in Chinese foreign policymaking, dating back to the 1955 Bandung conference, where then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai first advocated for its adoption as part of a ten-point “declaration on promotion of world peace and cooperation.” It was subsequently enshrined as a cornerstone of Chinese foreign relations, denying China the ability to meddle in the internal affairs of other states under the implied assumption of reciprocity (Li, 2019).

In 2014, Xi Jinping himself declared that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which include non-interference, represent a “major initiative in the history of international relations and a historic contribution to the building of a new type of just and equitable international relations.” Gegout and Suzuki (2020) explain how exactly history is connected to the principle: “China’s own experiences of Western and Japanese imperialism mean that it has been uncomfortable with intervention that is led by the West.” The Authors cite Samuel S. Kim, who observed that “The ‘protective’ thinking enveloped in the Chinese obsession with sovereignty reflects a measure of the immense weight of past grievances.” China’s no-strings-attached approach to economic cooperation, foreign aid, and other bilateral cooperation has been criticized by the West. Meanwhile, it enjoys support from a “large coalition of like-minded governments” that wield the principle as a defensive tactic against Western liberal democratic values and the threat of regime change (Gegout and Suzuki, 2020). In this context, the principle can also be considered somewhat of a soft-power tool. China’s degree of commitment to non-interference, however, has emerged the subject of much academic scrutiny, as it appears to vary according to China’s interests and its position on the world stage (Guo, 2017).

In some conflicts, non-interference forms the foundation of China’s involvement. Thus, China has often stressed that any solution to the Afghan conflict must be “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned”, not imposed on the Afghan people by an external force (FMPRC, 2021b). This has continued through the withdrawal of NATO forces from the country. In 2015, China facilitated meetings between representatives from the Taliban and Afghan governments. However, Beijing did not offer any tangible solutions to the conflict, nor did Chinese officials press for further negotiations. Essentially, China did little but provide a venue for the warring factions to engage in dialogue. The limited scope of China’s mediation efforts and goals regarding the case of Afghanistan reflects the ways in which Beijing attempts to portray itself as adhering to the principle of non-intervention while still involving itself in the reconciliation process.

Hirono (2019) points to “one exception” in China’s non-interventionist approach during its mediation efforts in Afghanistan, namely the third Russia–China–Pakistan Trilateral Dialogue hosted by Moscow in 2016. During these talks, all three countries agreed on a “flexible approach to remove certain [Taliban] figures from [United Nations] sanctions lists as part of efforts to foster a peaceful dialogue between Kabul and the Taliban movement.” The Taliban subsequently responded: “It is joyous to see that the regional countries have also understood that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [Taliban] is a political and military force. The proposal forwarded in the Moscow tripartite of delisting members of the Islamic Emirate is a positive step forward in bringing peace and security to Afghanistan.” This development angered Afghan Parliamentarians, who retaliated that “the holding of such a meeting on Afghanistan, without consulting [the] government, is an obvious interference in internal issues.”

Meanwhile, in Myanmar, China has repeatedly insisted that the civil war is a purely domestic issue and the international community has no right to intervene, going so far as to block sanctions against the Burmese regime following the brutal 2017 Rohingya crackdown and the bloody 2021 military coup. Since as far back as 2013, China has made a concerted effort to adopt a low-profile in its mediation between warring factions in Myanmar, with mediation occurring behind the scenes, under the guiding principle of “persuading for peace and promoting dialogue” (劝和促谈) (Li, 2019).

Sudan, however, represents an example of a varying Chinese approach to non-interference. In the mid-2000s, China’s dealings with the Sudanese regime during the Darfur crisis prompted international criticism and threats to boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics, causing a softening of its categorical refusal to intervene in Sudanese affairs (McGreal, 2008; Guo, 2017). At the time, scholars suggested that the Darfur conflict became a watershed moment in China’s wielding of the non-interference principle, as it came to understand that it would no longer be able to extend its influence globally without any degree of interference in other states’ affairs (Shinn, 2009). Following South Sudan’s independence, China continued its involvement in the form of leading inter-government mediation and peacekeeping missions, in what analysts have suggested was an experiment for testing new forms of foreign policy far away from its borders (Shinn, 2017).

