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Almutairi, Sarah J

Publication Date

2018

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**The Arab Gulf Monarchies' Responses To The Rise Of The Chinese
Dragon**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

POLITICS

by

Sarah J Almutairi

December 2018

The Dissertation of Sarah Almutairi is
approved:

Professor Benjamin L. Read, chair

Professor Roger Schoenman

Professor Jennifer L. Derr

Lori Kletzer
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
2. Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review.....	24
3. Chapter 3: The Historical Involvement of the United States and China in the Arab Gulf Region From (1930s-2016)	70
4. Chapter 4: Security Dimensions of Arab Gulf States' Responses to China's Rise (2001-2016)	126
5. Chapter 5: Economic Dimensions of Arab Gulf States' Responses to China's Rise.....	165
6. Chapter 6: Findings and Conclusion.....	233
7. References.....	256

List of Figures

Figure 5.1: China's Oil Production and Consumption between (1993-2016)	167
Figure 5.2: China's Oil Imports by Country, 2014.....	174
Figure 5.3: Saudi Arabia's Oil Exports by Region, 2016.....	175
Figure 5.4: Iran's Oil Exports by Country, 2017.....	177
Figure 5.5: China's Oil Imports from Iran between (2012-2016)	177
Figure 5.6: Kuwait's Oil Exports by Region, 2016.....	178
Figure 5.7: Oman's Oil Exports by Country, 2016.....	180
Figure 5.8: Sino-Saudi Trade Volume from (2008-2016)	197
Figure 5.9: China's OBOR Map.....	225

List of Tables

Table 5.1: Oil and Natural Gas Reserves, and Oil Production of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran.....	181
Table 5.2 Sino-Iranian Trade Volume from 2008-2016.....	213
Table 5.3: The Membership of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran in AIIB...	224

Abstract

The Arab Gulf Monarchies' Responses to the Rise of the Chinese Dragon

by Sarah J Almutairi

Is China rising in the Arab Gulf region as it is in other parts of world? Does China rise politically and militarily as well as economically in the region? Does its rise represent a golden opportunity for Arab Gulf states? Does China challenge the United States in the Arab Gulf region? What are the strategic responses of the Arab Gulf states toward China's rise? There is an ongoing debate among scholars of international relations (IR) and Asian studies regarding China's rise, its forms and types, its impacts on hegemonic power, international order, states' internal and external politics, and states' strategic responses toward this rise. Realists argue that any rising power will ultimately challenge the dominant power, seek to change the international order to its favor, attract or coerce by utilizing its increasing economic and military powers the other states to do what it needs and demands. In their view China is not an exception. This dissertation contributes to these discourses by examining if China is rising in the Arab Gulf region, what type is this rise, what it means to the Arab Gulf monarchies, and what are their strategic responses toward it.

This dissertation finds the following: first, although China's recent increase in prominence and power is profoundly affecting some parts of the world, China is rising only economically in the Arab Gulf region. This rise is an 'infant energy-oriented economic rise.' Importing and exporting oil represent the bulk of Sino-Arab Gulf

economic ties. In spite of ongoing and planned investments between China and the Arab Gulf states, these investments are mostly in the energy sector and relate mainly to building oil refineries and storage facilities in China in order to increase oil trade between the two sides. Also, although the Arab Gulf states and China are members in many economic forums and dialogues, these forums are merely ‘talk shows’ without any influence in strengthening ties between the two sides. Moreover, Arab Gulf states do not play a significant role in China’s One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR). It can be stated that the mutual economic interests in energy sector are the wheels that have driven China’s infant economic rise and paved the way for it.

Secondly, China’s rise today represents a limited opportunity for Arab Gulf states. China’s increased economic power is not translated into superior security and military power. Also, although China and the Arab Gulf states are increasing their economic/energy ties, their security and military ties are insignificant compared to Arab Gulf states’ ties with their traditional ally, the United States. Therefore, China lacks the ability to provide the Arab Gulf states with the security they need. Four factors set limits on China–Arab Gulf security and military ties: first China’s support and strong political, economic, and military ties with rival states, namely, Iran and Syria. Second, China’s influence over the Arab Gulf states’ traditional allies specifically, Pakistan. Third, the Arab Gulf states’ alliances with the United States. Although the US-Arab Gulf ties have witnessed major political tensions after the events of September 11 and the Arab Spring, the United States will continue to be, for the next few decades, the region’s protector. Fourth, China’s fear of being entangled in the

region's security issues and their impacts on China's internal stability, mainly the fear of Sunni radical Islam and its links to and impact on Muslims in China.

Thirdly, the Arab Gulf states studied here—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman—are pursuing a “dual hedging” strategy against China and the United States. The strategy has two dimensions. First, they are hedging against the danger that China poses to them by its stance on the region's security issues. The Arab Gulf states find that China's approach in their region is threatening their stability and survival. Therefore, while maintaining and increasing their economic and commercial ties with China, they are also strengthening military ties with the United States as well as taking steps on their own to build their militaries. This first dimension of the strategy enables them to cope with indirect threats that China poses to them because of its position regarding the Arab Gulf region's security matters and support of Iran and Syria. Second, the Arab Gulf states are hedging against the possibility that the United States might someday abandon them. They are utilizing growing economic and commercial ties with China to signal to the U.S. that the Arab Gulf region is no more dominated by the United States. And there is a new power in their region that is willing to strengthen its ties with them without irritating them by interfering in their internal political issues, a new rising power that is perceived by the U.S. as threat to its power and hegemony. Finally, a new rising power that made the U.S. change its foreign and security policies toward the Arab Gulf and ‘pivot to Asia.’ The Arab Gulf states realize that maneuvering between the two powers, the U.S. as the security power, and China as the economic power, is

their only strategic choice to fulfil their security and economic needs simultaneously, therefore, securing themselves externally and internally.

Fourth, it is Iran, not Saudi Arabia, which is viewed by China as its primary strategic ally, economic, and security partner in the region. China and Iran cooperate extensively and comprehensively in economic, political, and security aspects. Both are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which is a vital organization in Central Asia, that paves the way for them to upgrade and solidify their security, political, and economic cooperation.

This dissertation applies qualitative methods of research, including online archival research, physical archival research and interviews. Personal interviews with political officials, retired diplomats, scholars, writers, and journalists were conducted in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

To

Sameera, My Mother, the Source of Unconditional Support and Love

Sajed My Beloved Partner

Shams and Omar the Joy and Happiness of my Life

Shafaq my Sleeping Angel

I love you All

Sarah

Chapter One: Introduction

- **“China and the GCC [are] good brothers, friends and partners featuring high mutual trust, substantial trade cooperation and close cultural and people-to-people exchanges.”¹**

Chinese President Xi Jinping

Chinese officials are cited on numerous occasions, stating the importance of the Arab Gulf region to China and its rise. As evidenced by China’s public statements, Arab Gulf states are often referred to as “good brothers,” “trusted friends” and “strategic partners.” However, China also utilizes the rhetoric of brotherhood and friendship with other regional states as Iran, and with any region that presents a potential source of natural resources that meet its appetite for energy and feed its economic demands.

The literature is inundated with studies of China’s motivations for establishing economic, political and military ties with other resource-rich regions such as Latin America, Africa and Asia. Various studies explain these regions’ reactions and strategic responses toward China. Nonetheless, there is no in-depth study that concentrates on China’s rise in the Arab Gulf region. Furthermore, most China-Arab Gulf studies focus solely on China’s motivations, ignoring the Arab Gulf states’ motivations to seek ties with China on the one hand and overlooking their strategic responses toward this rise on the other.

¹GCC refers to Gulf Cooperation Council that includes six states: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Bahrain, and Sultanate of Oman.

Therefore, this dissertation aims to investigate China's rise in the Arab Gulf region and examines the Arab Gulf states' strategic responses to it. The period of time that this dissertation focuses on is 2001–2016, though it will also explain the historical backdrop to the contemporary period.

Always Seeking for Survival

China and the Gulf Region

There were three key factors that led China to reach out to the Gulf region and establish diplomatic ties with its countries.² First, China's ideological struggle with the West and the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, the Gulf region played a vital role in China's ideological agenda; during that period, China fought against Western imperialism and influence in the Arab world in general and in the Gulf in particular. China saw the Arab world and the Gulf region as a stage to promote and spread its ideological and radical thoughts to expand its influence. Therefore, China stood by the liberation Marxist movements in the Gulf, mainly in Oman, and supported them financially and logistically to fight against the local governments which were—and still are—strong allies to the West, especially the United States and Britain.

During the 1960s and 1970s, China had another enemy to fight against in the Gulf, namely the Soviet Union and its expansionist intentions in the region. After their split in 1960s, China perceived the Soviet Union as a strong competitor, therefore China sought to block any attempt by the Soviets to expand their influence in any region; the Gulf was no exception. In order to defeat the Soviets who were diplomatically active

²The Gulf region refers to the six Arab Gulf states, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen.

in the region through their ties with major Arab countries as Iraq and Egypt, China changed its approach toward the Gulf region and applied a new policy toward its Arab monarchies. Since 1970, China abandoned its radical revolutionary approach toward the region, eased its support of the liberation movements, and sought strongly to establish diplomatic ties with the region's countries in order to cooperate with them to eliminate the Soviet threat.

By the end of the 1970s, China witnessed a new economic era with Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and modernization plan. The 'opening up' policy was one of these reforms. China sought strongly to expand its economic cooperation and upgrade its economic ties with more countries, including the Gulf states and Arab monarchies. During the late 1970s and the 1980s China's involvement in the Gulf region was guided by China's need to satisfy and meet its economic development and modernization needs. China found that arms trade with the Gulf countries provided it with needed currency for its economic development. China sold arms to Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. During the Iranian-Iraqi war 1980-1988, China supplied both sides with weapons. And, since the 1980s, China played an influential role in developing the Iranian nuclear program. More details will be presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

Also, by the end of the 1980s, there was another factor that led China to strengthen its involvement in the Gulf region. In 1989 China found itself in a critical situation where it needed the support of Gulf countries to counter the Western criticism and reduce the negative impact of the international isolation and sanctions imposed on it because of its brutal response to the Tiananmen Square protests. The Gulf states did

not disappoint China, they announced their support of the Chinese government in protecting its internal stability by any means. It can be stated that during the 1970s and 1980s China needed the support of Gulf states to secure itself internally by improving its economic ties with these states, and internationally by ensuring their political support in time of crisis and struggle with the West.

During the 1990s and 2000s there were two key factors driving China's ties with Gulf countries. The first factor is economic: China's need for energy resources, especially oil. In 1993, China became a net importer of oil. As the Gulf region enjoys massive oil and natural gas reserves, China sought to increase and solidify its ties with all Gulf countries including the two rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia. The second factor concerns security: China's deep fear of the Gulf region's negative impacts on its internal stability, mainly the fear of Sunni radical Islam and its links to Muslims in China. Since the mid of 1990s, China cooperated with one Gulf state, Iran, to prevent and limit the expansion of radical Sunni Islam in Central Asia and China. More detail is presented in Chapter 4.

To summarize, from the 1950s until this moment, China had multiple reasons to go out to the Gulf. China needed the Gulf to secure itself economically, politically, and ensure its internal stability. But, what about the Arab Gulf states? What were their motivations to establish and strengthen ties with China? What were their expectations from their ties with China, and why? The following section explains briefly those motivations and expectations. More details are in Chapters 3 and 4.