Yet other examples indicate a much more permissive interpretation of the principle of non-interference, suggesting a new Chinese paradigm on the topic. In some cases, China has supported obtrusive behavior by other states, even if it has not engaged in it itself. This includes China’s endorsement of Russia’s expeditionary mission in Syria in support of the Assad regime, even as it blocked UNSC action against the same regime on the pretext of non-intervention (Blanchard, 2016; Melling and Dennett, 2017), or its

cautious support for the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthi rebels in Yemen since 2015 (Reuters, 2016). In a handful of instances, China has been accused of directly interfering with the internal affairs of other states, most notably in the aforementioned cases of the arrest of Congolese rebel leader Nkunda in 2009 or the coup deposing Zimbabwean president Mugabe in 2017. In 2019-2020, China also mediated a factional split within Nepal's ruling Communist Party, drawing accusations of meddling in its neighbor's internal affairs (Basu, 2020).

Consultative intervention - One way Beijing has sought to justify its interference through mediation is by conditioning its involvement on host government consultation and approval. This approach, which Chinese scholars have dubbed “consultative intervention” (协商介入), is based on the logic that if the host government consents to Chinese involvement in their internal affairs, then it no longer constitutes as direct interference (Li, 2019). This approach was evident in the case of Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, where China first engaged in bilateral consultation with each respective government and only later expanded discussions to include other rival parties. In recent years, there has emerged debate among Chinese scholars advocating a rethink of the principle. Some have argued that a powerful China with interests spanning the globe can no longer afford to adhere strictly to the principle.

These debates are intimately linked to the previously addressed interest in projecting an image of a responsible power in the international arena (Guo, 2017): Beijing must play a more proactive role in conflict resolution to protect China's image, especially in regions where its interests are threatened. In tandem with non-interference, China markets itself as a neutral arbiter of the foreign conflicts in which it is involved. China adamantly maintains that it has no enemies, maintains good relations with all countries (or non-state actors, in some conflicts), and pursues a non-exploitative, 'win-win' approach to diplomacy, thereby gaining credibility as an impartial conflict mediator. Bilateral relations are not a binary concept, and thus China is seldom genuinely neutral in a foreign conflict, but it uses this tactic to legitimize its involvement nonetheless.

Regardless of how China actually adheres to the principle of non-interference, it unquestionably plays a central role in shaping Chinese responses to international conflicts. The Communist Party wields this principle as a tool to promote its interests, both at home - for instance, in attempting to delegitimize the US as a security actor in the South China Sea - and abroad, as demonstrated above.

Multilateral Cooperation and Collaboration

As mentioned previously, China has held bilateral discussions with the Taliban, Afghan, and Pakistani governments, respectively. Over in Yemen, China also cultivated bilateral channels of engagement with rival parties: In 2015, Xi Jinping pressed Saudi Arabia's King Salman over the phone to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict, while at the same time China engaged with the Houthi delegation in 2016. Kelemen (2020) argues that these developments serve as “examples of how China managed to increase its leverage and move away from relying on international multilateral efforts and toward substantial bilateral approaches.” However, while Beijing certainly engages in bilateral discussions, these engagements are more designed to lay the groundwork for engagement in multilateral settings.

In high-profile conflicts, China has demonstrated that it prefers to avoid pursuing an independent path towards resolution, instead favoring participation in collaborative efforts to advance commonly accepted solutions. Examples of this phenomenon span the gamut of China's conflict involvement. During the Darfur crisis, China took a step back and allowed the warring factions to negotiate, relying on international peacekeeping missions to safeguard its interests. A few years later, when China involved itself in the South Sudan civil war, Beijing liaised with other multilateral initiatives, including the US-Norway-UK Troika, and supported the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led process. Large (2016) highlights that “China's engagement may have had mediation-like aspects, but, more than conform to a rigorous definition of mediation, in essence it represented a diplomatic-political intervention to try to assist negotiated settlement and assist the formal mediation process.”

In Syria, China hosted government and opposition leaders (separately) and sent a special envoy, repeatedly supporting collaborative efforts to reach a solution while doing little on its own to achieve progress (Calabrese, 2019). China participated in the JCPOA negotiations, where it often played middleman between the US and Iran (Li, 2015). And despite China's strong security concerns over the North Korean nuclear program, it has refrained from direct negotiations with the Kim regime or proposing a peace plan for the Korean peninsula. Instead, Beijing participated in the Six-Party Talks with other regional powers, which have been suspended since 2009. Perhaps the most telling example in this regard is Afghanistan, where China has long encouraged the various factions to work out an agreement among themselves. At the same time, China has participated in a host of bi-, tri-, and multilateral fora to negotiate with different stakeholders, including hosting the Taliban in Beijing (Bokhari et al., 2018).

Relying on multilateral efforts to mediate conflicts, Beijing appears to perceive no responsibility to seek out independent solutions to said conflicts. Instead of proposing a creative solution to a conflict or a pathway

to one, China prefers to offer its own version of a commonly accepted framework. Thus, in Myanmar, China explicitly endorsed the “five-point consensus” proposed by ASEAN, of which Myanmar is a member (FMPRC, 2021c). In Syria, China participated in a major peace conference in 2014 and put forward a 5-point plan towards reaching a settlement, one which had much to do with non-interference and little with the politics of Syria (Calabrese, 2019). In Afghanistan, it supported the Istanbul Process and worked through other multilateral fora, including the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, SCO, and previously mentioned Russia–China–Pakistan Trilateral Dialogue. China has used the phrase ‘Afghan-led, Afghan-owned’ to describe its vision of a peaceful resolution in dozens of policy statements while promoting a vision of ‘peace through development’ that includes dialogue with all relevant parties (Liu, 2021; Erslev Andersen and Jiang, 2018).

Peace Through Development

The Chinese believe that the most important precondition to achieving peace is socio-economic development. This belief is informed by China’s own experience of maintaining internal order and stability across the mainland. As Sun (2019) explains, “enhanced economic performance validates the legitimacy of the state and improves stability, which in turn creates conditions for further economic development.” Rather than promoting democratization and market liberalization, a tactic favored by the West in its conflict resolution efforts, China has introduced its own concept of “peace through development.” In his address at the General Debate of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi went as far as to state that “development is the master key to solving all problems” (Xinhua, 2019).

In the West, development is often associated with wealthy governments, international banks, and NGOs offering assistance to poor, conflict-stricken countries. However, for China, development is distinct from providing humanitarian aid (Ferchen, 2020). While China does offer some aid (in the Western sense), its contributions tend to be modest and play a minimal role in its conflict resolution efforts. Between 2013 and 2014, China provided just over \$21 million in such aid to South Sudan compared to \$720 million by the US and \$206 million by Britain (Hang, 2014). During that period, however, China pledged another \$24 million to finance agriculture and infrastructure projects, including the construction of Juba International Airport. In stark contrast to providing humanitarian assistance, Beijing’s “peace through development” encompasses a broad range of often state-backed commercial engagements, including trade, investment, infrastructure development, and lending.

Within this framework, President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative is of critical importance. In a speech at the Belt and Road Forum in May 2017, Xi Jinping said, "We should build the Belt and Road into a road for peace." China's engagement in Myanmar is emblematic of China's efforts to realize this aspiration. The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and efforts to resolve conflict intersect three economic cooperation zones across the cities Myitkyina, Ruili, and Lincang. These commercial initiatives were designed to facilitate trade between these cities and spur agricultural production and infrastructure development cooperation between China and various ethnic areas in Myanmar's northern regions (Sun, 2019). China hoped that economic development and integration would reduce the incentives for ethnic groups to continue fighting since the resulting interdependence would elevate the risk of economic disruption. At the same time, they served to consolidate China's influence over northern Myanmar and increase China's appeal as a development partner in other parts of the country. China's dreams of achieving peace through development in Myanmar and the success of the CMEC were derailed when chaos erupted in 2021. Tower (2021) argues that the "turmoil sparked by the coup has moved the country past the brink of failed state status." Since the army's power grab, new threats have emerged for China on every front, from public health to national security. Rising anti-China sentiment across the country turned violent, with attacks on Chinese factories, oil and gas pipelines, and threats against Chinese workers in urban areas of the country.

The 2021 coup in Myanmar and the failure to curb extremism along the CPEC in Gwadar (addressed in previous sections of this paper) reflect the challenges inherent in China's efforts to achieve peace through development. Notably, while underdevelopment may be a source of conflict and instability, the success of the BRI largely depends on stability in the regions across which it traverses. Beijing is not oblivious to this contradiction. In the same breath that Xi declared the BRI "a road for peace" back in 2017, he also mentioned that "the ancient silk routes thrived in times of peace, but lost vigor in times of war." While China has invested heavily in the CPEC and MCEC - regions of national security concern - Beijing has been hesitant to invest heavily in conflict-stricken regions where its interests are not directly threatened, such as Syria and Yemen. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, despite talks of reconstruction and further integrating the country into the BRI, analysts remain skeptical as to whether these promises will materialize (Sacks, 2021).