Arab Gulf States and China

Arab Gulf states without exception are deeply preoccupied with their survival. Survival has both internal and external dimensions. The internal involves the protection of economic security and stability in the Arab Gulf states. These states are welfare countries that rely heavily on oil revenues. The largest expected buyer of their oil in the next few years is China. Strong economic ties between China and the Arab Gulf states promises to solidify their economic stability which is a necessity to protect and enhance their political authority and stability. In other words, their “economic strength [and stability are] directly related to [their political] power and security..., and [their] economic well-being is part of the essential values... [which] serves as a crucial factor for [these states’] legitimacy and stability.” (Drifte, 2003:2) These states’ internal economic balance and security are influenced by China’s energy demand. In case of any decrease of China’s energy demand for any reason, these states’ economic security would most likely suffer, which would ultimately impact their welfare status and their internal political balance.

The other side of the survival coin is external survival. External survival is defined as the security of the Arab Gulf states in the face of any external regional threat that is posed by rival states in the region, namely Iran and its allies in the region. Their only effective means of overcoming these threats was, and still is, aligning with an external power, which is the United States—and recently by developing their self-defense.

Arab Gulf leaders were shaken when their long-standing protector, the United States, altered its security policies regarding the region, and criticized them and their

way of rule after September 11, 2001. In 2001, the Arab Gulf region, in specific Saudi Arabia, turned toward China, after accusations concerning the September 11 events and the harsh language employed by the United States against the Arab Gulf region, particularly against Saudi regarding its connection to these attacks. There was a huge backlash in the region, more so between Saudi Arabia and the United States. As a result, Saudi Arabia, the leading power in the Arab region, was keen to diversify its security partners. Saudi Arabia not only looked to another possible alternative, China, it also played a significant role in influencing the smaller Arab Gulf states, Kuwait, to join her.

An alarming episode came after 2001. The war in Iraq in 2003 was also a key moment in the Arab Gulf–US security ties and an additional reason for Arab Gulf states to look at China as promising alternative. During the war the United States continued its criticism on internal issues in Saudi Arabia as well as the Arab Gulf region. These critics were referring to human rights, democracy, and internal politics. Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab Gulf states have considered this matter as interference with their sovereignty and authority. They reacted in such a way that they shaped a new Gulf state approach dubbed the “Look East Policy.” This policy was first cooked up in the Saudis’ political kitchen and other smaller Arab Gulf states, especially Kuwait followed suit.³

³Interview, February 24th, 2016; Interview, March 13th, 2016.

The Look East policy was primarily aimed to send a strong signal to the United States that the Arab Gulf states have a new potential partner, a promising competitor to the United States' power in the region. Ironically, although the partnership between the Arab Gulf states and China is still in an infantile stage and economically oriented, the Arab Gulf states have seen China as a capable partner that can rebalance the American political and security influence in their region—in other words, they were desperate enough to play the “China card” (Olimat, 2010:316).

The US-Arab Gulf ties were troubled by two additional security shocks. The first is when the Obama administration took steps to reduce the U.S. military presence in the region to focus on and ‘pivot to’ Asia. The second is when the same administration in 2015 signed a historic deal with Iran regarding its nuclear program. Based on this deal the economic sanctions imposed on Iran were lifted, paving the way for Iran to empower itself economically and militarily and expand its influence in the region.

From 2001 to 2011, China was Arab Gulf states' favorite alternative, particularly in the political and security aspect. Saudi Arabia tried to encourage China to play a larger security role in the region. For example, in 2004, the Saudi former foreign minister Saud Al Faisal gave a speech in Manamah, Bahrain, which revealed that the Arab Gulf states were looking forward to China's participation in shaping and protecting the security order in the Gulf. In his words, “Gulf security framework should engage positively the emerging Asian powers... especially China.” (Al Faisal, 2004:6) Nevertheless, this did not necessarily win China's favor, because China is not interested in and even not capable of playing this kind of security role in the Arab Gulf region.

The Arab Gulf leaders—especially the Saudis—discovered that China was not a good choice. The Arab Gulf leaders found that China is not willing to offer them the kind of protection that they need; additionally, China does not agree on any kind of military alliance that the Arab Gulf leaders are seeking and are keen to have. Moreover, China does not have the military capacity to do so. China had limited political or security interests in their region and has considered not only their region but the whole Middle East as the “grave of great powers.” (Chaziza, 2015:19) Also, these leaders finally realized that China wanted to enter the region forcefully through economic involvement, not by involvement in the region’s conflicts or confrontations. Therefore, China is keen to detach itself—as much as it can—from the region’s political and security issues and only focus on the economic partnerships. This Chinese view and its continued refusal of the Arab Gulf states’ call for a larger security role and support led to political and security concerns among the Arab Gulf leaders, especially in the cases of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and has strongly impacted the Arab Gulf states’ views on China’s role in the region and their strategic responses toward it.

The Saudis and Kuwaitis have found themselves in a difficult situation in which they were still in great need of U.S. security power for external protection and of China’s economic power for internal economic balance and stability. Unlike the other two cases, Oman has not found itself in problematic situation with US, as its ties with U.S. have not been negatively impacted since 9/11. Oman did not need to look for a new security partner. Accordingly, Oman did not view China as its next security partner. But as in the other two cases, Oman needs China and its economic power to secure

itself economically. Currently, the Arab Gulf states need to deal with two powers: the security power, the U.S., and the economic power, China; how they deal with and react toward these powers are what this dissertation aims to discover.

The Puzzle

Realists argue that China's growing economic power will ultimately be translated into hard military power in many regions starting with Asia. They go further by claiming that, in spite of continued assurances from Beijing, China's rise cannot be a "peaceful rise," as China seeks to gain regional hegemony in Asia and be the dominant power (Mearsheimer 2001, 2006).⁴ Also, they argue that China's rise poses a great challenge to the international order by seeking to replace Western international order on one hand, and threaten U.S. power and undermine its influence, especially in Asia, on the other (Mearsheimer 2001, 2006). Therefore, states like the U.S. and its allies need to adopt balancing strategies to prevent China from expanding its power and influence in Asia and other parts of the world. However, this is not the case in the Arab Gulf region which seems to be a place where China wants to focus purely on economic exchange and has not tried to translate its economic power into security and strategic power. Contrary to what realists argue, China is not utilizing its economic engagement in the Arab Gulf region, especially in the energy sector, to increase its political, military, and strategic predominance in the region. Moreover, China is not seeking to undermine or damage Arab Gulf states' ties with the United States nor to replace the

⁴The peaceful rise term was coined in 2003 by Zheng Bijian, the former Vice Principal of the Central Party School, since then it has been largely applied by the Chinese officials to define China's foreign policies, especially toward its neighbors in Asia (Jing, 2014:61-62).

U.S. as the dominant power in the region. In other words, China's increased economic cooperation with the Arab Gulf region, especially in the energy sector, is not aimed to pave the way for a strong political and strategic alignment with the region's states, or to control the region to make it a 'Chinese lake.'

Although, there are many studies that examine China's rise and its impact on: the U.S. power, the international order, states' internal and external policies, and states' reactions toward China and its rise. However, only a few deal with China's rise and its different strategies in the Middle East (Halper 2010; Shambaugh 2013; Sutter 2012; Salman 2013). Also, there are studies that focus on Chinese foreign policy and strategies, its history and motivations toward the Gulf region (Huwaidin 2002; Behbehani 1981; Sager 2010; Hokayem 2011; Calabrese 1998; Wu 2011:10).⁵ More on these writings will come in Chapter 2. However, there is no single study that focuses on China's rise in the Arab Gulf region, the type and form of this rise, the Arab Gulf monarchies' strategic reactions toward China's increasing power, and then relate all the above to the broader academic debate regarding China's rise.⁶

Therefore, this dissertation raises two questions and advances three hypotheses. The first question is: How are Arab Gulf states responding and reacting to China's rise? The second question is: How do we explain these responses and reactions?

⁵The Gulf region itself was a space and area for balancing against other great powers. One of the reasons that China looked to the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular is to balance against the United States and the Soviet Union (Huwaidin 2002:52/90/260/272-273; Dillon 2004: 42-44).

⁶Dawn Murphy in her research "Rising Revisionist? China's Relations with the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa in the post-Cold War Era," (2012), has questioned the type of China's rise and its impacts in the Middle East in general. Her study covered China's ties with twenty countries, Arab Gulf states were among these countries. However, this dissertation argues that this region is a unique region that needs to be analyzed as a separate block from the larger Middle East. More details come later.

The three hypotheses are:

1. Arab Gulf states' concerns for their internal stability and survival drive them to form closer ties with rising China.
2. Increasing economic benefits and profits motivate Arab Gulf states to form closer ties with rising China.
3. The Arab Gulf states' concerns regarding strong Sino-Iranian ties restrain them from embracing China militarily in the region.

Under these two broad questions, several sub-questions are answered, such as: is China fully rising in the Arab Gulf region? In other words, is China rising economically, politically, and military in the region? What is the core of China's rise in the region? Do Arab Gulf states really matter in China's economic map, notably its OBOR initiative? If not, why not? Are Sino-Arab Gulf economic forums effective tools in bringing the ties between China and the Arab Gulf states closer or not, and why? Who is China's most promising strategic ally, economic and security partner in the region, and why? Does China challenge the U.S. power in the Gulf region? If not, why not? Does China try to undermine U.S. ties with its historical allies, the Arab Gulf monarchies? If not, why not?

There are four major objectives of this dissertation:

- First, to understand the nature of China's rise in an energy resources-rich region that is far from China's immediate neighborhood.⁷

⁷According to Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, China has four concentric circles, the first is China's entire territory, the second is China's borders and immediate neighborhood, the third is China's surrounding regions, and the fourth is China's far neighborhood. For more detail read their article titled: "How China Sees America The Sum of Beijing's Fears," *Foreign Affairs*, 91;5, (2012): 32-47.

- Second, to understand the opportunities and threats that China's rise brings to the Arab Gulf region and their impact on Sino-Arab Gulf ties on one hand, and the Arab Gulf states' view of China on the other.
- Third, to understand the Arab Gulf states' strategic responses toward China.
- Fourth, to understand the impact of China's rise on US-Arab Gulf ties and U.S. power in the region.

To answer all the above and achieve the previously mentioned objectives, this dissertation draws on a neo-realist theoretical framework that highlights states' need to pursue external and internal security through internal and external balancing, and the role of external and internal factors in shaping states' strategic responses toward any rising power. This dissertation argues that Arab Gulf states' strategic responses toward China can only be explained and determined by both external and internal factors. The primary external factors are China's positions toward the region's security issues; China's ties with rival regional states, namely Iran and Syria; China's growing influence over Pakistan; the Arab Gulf states' political and security ties with the United States, and China's fear of ethno-religious links, mainly links between radical Sunni Islam groups and Muslims in China, and the ramifications of these links on its internal stability. The internal factors are the Arab Gulf states' need to secure and protect their internal economic security and stability; and their need to sustain their welfare status quo. Securing internal economic balance and welfare status quo is very crucial to secure Arab Gulf states' internal political power and balance—what this dissertation means

by internal political power and balance is the protection of Arab Gulf monarchies' interests, the insurance of their survival, and the continuity of their rule in the first place.