There is another dimension of China's concept of "peace through development" worthy of mention: it is intimately tied to Beijing's desire to reshape global governance in its image as part of its return to great power status. As Yin He points out: "A rising power always promotes a zeitgeist: the United Kingdom

promoted free trade and the United States promotes freedom and democracy (Zheng). The zeitgeist that the rising China promotes is peace and development.” China has leveraged its leadership positions within various departments of the United Nations and contributions to the organization to proliferate the concept and in an effort to establish it as a global norm. While there is nothing intrinsically nefarious about the concept itself, it stands in stark contrast to "liberal peace" that promotes political and institutional reform and market liberalization.¹³ As Burton (2020) explains, “the Chinese alternative proposes state-led development over political reforms, stability over inclusion, and unconditional aid and investment.”

Many Western analysts have negatively framed Chinese development efforts in Africa, with some going as far as to label them a form of neo-colonialism and even "colonialism with Chinese characteristics" (Deych 2019; Kelvin, 2019). However, the majority of Africans don't seem to share their Western counterparts' sentiments. According to a 2020 study conducted by Afro Barometer examining *Africans' perceptions about China*, 63% of the participants across the 18 countries surveyed reported that China is a "somewhat" or "very" positive influence in their country. Investments in infrastructure and business development emerged as the key factors contributing to this positive image. Nevertheless, the vast majority of African countries surveyed still preferred the US model of development over that of China. Regardless of how African people feel about Chinese development, the continent remains among the world's most conflict-stricken regions (Allison, 2020; Muggah & Cabrera, 2019).

¹³ The theoretical origin of the liberal peace dates back to 1795, embodied in Immanuel Kant's classic works, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" which addresses how peace can be achieved and maintained. William Godwin, Thomas Paine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings also contributed significantly to the theoretical underpinnings of the concept. Liberal peace concept experienced a resurgence in the 1980's following Michael W. Doyle's publications "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs (1983) and "Liberalism and World Politics" (1986) (Sørli, 2001).

Part III. Making sense of China's offers to mediate the Israel-Palestine conflict

Background

China has been involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for years, however indirectly. Formed a year after Israeli independence in 1948, the People's Republic of China initially positioned itself on the side of Israel's Arab enemies as part of its broader support for anti-Western regimes in the early days of its pro-revolution Maoist aim to spread communism in the early years of the Cold War (Aluf & Li, 2020). After China's opening to the Western world in the late 1970s, Israel received a nod from the US to begin selling weapons (covertly) to China (Shichor, 2020). Formal diplomatic relations were only established in 1992. China first appointed a special envoy to the Middle East in September 2002 and followed this with a "five-point" peace plan along the lines of a two-state solution in 2003 (which President Xi Jinping later updated as a "four-point" plan in 2013) (Legarda, 2021). The blueprint calls for: "advancing the two-state solution based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of a new Palestinian state;" upholding "the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security;" ramping up international efforts to put forward "peace-promoting measures that entail joint participation at an early date;" and "promoting peace through development and cooperation between the Palestinians and Israel" (Haaretz, 2017). The vague plans offered relatively little in the way of new ideas and have been received coldly by many Western analysts (LeBaron et al., 2021).

In a meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in July 2017, just four months after then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping offered to establish a trilateral dialogue mechanism with Israel to resolve differences between the sides. An official dialogue of such nature, however, has yet to materialize. Nevertheless, these developments signaled China's eagerness to assume a more prominent role in the issue. During the Gaza conflict in May 2021, China was more vocal than ever in calling for an end to the violence, urging the United Nations Security Council to "take action, [and] reiterate its commitment to and firm support for the two-state solution" (FMPRC, 2021). As the conflict intensified, China dialed up the bias against Israel - appealing to the UN Human Rights Council to establish an international commission to investigate Israel's "violations in the occupied Palestinian territory." Uncharacteristically, Beijing took the initiative to call for the UN Security Council to convene three emergency meetings on the matter in one week (Al Jazeera, 2021). While China frequently votes against Israel at the UN, this is the first time Beijing has spearheaded such anti-Israel initiatives. China's state media jumped on the proverbial bandwagon, pushing a clear anti-Israel narrative

(O'Donoghue, 2021), some of which were laced with anti-Semitic overtones.¹⁴ Notably, China grabbed the opportunity to accuse America of conducting a hypocritical foreign policy, demanding one standard of behavior from China and another from its ally Israel.¹⁵

During the UNSC meeting concerning the escalation, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated President Xi's four-point proposal and invited both sides to China to participate in a "direct dialogue" with the goal of putting an end to the violence - an offer the Israeli government did not acknowledge (Zhicheng, 2021). In extending these offers, China markets itself as a neutral arbiter, a major power devoid of colonial history in the region and maintaining good relations with all parties involved. However, as the present study illuminates, China's mediation efforts are not necessarily inspired by altruism. Rather, Beijing only involves itself in conflicts where such involvement serves its interests. So what exactly are Beijing's interests in involving itself in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? And how might its principles and practices, as revealed in the previous sections, apply to this case?