This dissertation finds that the only strategy that allows Arab Gulf monarchies to secure themselves externally and internally is “double hedging” against China and the United States. The Arab Gulf states continuously hedge against any move from the U.S. and China that impacts negatively their security and survival. They hedge against the U.S.'s decrease of security commitment toward them, the U.S. interference in their internal issues, mainly its unwanted political pressure for political reforms, and the U.S. unwillingness to support them during times of security crisis. They hedge against the U.S. by strengthening their economic ties and engagement with China. These states utilize their increased economic ties with China, especially in the energy sector, to reduce their dependency on the U.S. on one hand and signal to the U.S. that there is a new power in their region which they look at as their potential alternative, on the other. Moreover, Arab Gulf states hedge against China and its indirect threats against them, especially by its stances regarding the region's security issues, its ties with their rival Iran, and its support to their enemy in Syria, Assad. They hedge against China by seeking to increase their military ties and reinforce their security alliance with the United States on one hand and upgrade their own military defense abilities, on the other. To secure themselves, Arab Gulf states take a median position between the U.S. and China that allows them to maneuver between the two, play them against each other, and seek to gain more from them at the same time. Hedging strategy applied by the

Arab Gulf states is not only a backup plan when wind blows against them; it is rather an ongoing and dynamic process that aims to counter and consider all the possibilities in order to minimize the risks they face and maximize the gains they gain from both powers.

Methodology: Case Studies and Methods

Why the Arab Gulf Region is an Important Test Case?

Scholars have focused extensively on China's rise and other states' strategic responses toward it in different parts of the world, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. However, there is no single study that focuses on China's predominance in the Arab Gulf region or on its countries' strategic responses toward it. This dissertation argues that the Arab Gulf region is an important test case that deserves more attention, especially from scholars who are interested in China's increasing power. There are two reasons that explain the importance of the Arab Gulf region as test case: first, although the Arab Gulf is a region far from China's borders and its immediate neighborhood, China greatly needs the region and its energy resources to satisfy its increasing economic needs. As Chapter 2 shows there are many studies that assume that China's rise and its impact are most perceived in Asia-Pacific region, China's immediate neighborhood.⁸ However, this dissertation encourages us to go beyond the Asia-Pacific region to study and investigate China's rise in vital regions outside China's

⁸Ibid.

geographic range that are distanced by thousands of miles and which China needs to sustain its economic growth.

Second, some scholars often assume that China's increasing economic power in a region will go hand-in-hand with expanding its strategic influence and challenging the dominant power there as is the case in the Asia-Pacific. The Arab Gulf region represents a vital test case to examine if China's increasing economic ties with the region's countries aim to ultimately expand its political and strategic power, challenge the U.S. power, and take U.S. allies away from it as in Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia, especially that this is a region where the U.S. power and influence loom large; a region where the U.S. enjoys strong and historical alliances with its countries and a region where the U.S. practices its influence and shows its military power and supremacy by initiating wars to protect its interests. On the other hand, it is a region that China seeks strongly to increase and upgrade its economic ties with its countries to meet its growing economic needs.

Case Studies

The Arab Gulf region comprises six states. And these states share many similarities which are helpful in controlling some factors of any potential variation regarding their responses toward China. All of the Arab Gulf states are Islamic and Arab countries, monarchies, rich in energy resources such as oil and natural gas, are located in the same geographic region, and have similar cultural and sociological features. This dissertation concentrates on three Arab Gulf states: the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman. Although these states share

the previously mentioned similarities, they differ in the following aspects: they have different quantities of oil and natural gas—Saudi Arabia is the richest in energy resources. The type of political regime in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is a *Sunni* monarchy, while Oman has an *Ibadi* monarchy. The nature of regional security threats that these states face—especially from Iran and Syria—also differ in impacting their ties and their strategic responses toward the U.S. and China.

Moreover, historically, Kuwait is well known in the Gulf and the Arab and Islamic world as an active state politically, economically and diplomatically.⁹ Kuwait was the first Arab Gulf state to establish diplomatic relations with China. Therefore, Kuwait has the longest economic and diplomatic history with China among the other Arab Gulf states, making Kuwait a strong case study that provides the research with vital data on the history and background of China's presence in the region. Second, studying Sino-Kuwait ties is important not only to understand the ties between Kuwait and China, but also China's ties with the other smaller Arab Gulf states. As a small Sunni monarchy, Kuwait is a useful representative case study for other small Sunni monarchies in the region such as Qatar and Bahrain. Finally, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia enjoy stronger political ties than the Omani-Saudi ties. These strong political ties are significantly central to explaining the political and security agreements between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in defining threats facing these states and the region. For example, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait view Iran as source of threat to their survival and

⁹For example, Kuwait proposed the idea of establishing the GCC in 1981 in response to different external security factors and concerns. One of those concerns was the fear that the Shiite Iranian revolution would spread to Kuwait and the other Arab Gulf states.

the region's stability; both have political and ideological tensions with Iran. By contrast, Oman has strong and stable economic and political relationships with Iran, and is also geographically closest to it. Also, Kuwait is an important test case that shows how and why Saudi Arabia influences the smaller Arab Gulf states and their foreign policies, especially in times of regional crisis. Studying Kuwait shows that in security issues which involve external powers such as the U.S. and China, or regional powers such as Iran and Syria, Saudi Arabia leads the smaller Arab Gulf states, mainly Kuwait and Bahrain, and influences their decisions and responses. Saudi influence over Kuwait started with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990; since then Kuwait's decisions regarding the region's security issues are largely influenced by Saudi Arabia. There are three reasons that explain Kuwaiti acceptance of Saudi influence—all related to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. First, after the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait realized that it is Saudi Arabia which is the state among the other Arab Gulf states most capable of supporting Kuwait financially, logistically and strategically. Second, the invasion made Kuwait realize its need for the Saudis' Islamic, political, and economic influence over the other Islamic countries, especially in the United Nations, to stand with its cause. Third, after the invasion, Kuwait realized it needs Saudi Arabia to counter Iraq, limit its power and influence in the region, ultimately, reducing its threats on Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia represents an essential and vital case for any study on the Gulf and the Arab Gulf region. Saudi Arabia is the largest Sunni state with the highest population in the region. It is the second richest state in the world after Venezuela and the richest in the Gulf in terms of oil reserves. Saudi Arabia enjoys significant global

and regional weight due to its religious influence in the Islamic World. Finally, Saudi Arabia enjoys a great influence over the smaller Sunni Arab Gulf states that undoubtedly impacts their regional decisions and their ties with any regional and external power including their ties with Iran, the U.S., and China.

Oman represents a special and unique case. First, as previously mentioned, Oman is the only *Ibadi* monarchy in the Arab Gulf, and is viewed as politically isolated from other Arab Gulf states. Second, Oman is well known for its independent foreign policy to achieve its own political interests and agenda separately from the other Arab Gulf states. Oman is the only Arab Gulf state that has resisted all kinds of Saudi influence and refused to be entangled in any regional crisis, especially with Iran and Syria. Oman is the only Arab Gulf state that prevented its political, security, and economic ties with any regional power, namely Iran and Syria, and external power, the U.S. and China, from being negatively impacted because of other states' security and political conflicts or disagreements. Finally, Oman has a substantially different history with China, which in the 1960s supported the liberation movement in the Dhofari Governorate in Oman and during which China went as far as providing this movement with logistical help, money, arms and military training (Huwaidin 2002; Calabrese 1993).

Methods

This dissertation uses qualitative methods of research, including online archival research, physical archival research and interviews. Field work was conducted in Kuwait, employing archival research and personal interviews. Data on Saudi Arabia

and Oman have depended on online archives research and interviews conducted either personally or via Skype.

Physical archival research includes visits to archives of the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies in Kuwait, governmental libraries in Kuwait, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Qatar, and the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in the United Arab Emirates. Physical archival research provides a strong historical background on China's historical, economic, and political presence and involvement in the three states specifically, and in the region in general. It illustrates various internal and external factors that drove China to establish political and economic ties with the Arab Gulf states and helps provide a basic picture of the three cases' strategic responses toward China.

The dissertation has also utilized online newspaper archives, online United Nations archives and GCC archives on the three cases. Online newspaper archives provide primary information on the significant economic and military treaties that the three Arab Gulf states signed with China—when they occurred and under what circumstances. Also, they highlight key moments of Arab Gulf–Chinese cooperation or conflicts, such as Arab Gulf states' official speeches or announcements on China's rise in the region, or their views on China's role in the Iranian nuclear program and the Syrian crisis. Finally, information obtained helped in designing questions for interviews. This dissertation analyzes the international daily newspapers *Asharq Al-Awsat* and *Al-Hayat*, along with one daily local newspaper for each case: *Al-Qabas* from Kuwait, *Al-Riyadh* from Saudi Arabia, and *Al-Watan* from Oman. I selected these

newspapers because they are among the oldest in the region and they have online archives.¹⁰

Searching through the United Nations online archives provided vital information about Kuwaiti, Saudi and Omani voting behavior in the General Assembly on China's admission to the UN, Iran nuclear program, and Syrian crisis. Searching through the GCC archives provides data related to China's growing economic role in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman from 1993 to 2016. Also, it provides the most central and significant "formal" treaties and agreements between China and the three Arab Gulf States. For example, vital treaties on trade, oil industry, labor exchange and Chinese companies' presence and investments in each state; significant presidential or high political official visits to these countries; multilateral diplomatic, institutional and security agreements; China's participation in forums or institutions with GCC or other regional institutions which the Arab Gulf states are part of; such as the Arab league.¹¹

Online archives search of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the Energy Information Administration (EIA), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco), and Oman Oil Company, (OOC) has also provided vital and specified economic data,

¹⁰Although most of these newspapers are private, all of them operate under the surveillance of the political regime in each respective country.

¹¹There were several communications and contacts with official employees in the Asian Department in the GCC, Department of Statistics in the GCC, and the Department of Political Affairs in the GCC to obtain further data on Sino-Arab Gulf ties.

especially in the energy sector between the three cases and China, and their participation in vital Chinese economic projects.

Searching through Kuwait's Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) website provided data on the Chinese presence in Kuwait and Chinese investments; searching through Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development website and online archives gave detailed data on Kuwait's loans and funds to China; and finally, searching through Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) website produced data on Kuwait Investment Beijing Representative Office in China (KIRO).

Data on the Chinese weapons sale records to the three Arab Gulf states—the quantity and quality of these weapons has been obtained through online archive search of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) archives.

Thirty-three in-person and Skype interviews were conducted to understand varying opinions on China's rise in the Arab Gulf region and these states' multiple ties, reactions and strategic responses toward it. Interviewees included political officials, retired diplomats, scholars, writers, and journalists. There were a few interviewees that the researcher has interviewed more than once with their approval. Personal interviews were conducted in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar (required two visits), and the United Arab Emirates (required two visits). The whole journey of fieldwork took almost a year and a half.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into six chapters: Chapter 2 reviews the literature. It examines the prevailing writings and ideas on the rising power, the IR theories on

the rising power, in particular realism theory, individual states' strategic responses toward the rising power, such as the theory of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. Chapter 2 concentrates on China as a rising power, IR theories on China's rise, China's rise in various regions, and China and the Arab Gulf region.

Chapter 3 provides a historical review of the United States' and China's involvement in the Gulf region. Then, it examines the impacts of September 11 on U.S. security alliances with the Arab Gulf states. Finally, it investigates the Arab Gulf states' security and political concerns. It analyzes the shared and divergent security and political interests among Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman and their impacts on these states' security ties with U.S. and China on the one hand, and on their dual hedging strategy toward the United States on the other.

Chapter 4 examines the divergent political and security interests, regarding Iran and Syria, between the three countries and China, and their impact on these states' political and security ties with China on one hand, and their dual hedging strategy against China on the other.

Chapter 5 analyzes the shared economic interests between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and China. It examines the role of energy trade, economic projects as OBOR, and economic forums and dialogues in strengthening the economic ties between the three countries and China. This chapter also reveals the regional state that China is strongly keen to establish strong and sustainable economic ties with, namely Iran, and explains why.

Chapter 6 summarizes four key findings regarding China's rise in the Arab Gulf region, the nature of this rise, the opportunities China's rise brings to the region, the threats China poses to the region, and finally the explanations behind the dual hedging strategy against China. The chapter explains why each case hedges against China. Finally, it suggests three areas for further study.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two sections: section one presents the dissertation's theoretical framework. In particular, it discusses realist and neo-realist theories and their views concerning a rising power, its impacts on regional and international order, and different states' reactions and responses toward it. Section two is on the literature. It examines and reviews writings on China as a rising power, China's rise in different regions, and responses of different states toward its rise. Moreover, it reviews various writings on China and the Middle East, China and the Gulf region, and Asia/China and the Arab Gulf states. The section concludes by providing a summary of the findings from the reviewed writings on one hand, and gaps that the dissertation seeks to fill, on the other.

Theoretical Framework

Realism and Neo-Realism

Realist theory views the state as the most basic and important player on the international level; the state's survival and self-interests determine its international behavior, foreign policy, and strategic responses (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001,2006; Donnelly, 2013:43-44). Every state strives either to gain more power or maintain its current power (Waltz 1979; Morgenthau 1973; Mearsheimer 2001,2006; Walt 1987; Donnelly 2013:43; Shambaugh 2013:10).

The motivation behind a state's keen desire to increase or maintain power is to secure its survival (Waltz, 1979). According to Waltz there are specific measurements to define a state's power such as its economic and military capabilities, its territory, its

size of population, its resource endowment, and its political stability (Waltz, 1979: 131). From a neo-realist view point, a state aims strongly to balance its internal and external power by developing and increasing its internal economic and military capabilities—contrary to the classical realism which focuses only on developing military power by aligning and establishing strong ties with strong external powers. Moreover, neo-realists argue that the structure of the international system is anarchical, and a state’s international behavior and actions can be explained by its different interactions with other states through this anarchical system (Waltz, 1979). Thus, external factors such as the nature of the international system and other states’ power and actions play a significant role in impacting a state’s actions and behavior.

The Arab Gulf states’ responses toward any rising power including China, should begin with the key word “survival”; it is their main and ultimate goal. Based on their survival desire, and their attempts to secure their internal and external survival and balance, they react to rising China. This dissertation finds neo-realist theory to be the most appropriate approach to analyze the Arab Gulf states’ responses and ties with rising China. There are two reasons for taking such an approach. First is the absence of strong and influential domestic societal political players, civil groups and public opinion that shape and impact Arab Gulf states’ responses toward the region’s security issues and rising powers—China being no exception—and their alliances with their traditional allies. It is the ruler, the King, the Emir, the Sultan and their small closed inner political circles who have the right and ability to influence the state’s responses and form its policies and strategies. The second reason lies in the fact that, although

states' decisions and strategic responses are completely in the hands of the ruler, external factors such as security crises and security changes made by an ally are the key factors that to force the ruler to rethink his state's strategies, and form new strategic responses toward allies or any new rising power in the region in order to secure his authority and power. In other words, the external factors related to changes in international and regional contexts, or Arab Gulf states ties with other powers, have the upper hand in forming these states' strategic responses toward any rising power, including China.

Neo-realist approach helps investigate the Arab Gulf states' motivations, needs, and their strategic responses toward China. It helps to analyze the role of the external factors as China's stances regarding the region's security issues including: China's ties with Iran and Syria, and China's influence on Pakistan. Also, the neo-realist approach helps to investigate the role of Arab Gulf states' security ties with the United States and its influence on their ties with and their responses toward China. The neo-realist approach helps to examine the role of Arab Gulf states' need to secure their internal economic and political balance by forming and adopting new economic and military policies to increase their national power on one hand and secure their internal balance on the other. At the same time, they tend to secure their external balance by forming strong military ties with other external powers, namely the U.S., to face the indirect threats posed to them by rising China.¹²

¹²David Shambaugh in his chapter "International Relations of Asia: A Multidimensional Analysis," in *International Relations of Asia*, by David Shambaugh, Michael Yahuda, (eds.), (2014), distinguishes

Before reviewing IR theories mainly realism and neo-realism and their views and ideas on rising power and different states' strategic responses to it, it is crucial to provide the dissertations' definition of the concept of rising power.

Rising Power

Since power in IR is dynamic and changeable, new powers are continually emerging as others fall. The IR field has been focusing on the rising power phenomenon and its impacts on international order, great powers' hegemony, regional stability, and states' domestic and external politics. Although the rising power phenomenon has been a vital topic in the IR, there is no consensus on its definitions or measurements (Hart and Jones 2011:65; Johnston 2008:9). Defining rising power is based on two categories: the first is hard power, where the state seeks to play international and regional political roles and challenges the dominant power based on its growing material power, i.e., economic growth and advanced military capacity (Mearsheimer 2001, 2006). The second is soft power, where the rising power influences other states to "get what [it] want[s] through attraction rather than coercion or payments." (Nye, 2004: x/11)

Other IR scholars such as Snow (2012) and Hart (1976), highlight the importance of both hard and soft powers to illustrate the rising power and its impacts on global power distribution. Rising power is the "country, that by virtue of increased military, economic, or other power, is or has the potential to play a more prominent

between internal balance and external balance. Internal balance is achieved by adopting self-help policies of strengthening comprehensive national power, whereby, external balance is achieved by aligning with big other power to offset threats (13).

role in the international system than it has heretofore played, [it seeks to] change the relative power balance between the major powers, [and] influence the existing order and establish its own place.” (Snow, 2012: 207) On the other hand, Hart (1976), is more interested in addressing the core tactics that the rising powers apply to expand their international role and influence. These tactics are a combination of hard and soft powers. The rising power seeks to expand its control over resources to secure its economic growth and its control over actors, events and outcomes to influence other states (Hart, 1976).

By drawing on the reviewed literature, this dissertation defines rising power as a state that has significant economic growth, with advanced military capacities, and which utilizes its successful growth in these two aspects to fortify its diplomatic, political and economic ties in regions beyond its own, to protect its rise and to influence the existing system in its favor.

IR Theories and Rising Power

Within IR, there are different theories on the rising power and its global and regional impacts. Realism theory is divided into three sub-theories, each with its own perspective in analyzing the rising power’s motivations, its relationship with the dominant power, and its influences on the international order. Offensive Realism theory argues that any rising power seeks for more hard power to change the international order and to challenge the existing hegemonic power in order to achieve regional and global hegemony (Mearsheimer 2001,2006). Offensive realists argue that war and conflict between rising and dominant powers is inevitable (Mearsheimer 2001,2006).

However, realist scholars disagree on the timing and international conditions in which conflict occurs (Shambaugh, 2013:10). For example, Power Transition (PT) theory agrees with offensive realism that any rising power seeks to challenge the dominant power; nevertheless, PT predicts that war and conflict occur during the transition period because the international order lacks stability; thus, war and conflict between a rising power and a dominant power erupt (Gilpin 1981,1988:595; Organski 1958; Organski and Kugler 1980; Shambaugh 2013:10-11; Donnelly 2013:40). Defensive Realism, unlike offensive realism or power transition theories, does not believe that conflict or war between the rising power and the hegemonic power are pre-determined; they argue that rising power seeks more hard power to maintain its survival and security, rather than to challenge the dominant power (Waltz, 1979).

Liberalism and Neoliberalism are other IR theories that offer contrasting views on rising power. Rather than challenging the international order to gain or maintain power, the rising power integrates with the system by participating in regional and international organizations and through economic interdependence with other states (Shambaugh 2013:14-15; Keohane 1984; Keohane and Nye 1989; Burchill 2013: 67).¹³ Through integration and cooperation with the system, the rising power accesses various benefits, especially economic ones.¹⁴ Finally, Constructivism draws our attention away from materialistic aspects to normative aspects. It focuses on the role of norms,

¹³There are two faces of liberalism: economic liberalism and institutional liberalism-which is also called neoliberalism.

identities, values, ideas, perceptions and history, to illustrate that the rising power either challenges the international order or works with it (Reus 2013:217-239; Wendt 1995).

How Do States Respond to Rising Powers?

Established states have different strategies in facing the new rising power, including balancing of power, balancing of threats, bandwagoning, engagement, integration, and hedging. The following section is a review of these strategies, their elements and definitions.

Balance of Power and Balance of Threats

Balancing against refers to a state's strategy to protect its survival and security by increasing its different forms of power vis-à-vis the rising power (Waltz 1979; Morgenthau 1973; Mearsheimer 2001; Walt 1987). The theory of balance has two strands. First is the balance of power, in which states seek to balance the rising superior power by increasing their hard power or by distributing power between them (Waltz, 1979). Their goal is that "no single state and no existing alliance has an 'overwhelming' or 'preponderant' amount of power." (Sheehan, 1996:4) The second strand is the balance of threat. Stephen Walt (1987), argues that states balance against the threats posed by the rising power. Threats are determined by four criteria: aggregate power for alliance formation, geographical proximity, offensive power and aggressive intentions (22-25). If states face a rising power that poses a threat to them in these four criteria, they will balance against it.

Bandwagon with

The term bandwagon is defined from two different perspectives: one is based on security concerns while the second is based on profit-gaining. According to the first perspective, bandwagoning means that states seek security protection and avoid any potential attack by aligning with the stronger or threatening power (Waltz 1979; Morgenthau 1973; Mearsheimer 2001; Walt 1987). The second perspective states that bandwagoning is gaining material and economic advantages by “being with the winning side.” (Schweller, 1994:72-104)

Engagement and Integration

It is common in IR that there is no single definition for its terms; engagement and integration are no exception. However, this dissertation focuses on the main and most common definitions. Engagement strategy means that the state aims to build and maintain economic, political and diplomatic ties and contacts with the rising power by utilizing positive and non-coercive tools, such as inclusion and rewards, to socialize the rising power in order to make it accept the rules and institutions of the existing international order (Chung 2009/10:660; Papayoanou and Kastner 1999: 158-159; Roy 2005: 306). Integration strategy means that the state seeks to integrate and incorporate the rising power into the existing international system and its various institutions and forums (Chung 2009/10; Papayoanou and Kastner 1999:158-159).

Hedging Against

The origin of hedging term came from finance, then was borrowed by IR scholars to refer to an alternative strategy that differs from balancing against and bandwagoning with as well as describes small states and big powers’ reactions to other

rising powers (Chwee, 2008:161). Hedging means that a state is stressing engagement and integration on one hand and applying realist-style balancing on the other; it balances externally and internally by strengthening security cooperation with big powers and upgrading national military capacities (Medeiros, 2005:145). Also, by application, hedging against a state is keeping the state's strategic options open in order to contain possible and future threats and dangers (Roy, 2005: 306). Guzansky defines hedging as "a situation in which states seek to strike a middle ground,... [to]... gain [profits], to offset risks and improve its situation in relation to the rising power while avoiding a major confrontation," a strategy that helps states keep important ties with the threatening power on one hand, and balance against its future security threat on the other (Guzansky, 2015:120). The key factor that leads states to hedge against a rising power is uncertainty; when states are uncertain of the rising power's intentions regarding them and are uncertain of the risks that rising power imposes on them they tend to hedge against it (He, 2012: 56).¹⁵

This dissertation argues that Arab Gulf states are dual hedging against China and their traditional ally, the United States. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a clear definition of dual hedging strategy. By drawing on the reviewed definitions, this dissertation defines hedging as a strategy that allows both big powers and small states to keep their strategic options open; a strategy that "avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another," to "cope[s] with the diffuse uncertainties," and

¹⁵The containment policy was not included because Arab Gulf states simply cannot apply this policy with a country like China; "China literally could not be contained." (Shambaugh, 2013:315)

reduces both the direct and the indirect threats that are imposed by any rising power through economic engagement and cooperation, strong military alliance, and advanced self-military capacity (Goh 2006; Chwee 2008:170).