Economic Interests

Since normalizing relations in 1992, trade between Israel and China has grown substantially. According to the Chinese Embassy in Israel (2021), bilateral trade between the two countries at the close of 2020 stood at \$17.54 billion. The two countries signed a comprehensive innovation partnership in 2017 and have been negotiating a free trade agreement since 2016 (Witte and Glinert, 2017). Between 2002 and 2020, China injected roughly \$19 billion into Israeli technology, agriculture, real estate, cosmetics, and infrastructure sectors (Ella, 2020).¹⁶ While this figure seems impressive, it represents less than 3% of China's total outbound investment. Some notable Infrastructure developments include the construction of the Ashdod port, a new terminal at the Haifa port (operated by Shanghai International Ports Group), the Carmel tunnels, and part of the Tel Aviv light rail. These structures have largely been unaffected by the Israel-Palestinian

¹⁴ A presenter on CGTN promulgated antisemitic tropes, stating that "powerful lobbies" of Jews in the America were responsible for shaping Washington's position on the Middle East crisis and that "Jews dominate (US) finance, media and internet sectors" (France24, 2021). The Israeli Embassy in Beijing accused China's state broadcaster of "blatant anti-Semitism."

¹⁵ See page 23

¹⁶ An in-depth and comprehensive examination of this topic by Ella (2020) revealed "that Chinese investments in Israel reached a peak in 2018, after which they began to wane." The Author proposed several reasons: "changes in priorities in China, the consequences of the global coronavirus pandemic, and perhaps also a change in the investment climate in Israel with regard to Chinese companies due to American political pressure."

conflict, thanks in part to Israel's Iron Dome defense systems. Moreover, should they incur any damage in the future, it's unlikely to affect China's economy in any meaningful way.

Israel joined Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015, but Jerusalem has yet to sign onto the Belt & Road Initiative officially. Nevertheless, Beijing still considers Israel an important node in Xi Jinping's signature mega-infrastructure project. Aside from natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, the area has no natural resources of note. For the most part, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has little bearing on the economic dimensions of the Sino-Israeli relationship. When it comes to China and the Palestinians, bilateral trade between the two sides was just \$73.75 million in 2018, and the two sides have announced that they have entered free trade negotiations, according to China's Ministry of Commerce (2019). Chinese aid to the Palestinians is disproportionately small in relation to the importance Beijing attributes to the conflict - dubbing it *the core issue* of the Middle East. Following the violence that ensued in May 2021, Beijing stated that the international community should "extend helping hands" to the region and committed to providing \$1 million in emergency aid, an additional \$1 million to UN relief efforts, and 200 000 COVID-19 vaccines for the Palestinian people (AFP, 2021b). These contributions pale by comparison to the \$360 million in assistance to the Palestinians that the United States will be providing (US State Department, 2021). Meanwhile, outside of China's modest aid contributions to the Palestinian Authority, there has been little by way of "peace through development." A Palestinian state would likely have little to offer China in the economic realm that would justify China increasing its involvement in the conflict.

Security and Citizens

Overall, China has relatively minor economic interests at stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The same can be said for Chinese security interests in the region, including the need to protect its citizens. There are Chinese nationals, including foreign workers, students, and tourists residing in the country.¹⁷ However, there are few compared to other conflict-affected regions, and there has never been an incident where a Chinese national has been kidnapped or killed due to the conflict itself.¹⁸

The Israel-Palestinian conflict represents no direct threats to Beijing's national interest. That being said, Chinese officials have often pointed to the conflict as being key to achieving broader stability in the Middle

¹⁷ In 2019, a total of 156,100 tourists from China visited Israel in 2019, compared with 114,200 in 2018 (Xinhua, 2020).