Dual hedging strategy means that a state hedges against a rising power, and at the same time, uses its growing ties with the rising power to hedge against a traditional ally or other states.¹⁶ In this dissertation, the Arab Gulf states are applying a dual hedging strategy: they simultaneously hedge between Beijing, Washington, and themselves. On one hand, Arab Gulf states strongly seek the protection of the U.S. to secure their external balance, while they use their growing ties with China—especially on the economic front—to hedge against risks that the United States’ poses for them: as possible withdrawal, decrease of security commitment to the region, unwanted political pressure to change their way of ruling. While increasing economic ties with China to secure internal economic and political balance, Arab Gulf states are hedging against China’s indirect threats to them by its negative stance regarding security matters and its strong support to rival states namely Iran and Syria. They hedge against China by increasing their security ties with the United States and developing their self-military capabilities.

¹⁶In their article “Japan’s Dual Hedge,” Heginbotham and Samuels use the dual hedging term to describe Japan’s strategy toward U.S. and China. According to them, Japan relies on its security alliance with the U.S. to defeat military threats it would face from China, and on the other hand, it strongly seeks to establish strong economic ties with China, who is perceived by U.S as competitor and source of security threats, to counter any possible economic threats. For more details read: “Japan’s Dual Hedge,” by Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, *Foreign Affairs*, 81;5, (2002): 110-121.

The dissertation aims to show that Arab Gulf states are at the center of an uncertain situation regarding their ties with both China and the United States. They are not sure whether their traditional ally will continue to be their protector, or whether China will ever be less committed to their enemies, Iran and Syria. This dissertation argues that the situation of uncertainty drives these states to keep their strategic options open and maneuver between China, the United States and even among themselves to secure their survival. Moreover, the dissertation shows that states' views of China's rising affluence are changeable. Some states shift their views of China from being a source of security support to a source of security threat. Arab Gulf states have proven the case that shifted China from being a source of "security support" to a source of "indirect threat," revealing that the hedging strategy adopted by these states toward China would be an addition to the general wisdom of how states react toward rising power and change their strategies toward it basing on their changeable views of it. More importantly, the dissertation aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the causes and reasons behind state's dual hedging strategy against China, which requires drawing attention to the role of political, economic, security character and necessities of the Arab Gulf region and their impact in shaping the Arab Gulf states' responses to China's rise.

The following section is divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section reviews scholarly writings on China as a rising power, China's rise in different regions, and different states' strategic responses toward its rise. The second sub-section

examines various writings on China and the Middle East, China and the Gulf region, mainly, Iran and the Arab Gulf states.

Existing Studies of China's International Relations

Theoretical Perspectives on China as a Rising Power

China is vigorously rising in multiple domains; economically, politically, diplomatically and militarily. This rise has attracted the attention of IR scholars and Asian studies scholars. The following section is a brief review of different literatures on China's rise in general and its rise in specific regions in particular. Most of the following literatures—except David Shambaugh's dissenting piece—illustrate that China is a rising power economically, politically, military and culturally. However, they differ regarding the approaches they apply, their findings on the impacts of China's rise on the international order, on the world's hegemony and hegemonic powers, on foreign and domestic regional countries' politics, and on states' strategic responses regarding this rise.

Scholars such as Mearsheimer (2001,2006) believe that China's growing rise cannot be a "peaceful rise," as China seeks to gain regional hegemony in Asia in order to gain global hegemony. From an offensive realist's viewpoint, he argues that China's rise poses a great challenge to the international order by seeking to replace Western international order and the global American hegemony (Mearsheimer 2001,2006). Therefore, he calls on states to balance against China economically and militarily

(Mearsheimer, 2001).¹⁷ In contrast to Mearsheimer's pessimistic view on China's rise and its impact on US power and international order, defensive realists such as Nathan and Scobell (2012) argue that China's rise is a contingent challenge to the international order, the world's hegemony and regional countries, because China is currently deeply overwhelmed by many security challenges within and outside its borders (Nathan and Scobell, 2012: xi). Therefore, China does not pose a challenge to the international order or the West, unless this order and the West weaken themselves, creating an opportunity to overtake Western hegemony when it displays vulnerability (Nathan and Scobell, 2012: 358-359). However, "defensive realists are not starry-eyed idealists," and they do not neglect the fact that China will continue to search for chances to change the balance of power in its favor (Mearsheimer, 2006: 84).

Other scholars such as Yong and Wang (2005), Kang (2003,2007), and Lampton (2006, 2008), study Asian/Chinese history, norms, and identity to emphasize that China's rise is a peaceful and useful rise for the international order and for different regional countries. According to them, China seeks strongly to strengthen its relationships—especially economic ones—with other regional countries and by

¹⁷States either balance against China's rise or buck-pass it; in Mearsheimer's view buck-pass is a situation where the states "try to get another great power to check the aggressor while they remain on the sidelines."(2001:139) Also, Thomas J. Christensen and Jack L. Snyder, in "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," explain buck-passing as a situation when a state "counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping arising hegemon." (1990:138) For more details read: John Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of great power politics*, (New York: Norton, 2001) and Christensen, Thomas J., Snyder, Jack, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization*, 44;2, (Spring 1990):137-68.

participating in different regional and global organizations. This is in contrast to the offensive realist viewpoint, that states in general—and East Asian countries in particular—will balance against China’s growing power. Instead, these scholars believe that states will bandwagon with China’s rise because of the shared Asian identity, the region’s history and the economic advantages which these states gain from aligning with China (Kang, 2003,2007). From a strategic thinking viewpoint, Edward Luttwak (2012), focuses on these same factors of China’s history and culture but arrives at a contrasting conclusion. According to him, China’s aggressive actions, maritime territorial claims in East China and South China seas, and its expansion of military capabilities have alarmed its neighbors (1-12). Thus, Asian neighbors balance against China by strengthening their ties with other great powers—i.e. the United States—and establishing security coalitions and alliances among themselves (Luttwak, 2012).

From liberal and neoliberal institutional approach, John Ikenberry (2013), concentrates on how liberal norms of the Western world have influenced China and its ascent. Ikenberry argues that China faces a strong liberal and Western international order which limits and contains its power and influence; and China cannot directly confront this Western liberal system for many reasons, such as the system’s capacity, which is “wider and deeper,” and its modernity, which is a highly developed system (55-57). Moreover, this Western system provides China with many golden opportunities to work with it and with the other states, especially through economic interdependence (Ikenberry, 2013). Working with the system gives China access to what Ikenberry calls “club benefits” such as international world aid, protection, free

trade, and openness to all states (64-66). According to this perspective, states do not need to balance against or bandwagon with China, they can depend on the international system's strength as an alternative strategy. In other words, the Western international system has the ability to contain, block, and constrain China's rise and its hegemonic ambitions (Ikenberry, 2013).

David Shambaugh (2013) holds a different opinion regarding China's rise as a global power and its regional and global impacts. He argues that within the literature on China's rise, there is an exaggeration of China's progression toward becoming a great power, while in fact, China is incapable of becoming a great power (5-7). In Shambaugh's view, becoming a great power requires hard and soft powers. Beijing has resources in terms of its economic growth and military advancement; however, it lacks soft power, as well as regional and global influence. "Beijing does not do enough to shoulder its appropriate share of international responsibility," and it does not shape events or resolve global problems (309). Therefore, Shambaugh sees that China has "very long way to go before it becomes—if it ever becomes—a true global power." (6) The only strategy to contain China's partial rise is integration; integration is the only available strategy that states have to manage their relationships with partial power, China (314).

China's Rise in Different Regions

In order to facilitate and protect its rise, China has developed different economic, diplomatic and political ties, and created networks of supportive international relations, especially within various resource-rich regions such as Africa,

Latin America, and the Middle East, specifically the Gulf region (Lampton 2008; Sutter 2012). There are two reasons for this expansion in China's foreign relations policy. First, China seeks to establish a multipolar international system not dominated by one state or group of states, an international system where the West does not constitute its center (Sutter, 2012: 296). Second, China wants to insure and secure its economic rise through the search for different sources of energy and other natural resources that fuel its growth (Lampton, 2008: 164).

Numerous studies have been conducted on China's rise and influence, and on different states' responses to them. Most of these studies focus on China's influence in Asia, Africa and Latin America and these regions' reactions toward it (Ross and Feng 2006; Nathan and Scobell 2012; Friedberg 1998; Kang 2007; Yong and Wang 2005; Luttwak 2012; Lampton 2008; Shinn and Eisenman 2012; Alden 2007; Cheru and Obi 2010; Gallagher and Porzecanski 2010; Rotberg 2008; Waldron 2008; Paus 2009). The next section reviews most of these writings, focusing on states' strategic responses toward China and explaining the reasons why states choose specific strategies toward it.

How Do States Respond to Rising China?

Three groups of scholars have analyzed states' responses to China. The first group labels these responses as balancing against China and its rise; the second group argues that these states have chosen to bandwagon with China to benefit economically and politically from its rise, and to cover their weak side; the third group claims that these states do not apply a stark and direct balance against or bandwagon with China;

these states have “adopt[ed] a middle position that is best described as hedging,” against China (Chwee, 2008: 159).

First Group: Balancing against China’s Rise

Why States Balance against China?

A state chooses to balance and stand against China when it is certain that China’s rise imposes serious and direct security threats to its survival, sovereignty or stability. A state balances against China under three circumstances. The first is when the state expects that China would initiate military attacks against it. The state fears that China would utilize its increasing power, especially military, to attack it. The possibility of such an attack is high in case of territorial disputes between the two sides—an example is the South Sea dispute between China and Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam.¹⁸

Second is when a state predicts that China would threaten its sovereignty. The state balances against China when it sees that China seeks to undermine and threaten its sovereignty—another example is Taiwan’s fear of China’s threat to its independence. China strongly rejects any attempts by Taiwan to gain full independence and calls for reunification; and Taiwan realizes that China would not hesitate to use military force against it if it declares its full independence.

Third and the last circumstance is when the state perceives China as a revisionist power seeking to shift the regional balance of power to its favor and therefore empower

¹⁸South Sea dispute is “a dispute over territory and sovereignty over ocean areas, and the Paracels and the Spratlys - two island chains claimed in whole or in part by a number of countries.... and China claims by far the largest portion of territory.” (BBC, July 12th, 2016)

itself and its allies and hamper at the same time the state's interests and weaken its power. Under such circumstance, the state balances against China. Some Asian countries, specifically India and Japan, perceive China's increasing economic and military power and its growing influence on smaller states as tools to hurt their interests and shift the balance of power in the Asian region to pave the way for China to dominate it. Therefore, Japan and India balance against China. The next section gives more examples to explain how states are balancing against China.¹⁹

Many scholars argue that certain Asian states have chosen to balance against China as they are concerned about China's rise and its effects on their regional stability, sovereignty, survival and interests. And some Asian states, especially Southeast Asian states and Japan, are balancing against China by utilizing three tools: first, by self-strengthening military capacities; second, by forming or deepening external military alliances with the superpower United States; and third by establishing a regional military and economic alliance with the "anti-Chinese" coalition (Luttwak 2012:125-144/258; Khong 2004; Goh 2007/08; Ross 2006).

Some scholars refrain from describing or viewing some Asian states' strategic responses toward China's rise as an act of classical balancing that focuses only on upgrading and improving military capacities. For example, Khong (2004), uses the term "soft" balance against China, and Goh (2007/08), uses the term "indirect" balance

¹⁹Two of the circumstances under which a state balances against China, under a military attack and when China aims to shift regional balance of power, are inspired by Rajesh Rajagopalan's publication, *India's Strategic Choices: China and the Balance of Power in Asia*, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017).

against China to distinguish the balance strategy which Asian states apply in response toward China's rise from the traditional balance that includes only an increase of military forces and defense budget. Both scholars argue that Southeast Asian states not only balance against China by seeking to maintain the United States military presence and dominance in the region and provide it with needed military access, but also by seeking to integrate China in Asian regional institutions (Goh, 2007/08: 11). So, the establishment of some Asian regional multilateral institutions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), are considered a sign of "soft" or "indirect" balance against China (Khong 2004; Goh 2007/08; Martin 2013).²⁰ On one hand, ASEAN and ARF work to contain China's regional hegemonic ambitions by creating a pathway for regional negotiations and dialogue on multi-regional issues like security and economic concerns (Goh, 2007/2008). On the other hand, it facilitates and paves the way for China's 'integration and socialisation' into the regional system and institutional norms (Goh 2007/08:10; Chan 2010: 390).

Other scholars have focused on specific Asian states and their strategic responses toward China. For example, both Acharya (2003/04) and Batabyal (2006), have analyzed India's strategy toward China. They claim that India is the only Asian

²⁰Steve Chan in his article "An Odd Thing Happened on the Way to Balancing: East Asian states' Reactions to China's Rise," (2010), gives a definition of soft balance, "soft balancing involves less confrontational mechanisms such as territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition." (Chan, 2010: 388) Jason Kelly in "Responding to Regional Challengers in a Unipolar System," (2007), argues that the presence of United States and its military superiority in East Asia are the main reasons for the absence of traditional balance among East Asian states. In his words, East Asian states "are assuaged by the presence of the United States in the region because of its commitment to maintain the status quo of power distribution." (28)

state which is balancing against China's rise (Acharya 2003/04:150; Batabyal 2006:179-180). India balances against China through the looking East strategy in the Southeast Asian and Asian-Pacific regions (Batabyal, 2006:180). The main goal of this strategy is to expand India's role in Asia through consolidating and strengthening its economic, political and military ties with Asian countries, and integrating into regional institutions (Batabyal, 2006). For example, India has pursued "closer ties with Burma to counter the growing Chinese influence... and conducted naval patrols in the Strait of Malacca to counter piracy and terrorism." (Acharya, 2003/04: 150) Also, both argue that India and the United States are working together and depending on each other to deter China's future threat in the region by strengthening their military and security ties (Acharya 2003/04; Batabyal 2006). Rajagopalan (2017), argues that the external balance through India's heightened security alliance with U.S. is India's best strategic choice to counter China and its direct security threats on India and the Asian region. Rajagopalan states that China represents a source of threats for three reasons: First, China and India have border disputes that can escalate at any moment, triggering China to attack India militarily. Second, China's strong ties with India's rival Pakistan empowers the latter and threatens India's interests in the region. China's financial and military support to Pakistan enables it to shift the balance of power in Asia into Pakistan's favor, thus, increasing Pakistan's ability to balance against India and challenge its power in the region. Therefore, he argues that India's increasing domestic military capacities is insufficient by itself and plays only a complementary role in limiting China's threats, thus, urges India to strengthen its alignment with US—which

also seeks to balance against China in the region. Only by upgrading security ties with U.S. is India capable of limiting China's potential dangers and preventing it from dominating the Asian region.

Other major Asian states, especially Japan and the Philippines, have also pursued a balancing strategy against China by looking for and maintaining military superiority over China in vital areas (Swaine 2005: 280-81; Bush 2005; De Castro 2010/2016).²¹ For example, Japan and the Philippines have been increasing their "military activism" with the coordination and support of the United States (Sutter 2005: 299; De Castro 2010). Moreover, Japan's defensive military budget was increased in the 1990s, and its public policies "have been more critical of Chinese military behavior since mid-1990s." (Swaine, 2005: 274) Also, as a sign of balancing against China, in 1998, the Philippines signed with the United States the Visiting Forces Agreement that provided the legal framework for U.S. troops to be part of defensive-related activities (De Castro, 2010: 330-331).

From the above, obviously China's rise has raised deep fears among many Asian states, especially Japan, India, and the Philippines. It is noted that all three of these states enjoy strong and sustainable military and security ties with the United States and seek strongly to prevent China from dominating Asia. In order to contain the threats of China's rise on their regional circle and inner circles these states have

²¹ De Castro argues that the Philippines is applying "equi-balance" which means "accepting, facilitating and pitting the big powers against each other." (2010: 328) However, in his article "Twenty-First Century Philippines' Policy Toward an Emergent China: From Equi-Balancing to Strategic Balancing," (2016), he argues that since 2011, Philippines is balancing against China to strongly ensure and secure its sovereignty over the South China Sea.

chosen to balance against China either by applying the classical type of balancing strategy or through 'indirect' and 'soft' balancing.

Second Group: Bandwagoning with China's Rise

Other scholars argue that some Asian, African, Latin American and Middle Eastern states are not balancing against China, rather they are bandwagoning with it. They bandwagon with China under three circumstances: First is when they desperately need China to gain material, economic, and political profits. There are states that need China, to benefit from its rise, enhance their economies, and develop their economic and military capacities, such as Pakistan and Iran—Sino-Pakistani ties and Sino-Iranian ties will be discussed later in detail. Second is when not only they need to benefit from China's rise, but also, they need to prevent and avoid direct future security threats from it. States bandwagon with China when they realize that China poses a security threat to their survival and stability and their military abilities are inferior in comparison to China's abilities. Also, such states have to bandwagon with China because they are left only with this strategic option; especially that turning to other powers, as US, is not an alternative because of their political tensions with it. Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos are examples. Thirdly, there are states who bandwagon with China because they need to benefit from China's rise on one hand, and they don't fear China and have no security concerns regarding its rise, on the other. They perceive China as their friend and ally. North Korea and Cuba are examples. The following section discusses various scholarly writings on different states' bandwagoning strategy with China from different theoretical perspectives.

Kang (2003,2007), argues that East Asian states, including Southeast Asian states, are bandwagoning with China as a result of China's values, ideas, and historical and cultural supremacy in the East Asian system.²² According to Kang, historically, the East Asian system is a hierarchical system not an anarchic one; China comes on the top of this system based on its long-dominated culture. Inside this hierarchical system, East Asian states are "deeply intertwined with China, both culturally and economically." (Kang, 2007: 198) The long historical entanglement with China made these states not suspect China's "peaceful intentions" including its ties with its neighbors and the region's stability, driving these states to dismiss any fear of a strong and powerful China in the Asian neighborhood (Kang, 2007:198). In his words, East Asian states "prefer China to be strong than weak" in order to have a stable region on one hand, and gain more material and economic advantages, on the other (Kang, 2007:4/40/198).

Also, Jae Ho Chung (2009/10), asserts that Myanmar, North Korea, Cambodia and Laos are bandwagoning with China. Their strategic behavior can be explained as a result of "lack of expressed security concerns with a rising China and the intermittent highlighting of solid ties and/or shared values with China." (661) Their aim for bandwagoning with rising China, especially under "circumstances where the possibilities of siding with the United States are slim," is to gain more economic advantages, and "maximize assistance and protection from Beijing" (661). Another possible factor that leads these states to bandwagon with China is that they have tense

²²Among southeast Asian nations are: Indonesia, Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

and problematic ties with the United States, preventing them from turning to it to establish strong military ties or benefit from its political and economic support and assistance.

It was mentioned previously that some scholars argue that ASEAN has played a crucial role in soft and indirect balancing against China. In an opposite view point, Vatikiotis (2003), believes that ASEAN policy seeks “to accommodate rather than confront China” and ‘ASEAN Plus Three’—“which includes China, Japan and South Korea and leaves the United States and Europe more or less out in the cold” is an important instrument to bandwagon with and accommodate China (Vatikiotis, 2003:72). Here, these forums present tools to facilitate cooperation and integration in order to gain profits rather than containing or limiting China and its ambitions.

Many scholars have focused heavily on Asian states’ responses towards China’s rise—which can be justified by stating that threats or benefits gained from strong ties with China are mostly noted in the Asian immediate neighborhood. However, some scholars have gone beyond the Asian circle and studied states’ responses in different regions regarding China’s rise. For example, there are scholars who argue that even the countries outside China’s geographic range distanced by thousands of miles—specifically outside the Asia-Pacific region—beyond the direct threat/danger of China—are bandwagoning with China as a strategy and response to its rise. Scholars looked into African middle power states and their strategic responses toward China’s rise. For example, Janis van der Westhuizen and Sven Grimm in their article “South Africa’s Middle Power Ambitions: Riding the Dragon or Being Its Pet?” (2014), assert

that South Africa “is likely to continue to bandwagon with China on many issues as a means of enhancing both its regional and global roles.” (186) In order to gain from China’s rise, especially economically, South Africa is bandwagoning with China. But bandwagoning with China comes with a price. According to Westhuizen and Grimm, bandwagoning with China has posed a challenge to South Africa’s independence and its democratic identity (185-186).

In “China’s Relations with Latin America: Shared Gains, Asymmetric Hopes,” Jorge I. Domínguez et al. (2006), find that China’s political value, and its economic support for Cuba are strong motivations that keep Cuba bandwagoning with China. To reveal Cuba’s strategy toward China they analyzed its voting behavior in the General Assembly of the United Nations in early 1990s. They found that only Cuba among other Latin American countries has “bandwagoned” with China in its voting behavior (15). “Cuba’s agreement with China has been high and constant for over a decade.” (15) They explain this behavior as a result of strong political ties between the two countries, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and “China[‘s] substantial political value as a socialist country that survives and succeeds.” (15/46)

States bandwagon with China either because they need China and don’t fear its rise or face security threats from it. Or because they desperately need China to gain economic advantages, while also facing potential security threats from it. Lacking military capacities and an alternative power to partner with, to protect themselves from China’s potential security threats made bandwagoning with China their only strategic option. However, when states need China, but are uncertain of China’s intentions

toward them or China's possible security threats pose to them, and they have another power to play against China, they tend to keep their strategic option open and hedge against it.

Third Group: Hedging against China's Rise

Many scholars argue that the balance-vs.-bandwagon dichotomy is too 'limited' and 'stark' to provide an accurate picture of "the menu of choices" and strategic behaviors which states can apply in response to China's rise (Acharya 2003/2004:152; Murphy 2010:2; Chung 2009/10:659).²³ Therefore, they analyze and label responses of some Asian, Latin American and African countries as hedging against China. Hedging against China means that states improve their military forces and strengthen their ties with other powers such as the United States on one hand, with maintaining and improving their economic and political ties with China, on the other (Chung 2005, 2009/10; Roy 2005; Garver 2005; Acharya 2003/04; Gilley and O'Neil 2014).