¹⁸ There has been one recorded case of a Chinese citizen being kidnapped in Israel in August 2021. However, the case was in no way related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but rather a criminal case involving the theft of NIS 700 000. The victim was unharmed and police indicted seven people implicated in the incident. (Jerusalem Post, 2021)

East. In his statement to the UNSC during the latest Gaza conflict, Wang Yi said: “the Palestinian question has always been the core of the Middle East issue.” (FMPRC, 2021a). Editorial pieces in Chinese state media have also erroneously conflated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the broader idea of “violence in the Middle East”, which includes bloodier conflicts in places such as Iraq, Yemen, and Libya (Zhai, 2021). This demonstrates that China presents the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a necessary condition for stability in the Middle East. Since China has broad security interests in the region overall, this may increase its motivation to assume a more active role in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To some degree, this also speaks to Chinese economic interest, as the success of the BRI in the Middle East largely depends on regional stability.

A Responsible Stakeholder

The Israel Palestinian conflict is considered among the most contentious issues in the Middle East and garners significant media attention worldwide. By presenting itself as playing an active role in the conflict, China seeks to position itself front and center as a major party involved in resolving international disputes, thus projecting substantial soft power. China views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of its strategic competition with the United States. America has thus far been the main interlocutor in the turbulent region, having mediated the peace accords between Israel and its former enemies Egypt and Jordan, as well as the Oslo Accords in 1993. The Chinese, however, dismiss American solutions as ineffective and have sought to overshadow their American rivals in this high-profile issue. Indeed, this forms part of Beijing’s broader push to market itself as a “responsible stakeholder” that shares the burden of international stability and a bulwark against the current unipolar system (Sheng, 2021; Zhou, 2021). By doing so, Beijing strengthens its image to that of a power on par with the United States, reinforcing its vision of a multipolar world order.

Levers of Influence

When it comes to levers of influence, China does not wield significant influence over either party. However, China has identified the conflict as a potential Achilles heel of US policy and uses it to gain leverage over the US. This can be seen in China’s reactions to the May 2021 Gaza conflict. On May 18, China’s foreign ministry spokesman said the American refusal to take action against Israel put the US “on the opposite side of mankind’s conscience and morality” and questioned why the US was “so callous about the Palestinian people’s human rights while it keeps talking about upholding Muslims’ human rights” (FMPRC, 2021d). China knows that the conflict is an important foreign policy issue for the US and appears to be using its involvement to tarnish American credibility and gain leverage with the Muslim states whose vote is central

to China's Xinjiang issues.¹⁹ Gering (2021) draws attention to the Chinese proverb “to point to the mulberry tree and curse the carob tree,” explicating that “China was eager to throw Israel under the bus if it meant running over the US.”



Beijing's actions follow a broader pattern of Chinese behavior. China's discourse regarding Palestinian and Muslim human rights is a very overt attempt to paint the US as hypocritical and unreliable on the international stage while also serving the critical role of diverting criticism from China's policies in Xinjiang. China has not been entirely free of such hypocrisy itself, however. Following the military coup in Myanmar this February, China, which is allied with the Burmese government, also vetoed a UNSC statement of condemnation, thereby preventing the Council from acting on the matter at the height of the

¹⁹ Perhaps ironically, the “Palestinian cause” is no longer the primary concern of Sunni Arab countries, many of which have since normalized relations with Israel. As a diplomat from one such country told the Economist in August of 2021, “With all our love for the Palestinians, and our traditional support for them, there comes a point where we will no longer be able to sacrifice our interests for local struggles on the Palestinian side.” Notably, during the Israel-Hamas conflict in May 2021, a social media hashtag which reads “#Palestine Is Not My Cause” begun circulating among some Gulf Arab countries (Rashad & Ghantous, 2021). Nevertheless, China has chosen to ignore these signs of change in the region, and continues to leverage the Palestinian struggle to advance its agenda.

violence (BBC, 2021). Just before violence erupted between Israel and Hamas in May, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called out China and Russia indirectly, saying: “when permanent members of the Security Council flout [international] rules and block attempts to hold accountable those who violate international law, it sends the message that others can break those rules with impunity” (Nichols, 2021). Chinese diplomats are all too eager to point to such statements when it comes to the uncompromising American defense of Israel at the UNSC, including blocking probes into potential violations of international law by Israel.