Moreover, the reasoning behind a hedging strategy is that a state hedges against a rising power that on one hand, presents a vital source of economic benefits, but carries possible direct and indirect military and security threats on the other. For example, although they are establishing strong economic ties with China, and admitting that China's economic rise is a fruitful and significant opportunity for them, some of the Southeast Asian states are hedging against China because they look at China's growing power as a leading factor to undermine their individual/regional security stability. They

²³"The balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy is too limited to capture the range of choices a state has in responding to a rising power." (Acharya, 2003/2004: 152)

share a common perception that China is keen to be the dominating power in their region, which they reject and aim to prevent. They are hedging against China by strengthening their military ties and alliance with the United States, and by improving their military abilities. Generally, they dance around the fire of China's rise to enjoy the light of its economic opportunities while avoiding the heat of its military and security challenges.²⁴

Chung (2005,2009/10), describes Thailand, Singapore, South Korea and the Philippines as "active hedging." (665) They engage China economically and politically while maintaining and strengthening their alliances and military ties with the United States (665).²⁵ Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia apply "hesitant hedging." (665) These countries engage China economically and through regional institutions as ASEAN but without seeking to strengthen their military ties with outsider powers like the United States as they "do not wish to be dominated by either the US or China." (666-667)

Gilley and O'Neil (2014) in their conclusion chapter "Seeing beyond Hegemony", point out that most middle powers such as South Korea, Australia, Turkey, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa are "hedging against China's rise rather

²⁴For more details on Asian states' hedging strategy against China, read "ASEAN's Response to the Rise of China: Deploying a Hedging Strategy," by Vibhanshu Shekhar, *China Report*, 48;3, (2012): 253-268, "East Asia Responds to the Rise of China: Patterns and Variations," by Jae Ho Chung, *Pacific Affairs*, 82;4, (Winter, 2009/2010): 657-675.

²⁵Batabyal debates that "some Asian countries most notably Singapore, believed that the most effective way of safeguarding regional security was to encourage major powers to actively engage in the region so that they counter balance each other." (2006: 190)

than balancing against it or bandwagoning with [it],” and their goals behind this strategy are “mitigating threats and maximizing opportunity.” (239/246)

This dissertation aims to go beyond a simple categorization or division between a position opposing China’s rise in which a state has to balance against it, and a position supporting China’s rise in which a state needs to bandwagon with it. This dissertation accords with those who emphasize hedging strategies and aims to show that states’ strategic responses toward China and its rise should eschew the narrow and traditional perspective of some IR theories by looking broader to include cases where a state is neither pro- or anti- China’s rise, and places itself in a central position between these two categories. This dissertation aims to show cases where states need to cooperate—especially economically—with China without being its client or seeing it as their trusted friend; at the same time, they need to be cautious of China’s potential threats without perceiving it as their enemy. China is neither their friend nor their enemy.

Moreover, this dissertation aims to show cases where states’ strategies are not formed based on certain and unchanged elements. In fact, states’ strategies change when factors such as states’ ties with their traditional allies, their region’s security circumstances, and their political and economic situations change. As a result of the changing nature of the above-mentioned factors, in reaction to China, or any rising power, states should avoid taking strict position toward China, and need to adopt a strategy that mixes between cautionary and cooperative elements to manage changeable factors, uncertainty, and their doubts regarding China’s intentions and possible threats to their stability and interests.

Lessons and Implications

Three main lessons are gained from the previous studies. First, most of the previous studies have provided the researcher with theoretical background on states' strategies and positions toward China. They offer a useful set of economic, political and diplomatic indicators which are essential to test the applicability of different strategies by Arab Gulf states in response to China's rise. For example, this dissertation concentrates on economic indicators such as trade dependency between China and Arab Gulf states, Chinese investments in the Arab Gulf region, presence of Chinese population in the Arab Gulf region, and Arab Gulf states' financial aid and loans to China. Also, it focuses on diplomatic indicators such as China's participation in regional forums, dialogues, agreements and institutions in the Arab Gulf region. For political indicators, Domínguez et al. (2006), give a good indicator by examining and analyzing the voting behavior of Arab Gulf states in the General Assembly of the United Nations on specific political cases that are related to their security and regional stability, in particular the Iranian Nuclear Program and Syrian Crisis.

Second, some studies such as Batabyal (2006), have enlightened this dissertation to explore the reasons behind Arab Gulf states' recent strategy "look East, not West". This dissertation investigates the motivations and means that Arab Gulf states focus on when they utilize this strategy. Moreover, this dissertation examines the extent to which China's rise and its expanded power triggered this strategy, and under what internal and external political circumstances and conditions.

Third, previous studies prompted this dissertation to take into consideration the crucial role of the following elements in forming Arab Gulf states' strategic responses toward China:

1. The history of relationships between China and the Arab Gulf states.
2. China's changeable motivations toward the Arab Gulf region.
3. Forms and types of possible security threats China poses to the Arab Gulf states' survival and stability, especially by its strong ties with rival states in the region, and its stances regarding the region's security issues.
4. China's economic impacts on Arab Gulf states' economies in light of China's increasing appetite for oil and Arab Gulf states' increasing need of oil revenues.
5. China's military position and its effects on the Arab Gulf region, especially through its role in improving the military power and capacities of rival states in the region.
6. Arab Gulf states' security needs through inflaming and unstable region, and Arab Gulf states' alliances formation and ties with other powers like the United States and their impacts on their ties with China on one hand, and their strategic responses toward U.S. and China, on one another.

As previously mentioned, there is no single study that focuses on China's rise in the Arab Gulf region and Arab Gulf states' strategic responses toward China. However, there are various studies that analyze Sino-Middle Eastern ties, Sino-Gulf ties, and Sino-Arab Gulf ties from historical, political, and economic perspectives. The

following section reviews the most significant works on China-Middle East and China-Gulf/Arab Gulf region. These writings are divided into two groups. The first group analyzes China's ties and policies toward the wider Middle East from historical, political, and economic perspectives. The second group focuses on China and the Gulf region including the six Arab Gulf states in addition to Iran, Iraq and Yemen.

China and the Middle East

China's Behavior, Relationships, and Foreign Policies toward the Middle East

There are many studies that investigate primarily China's behavior and foreign policies toward the Middle East. There are Khalili's *Communist China's Interaction with the Arab Nationalists since the Bandung Conference*, Behbehani's *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*, Shichor's *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy*, and Calabrese's *China's Changing Relations with the Middle East*.²⁶ All the above writings examine China's behavior regarding the Middle East from 1950s to 1970s; all point out that the vital element that drove China to be involved in the Middle East and its political issues is China's ideological orientation: competition and conflict with Western imperialism and Soviet expansionism. China's behavior and political moves in the Middle East were primarily guided by the international bipolar system and actions by global powers. Moreover, Behbehani's work explains in depth an important aspect of China's practical involvement in the Middle East: China reached

²⁶See Joseph E Khalili, *Communist China's interaction with the Arab nationalists since the Bandung Conference*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1970). See Hashim S. H. Behbehani, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab world, 1955-75: Three Case studies*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1981). See Yitzak Shichor, *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy: 1949-1977*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See John Calabrese, *China's Changing Relations with the Middle East*, (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991).

out to many radical liberation movements in the Middle East, namely in Palestine and Oman, and supported them logistically to fight the U.S. and the Soviet Union to influence the region and its countries in China's favor.

Harris's *China Considers the Middle East* reflects an important shift in China's policy regarding the Middle East. She argues that since the 1980s China has stopped looking to the region through its ideological lens and competition with the two superpowers and begun to look at the region more pragmatically; since the 1980s, China has viewed the Middle East as a crucial and important economic and trade partner that enhances and supports China's economic growth and its economic reform and modernization agenda.²⁷

Recent studies were conducted on the Middle East and China. Alterman's and Garver's book *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East* shows that the Middle East has two significant advantages for China.²⁸ The first is an economic advantage: The Middle East helps China to secure and ensure its economic growth and rise by developing and increasing its economic, oil, trade, and commercial ties with the region's countries. The second is a political and diplomatic advantage: The Middle East and China's political ties with its countries give China a golden opportunity to hedge against "Western insistence on global political norms." (Alterman and Garver, 2008) Also, in their work, they show that China is a 'free-rider' in the Middle East. China benefits greatly from U.S. security protection of the region. China

²⁷See Lillian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1993).

²⁸See Jon Alterman and John Garver, *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East*, (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008).

does not seek to challenge U.S. power aggressively in the Middle East. On the contrary, China wishes that the U.S. keeps protecting the region and securing China's economic interests.

Other works have focused on Asian/Sino and Middle Eastern economic ties such as the studies by Kemp, and Lee and Shalmon.²⁹ Both works pay attention to the growing economic interactions and commercial and energy ties between Asia/China and the Middle East countries. Both argue that China's primary motivation regarding the Middle East is creating a strong strategic economic interdependence that includes energy and non-energy trade to gain more economic benefits on one hand, and secure the Chinese economic growth, on the other. Moreover, Lee and Shalmon's piece points out that China shares with the United States two concerns regarding the region. First, both fear the region's instability and its impacts on their economic interests. Second, both have great concern regarding the rise of radical Islamic terrorism. China understands that radical Islam poses threats to its internal stability. Thus, in order to secure itself, China had to accept some of the U.S. security policies toward the region such as its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

China and the Gulf/Arab Gulf Region

China and Iran

There are many writings on China and the Gulf region. These writings can be divided into two groups. The first group focuses extensively on China and Iran, discusses their ties historically, economically, politically and strategically. The second

²⁹See Geoffrey Kemp, *The East Moves West: India, China, and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East*, (Washington: Brookings University Press, 2010), Henry Lee and Dan Shalmon, "Searching for Oil: China's Initiatives in the Middle East," *Environment*, 49;5, (2007):10-21.

group focuses mainly on Arab Gulf monarchies and their relationships with China also from economic, historical and political aspects.

The first group of scholarly writings shed light on common interests and shared views between China and Iran regarding security issues, international order and U.S. hegemony. Abidi's *China, Iran, and the Persian Gulf* is among the first works that cover Chinese ties with Iran and the international and domestic factors that brought them to form closer and strong relationships economically and politically.³⁰ His piece offers a detailed historical review of Sino-Iranian ties from the Han Dynasty to 1979. Abidi, as other scholars, argues that the impacts of the bipolar international system, and China's competition with the U.S. and the Soviet Union, were the main motivations of China's behavior regarding the region and its keenness to establish diplomatic ties with the region's states.

Garver's publications examine and analyze Sino-Gulf ties, mainly Sino-Iranian ties, historically, economically, strategically, and politically.³¹ According to these writings, Iran is China's key player, trusted friend, and strategic ally in the Gulf region. Iran is closer to China than any other Arab Gulf state because Iran shares with China similar political views regarding the world order. For example, both countries seek to create a multipolar world that is free of American domination. Both seek to reduce U.S.

³⁰See A.A. Abidi, *China, Iran and the Persian Gulf*, (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1982). China's ties with the other Gulf countries: Iraq, Yemen, and the six Arab Gulf states were also discussed in his work but not in an in-depth analysis as he did in Iran's case.