Neutrality and Non-Interference

Given that China’s historical contribution to this matter is confined to repeating support for selective existing recommendations and resolutions, it is unlikely that a more active Chinese role in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would bring new ideas to the table. The substantive differences between China’s approach and the American approach to this conflict are minimal. The American approach guided the previous major mediation efforts between Israel and its past and present adversaries, such as the Camp David, Oslo, and Abraham Accords. These efforts saw the US mediating between the different sides as an honest broker. The primary difference in this context is that China has broadly aligned itself against Israel in the diplomatic arena, which undermines the credibility of its neutral stance in the eyes of the Israeli establishment. This can be seen in China’s long history of voting against Israel in the UN or its recent vociferous condemnations of Israel during the May 2021 Gaza conflict, which arguably can be seen as a mirror image of US diplomacy that has long defended Israel on the world stage. That Chinese Embassies in Japan and Paris published anti-Israel memes during the conflict only further discredited China’s self-proclaimed neutrality. Israel has experienced China’s hypocrisy regarding non-intervention: Beijing called for a war crimes investigation during the May 2021 Gaza conflict after steadfastly refusing to condemn the Burmese military junta over the brutal coup it launched in February 2021 for over a month, citing non-interference as grounds for inaction (BBC, 2021; Falk, 2021). As Gering (2021) notes, “Beijing’s actions have eroded Israel’s trust in its ability to comprehend the complex realities of the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict.”

Multilateral Cooperation and Collaboration

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has followed a similar pattern to Chinese mediation efforts in other regions with regards to China’s preference for multilateral cooperation and collaboration over proposing bilateral solutions. While China has offered multiple times to mediate directly between the two sides, no such official negotiation process has occurred, and it is unlikely to occur in the near future, given China’s limited

leverage over Israel or the Palestinians and Jerusalem's perception of China as being biased against Israel. Furthermore, China's proposed four-point peace plan does not diverge from the US and European-backed two-state solution in any meaningful way (FMPRC, 2014; Figueroa, 2021). Meanwhile, experts have remained skeptical of China's ability to execute or guarantee these plans. As Bin Huwaidin (2021) argues, "China does not want to bear the responsibility as a guarantor of certain negotiated outcomes." Should China find itself in the position where it was responsible for enforcing an agreement and failed, it would lose face, thus harming its image as a great power.

China has hosted several Israeli and Palestinian delegations to engage in dialogue. While certain officials did attend these meetings, they by no means constituted a formal mediation process, nor did they achieve any meaningful results for Israel or the Palestinians by way of contributing to a resolution. In December 2006, Beijing hosted a seminar on the peace process convening delegates from both sides that resulted in nothing more than a vague non-binding eight-point joint statement that offered no concrete solution to solving the issue (Geneva Initiative, 2006). In July 2017, China held a two-day Palestine-Israel Peace Symposium at which it welcomed eight delegates from the two nations and seven representatives from China. The Israeli delegation was led by Hilik Bar, then deputy speaker of Israel's Knesset, while the Palestinian representatives included Nabil Shaath and Ahmed Majdalani, the Palestinian president's foreign affairs adviser and a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) executive member respectively (Eichner, 2017). According to Israeli media, "the representatives met with the goal of formulating a non-binding position paper that would be agreeable to both sides." However, the convening parties struggled to resolve disagreements on the issue of Jerusalem and refused to participate in a joint press conference. Ultimately, a non-binding document of little significance to the conflict was drawn up. Towards the event's conclusion, Hilik Bar made a point of mentioning that "Beijing should not be in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in place of the US, but by its side."

On July 15, 2021, China hosted another round of the Palestine-Israel Peace Symposium (this time virtually), where State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi himself delivered a speech in which he reiterated China's offer to facilitate direct negotiations between the rival parties (FMPRC, 2021). While China's Foreign Ministry portrayed the Symposium as the fourth of its kind (FMPRC, 2021), evidence of prior events, aside from the 2006 seminar and 2017 peace symposium described above, remain elusive. Burton (2018), Gao (2017), and Bhaya (2017) all note that such an event occurred in 2003 but failed to provide any reference in support of this claim. Meanwhile, China's state-run Global Times ran a piece by Ruohan (2017) pointing to a meeting between the three sides occurring in Jerusalem in 2013 - citing "china.com.cn"

but providing no further information. Whether or not this meeting occurred, the lack of reporting on the event perhaps indicates that it was of little significance.

Bin Huwaidin (2021) highlights that “in practice, the Chinese-sponsored talks did little to address the fundamental grievances underpinning the conflict.” Rather than serving as a tangible way to resolve the conflict, these discussions represent “a highly circumscribed form of conflict management” that does not achieve “a resolution of grievances and their root causes.” Regardless of the effectiveness of these discussions they serve Beijing well when it comes to optics. Both 2017 and 2021 Palestine-Israel Peace Symposiums received significant media attention, painting China as a responsible stakeholder that seeks to bring peace and stability to the international arena. Moreover, despite the fact that they were not official peace negotiations, they were attended and supported (however indirectly) by the officials that participated in the event. In the context of China’s adherence to the principle of non-interference unless the host country endorses their involvement, such participation could be leveraged by Beijing as welcoming its interference in Israeli-Palestinian affairs on the premise of “consultative intervention.”

Beijing understands that it lacks the necessary leverage and influence over either Palestinian or Israeli sides to get them to negotiate a settlement. Optics aside, China has remained a relatively small player in this issue. As Fulton (2021) points out, “Beijing is consistent in its messaging but its engagement on the issue remains tepid.” Some scholars have posited that China is well aware of its limitations and therefore restricts its involvement in the conflict to a collective international effort. This allows it to appear to support the Palestinians while contributing little on a practical level. Fulton (2021) concludes that “it is unlikely that Chinese leaders would want to wade into this beyond working within the framework of the UN and cooperating with Middle East partners.”

In July 2021, during Wang Yi’s second visit to the Middle East that year,²⁰ the Chinese Foreign Minister held talks with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry and Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul Gheit, respectively, in El Alamein. During these meetings, Wang raised a new proposal to have the UNSC permanent members convene an international peace conference with all stakeholders in the Middle East peace process (FMPRC, 2021). This idea has been raised several times since these meetings took place and could be interpreted as an effort to replace the Middle East Quartet that

²⁰ During this visit FM Wang travelled to Egypt, Syria, and Algeria. During his first visit in March he travelled to Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Iran, and Turkey. In addition to trade matters, both tours saw Wang raise three main issues: promoting the distribution of Chinese COVID-19 vaccines; Chinese investments in the framework of the Belt & Road Initiative; and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

includes the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and Russia. China has long relished joining the Quartet, which was established in 2002. Back in 2014, Foreign Minister Wang stated that “we [China] are ready to join it if the Quartet so wishes” but qualified that if it didn’t join it, “China will continue to work in its own way to move the peace process forward” (Keck, 2014).

Concluding Thoughts

Despite America being the primary target of China's hostile rhetoric and actions towards Israel during the conflict in May, Jerusalem must resist the temptation to disregard Chinese behavior as mere political theatrics. China has come to view Israel and the conflict as tools in its strategic competition with the US and its quest to regain what it perceives to be its rightful place atop the hierarchy of nations. As US-China tensions continue to escalate, it is likely to impact how China approaches Palestinian-Israeli relations, and the risk of Israel becoming collateral damage may well grow. Until China shifts its political attitude to one of neutrality -by not aligning itself blatantly against Israel in multilateral institutions- Jerusalem should take steps to secure its interests when China seeks involvement in any official conflict resolution efforts. The Israeli establishment can benefit from preventing China from losing face while ensuring it is not supporting Beijing's aspirations at Jerusalem's expense.

Beijing pursues a dual approach with regard to its relations with Israel: it supports commercial cooperation but politically aligns itself against Jerusalem. Equipped with the right tools, including knowledge of Chinese culture, its system, principles, and practices, it is indeed in Israel's interest to continue cooperating with China economically. When considering participation in Chinese peace initiatives, Members of Knesset and other government officials could benefit from receiving briefings on the implications of such participation. Officials should be aware that such gatherings have a history of contributing little by way of long-term solutions. At the same time, such participation in Chinese-sponsored peace events could be perceived by Beijing as grounds for justifying interference in the conflict based on the principle of "consultative intervention."

It's not only Jerusalem that should be sensitive to China's desire to increase its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egypt, which has long played an important role in managing the conflict and who recently brokered the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, should take note that Chinese involvement holds the potential to cause realignments regarding the Palestinian arena that could affect Egypt's role. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority seems to ignore that history has shown Chinese interests and rhetoric are designed to serve Beijing's interests, not those of the Palestinians. If the case were otherwise, there would be significantly more money flowing from China to the Palestinian Authority. While members of the Palestinian Authority laud their friendship with China and appreciate all the diplomatic support they receive, China has not indicated it would invest funds or substantial political capital to achieve the

aspirations it says it supports. As history demonstrates, Beijing's approach is pragmatic. As such, China has no aversion to changing its allegiance when it serves its needs. China's acknowledgment of Hamas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in January 2006 should serve as a cautionary example. Regarding China's peace through development, the Palestinians could do with more infrastructure and less politicking.

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