³¹John Garver, *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World*, Arabic Edition, (Abu Dhabi: ECSSR, 2009). See John Garver, "Is China Playing a Dual Game in Iran?," *The Washington Quarterly*, 34:1, (2011): 75-88. See John Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

military power and prevent it from being the only dominant military power in the Gulf region. Moreover, China sought to see Iran as a leading and dominant power in the Gulf region (Garver,2009: 441). To make the above possible, China sought to strengthen Iran's different capabilities; it participated in improving Iran's economic capacities, especially in the energy sector; it supported Iran's military advancement, especially in missile technology and naval capacities; it supported Iran's nuclear program logistically and via its veto power in United Nation Security Council (UNSC).³² Also, Garver argues an important element that improves the Sino-Iranian strategic ties and security cooperation in Central Asia is fighting radical Sunni Islam in Central Asia (Garver, 2009: 189-198). Also, he sheds light on China's tactics aimed at reducing U.S. influence in the Gulf and Asia. To do so, China seeks to upgrade its ties with Iran and Pakistan; Iran and Pakistan play vital role in China's strategic and political agenda; strong ties between China and Pakistan in Asia enable China to rebalance the US-Indian ties, and strong Sino-Iranian ties enable it to rebalance the U.S. influence and its strong military and security ties with the Arab Gulf states (Garver, 2009: 228/351). Finally, Iran and Pakistan enjoy sustainable ties, thus, making a strong strategic and security nexus among China, Iran and Pakistan predictable. Garver points out that it was Pakistan that paved the way in 1965 for Sino-Iranian talks to establish formal and diplomatic ties between the two countries (Garver, 2009: 427).

China and the Arab Gulf States

The second group investigates China's ties with the Arab Gulf states, mostly their historical, economic and political ties, these ties' impact on U.S. power in the region, and China's future security role in the region.

Within this group, there are scholars who are optimistic regarding the future of Sino-Arab Gulf ties and China's security role in the region. Olimat's three works on Sino-Middle Eastern ties including Sino-Arab Gulf states ties are examples.³³ In the three pieces, Olimat provides data on Sino-Arab Gulf ties in five dimensions: politics, economy, energy, security and culture. In his books he has optimistic views regarding the future and the scope of the Sino economic, political, and security ties with the Arab Gulf states, and on China's future security role in the region (Olimat, 2014:298). He claims that the U.S. is 'pivoting out' of the Arab Gulf region, while China is 'pivoting in' (Olimat 2013:141/195; Olimat 2016:240). However, he does not explain in depth why and where his optimism regarding China's security and political role in the region comes from, especially in light of the conflicting views and political and security disagreements between China and the Arab Gulf states regarding Iran and Syria.

In the same views as Olimat, Janardhan's chapter China, India, and the Gulf also argues that China has a potential security role to play in the region. Janardhan argues that the dramatic increase of economic ties in trade and energy between Arab Gulf states and Asian powers, namely China and India, signal that these two Asian

³³See Muhamad Olimat, *China and the Middle East: From Silk Road to Arab Spring*, (New York: Routledge, 2013). See Muhamad Olimat, *China and the Middle East: Since World War II: A Bilateral Approach*, (London: Lexington Books: 2014). See Muhamad Olimat, *China and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries: Strategic Partnership in a Changing World*, (London: Lexington Books, 2016).

powers would have a military and security role in the region.³⁴ In his view point, GCC countries can benefit from the influence and strong ties that China and India have with Iran to pressure Iran on its nuclear program, its sponsorship of Hezbollah, or its occupation of three Emirati islands.

Other scholars highlight an element that would bring the Sino-Arab Gulf ties closer: China's non-interference policy. Yetiv and Chunlong Lu in their article *China, Global Energy, and the Middle East* and Scobell and Nader in their book *China in the Middle East: the Wary Dragon* argue that China's non-interference policy made the Arab Gulf states find China as an attractive partner that does not aim or seek to interfere in their internal political affairs or dictate to them changes to their political system and way of life, contrary to what their traditional ally, US, does.³⁵ Also, they argue that China enjoys a rising economic role—not a security role—in the Gulf region by improving its economic cooperation in trade, energy, investments, and arms. Finally, due to its low military capacities—similar to Alterman's and Garver's argument—the authors point out that China enjoys free-riding on the American security umbrella to secure its economic interests in the Middle East and the Gulf region. Thus, contrary to Olimat and Janardhan, they do not forecast that China will play a security role in the region. While it is true that China is an attractive partner, this attractiveness is not enough to build solid strategic and security partnership with the Arab Gulf states.

³⁴See N. Janardhan, "China, India, and the Persian Gulf," in Mehran Kamrava, (ed.), *International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011): 207-233.

³⁵See Steve Yetiv and Chunlong Lu, "China, Global Energy, and the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, 61;2, (2007): 199-218. Andrew Scobell and Alireza Nader, *China in the Middle East: The Wary Dragon*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016).

Second, China's lack of advanced military abilities is not the only factor that limited and constrained its role and rise in the region. There are other reasons that limit China's rise in the Arab Gulf region which this dissertation seeks to reveal, such as the lack of trust of China as a reliable security and strategic partner, and China's negative stances regarding the region's security issues. It is worth mentioning that Scobell and Nader touched upon the political disagreements between China and Saudi Arabia regarding Iran and Syria, providing useful data to analyze Sino-Arab Gulf relationships from the security aspect, however, they did not analyze these disagreements' impact on the Sino-Saudi ties or on Saudi Arabia's view of China and its strategic response toward it.

Davidson's book *The Persian Gulf and Pacific Asia: From Indifference to Interdependence* studies the economic and trade ties (hydrocarbon and non-hydrocarbon), economic investments and projects, infrastructure and construction projects, diplomatic and military cooperation between the GCC monarchies and three Asian countries: Japan, China, and South Korea.³⁶ Similar to Yetiv, Lu, and Olimat, Davidson's book argues that economic interdependence between the Arab Gulf region and China indicates that China would play a very important economic role in the Arab Gulf region, especially in the energy sector. Contrary to Olimat and Janardhan who predict a promising Chinese security role in the region, Davidson argues that in military and security aspects, U.S. and Western power will continue to be dominant.

³⁶See Christopher Davidson, *The Persian Gulf and Pacific Asia: From Indifference from Interdependence*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2010).

Gharfour's article *China's Policy in Gulf* reveals an interesting idea regarding the relation between increased economic interdependence in the energy sector and domestic political stability in China. He argues that China undoubtedly will depend largely and aggressively on energy resources to secure its economy and growth. Securing its economy limits the internal social and political tensions that impact the power and the influence of the Communist party. "There is a profound connection between reliable energy supplies, political and economic stability, and continued party control."³⁷ His article offers a useful link between strong economy and political balance and stability. This dissertation also argues that there is a strong connection between strong economic ties with China and the Arab Gulf states' economic and political internal balance.

Huwaidin's *China's Relations with Arabia and the Gulf, 1949-1999*, argues that external factors, mainly China's ties with and perception of U.S. and Soviet Union, have motivated it to be involved in the Gulf region.³⁸ Huwaidin's book examines in depth Sino-GCC ties, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. He analyzes these ties from historical, political, and economic perspectives. Shichor's *East Wind over Arabia: Origins and Implications of the Sino-Saudi Missile Deal* also reveals that the development of Sino-Arab Gulf ties was a result of an external factor. He explains that the United States' refusal to sell missiles to Saudi Arabia in the 1980s has opened the door for Sino-Saudi

³⁷See Mahmoud Gharfour, "China's Policy in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Policy*, 16;2, (2009): 80-92.

³⁸See Mohamed Bin Huwaidin, *China's Relations with Arabia and the Gulf, 1949-1999*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

ties. This deal is the key reason that stands behind the Saudi view shift toward China during the 1980s from being a hostile power to an important arms supplier and facilitated the diplomatic ties and recognition between the two countries in 1990.³⁹

Calabrese's articles offer useful data on Asia, Gulf/Arab Gulf states ties from political, economic, and strategic aspects.⁴⁰ Calabrese in *Peaceful or Dangerous Collaborators?* argues that the Middle East 'shifting politics' and "combustible mixture of the Gulf's geostrategic importance and instability" paved the way for China to move forward in the region economically and strategically (Calabrese, 1992: 484). In *China and the Gulf: Energy and security*, he notes that since 1980s, the economic and commercial ties between Gulf countries and China have grown in arms, energy, and construction aspects. However, these growing ties came with a price. He argues that the fear of the Gulf region's ethno-religious influence worried China. China has considered seriously the security impacts that the Gulf region—which is part of Central Asia—has on China's Muslim minority in Xinjiang and China's internal stability; to contain this fear China sought to build stronger ties with Central Asian states, including Iran (Calabrese, 1998:453-454).⁴¹

³⁹See Yitzak Shichor, *East Wind over Arabia: Origins and Implications of the Sino-Saudi Missile Deal*, (Berkeley: Berkley Center for Chinese Studies, 1989).

⁴⁰See John Calabrese, "Peaceful or Dangerous Collaborators? China's Relations with the Gulf Countries," *Pacific Affairs*, 65;4, (1992): 471-485. See John Calabrese, "The Consolidation of Gulf-Asia Relations: Washington Tuned in or Out of Touch?" *The Middle East Institute Policy*, Brief No. 25, (June 2009): 1-12. See John Calabrese, "China and the Persian Gulf: Energy and security," *The Middle East Journal*, 52;3, (Summer 1998): 351-366. See John Calabrese, "China and the Arab Awakening: The Cost of Doing Business," *China Report*, 49;1, (2013):5-23.

⁴¹It is worth noting that Garver has echoed this perceptive in his book *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World*, (2009).

It has been mentioned previously that Garver (2009), argues that China and Iran seek stronger ties to rebalance U.S. power in Gulf; Calabrese in *The Consolidation of Gulf-Asia*, argues that Arab Gulf states apply the same tactic. These states not only looked economically to Asian powers but also strategically; they “are seeking to rebalance their relations with the major powers... [and] reduce their level of dependence on the United States, as well as their susceptibility to US pressure.” (Calabrese, 2009:6) Moreover, he describes the Gulf-Asia ties as “bi-directional, multi-faceted, firmly rooted, multilayered, inclusive, and diverse.” He points out that the Gulf-Asia ties witness “incremental progress in the building of personal and institutional relationships;” oil trade is the cornerstone of Asia-Gulf ties and it led to extensive cooperation in the energy sector; also, collaboration is increasing between the two regions in investments in natural resource development, agribusiness, and transportation infrastructure.

In his article *China and the Arab Awakening*, Calabrese discusses important issues related to Arab Gulf states’ security and stability. He examines China’s behavior regarding Arab Spring protest waves in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Bahrain. He explains how China refused to support these uprisings, why it approved the Western and U.S. military intervention in Libya while it refused such operation in Syria, and how China has collaborated with Russia in the UNSC to prevent any international action to take down Assad’s regime. His article provides useful data to analyze and clarify the political and security tensions between Arab Gulf states and China regarding Syria.

Fulton's *China's Relations with the Arab Gulf Monarchies* argues that in examining Sino-Arab Gulf ties, more attention should be paid to the unit-level considerations such as domestic motivation, domestic political concerns and perceptions by Arab Gulf leaders, in addition to the state's relation to its surrounding society behind each of the relationships along with the international systemic factors.⁴² Fulton rejects neo-realists' main idea that external factors and systemic pressure are the main factors shaping states' reactions and policies. Therefore, in his study, he applies neoclassical realism theory that attaches equal importance to analyzing the role of internal factors in shaping states' policies—as the political views and concerns of the policy makers. Moreover, he argues that neoclassical realism is the most appropriate theory that helps to reveal the evolution and improvement of China's ties with Arab Gulf states, especially in the three cases of Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. In his work, he raises three questions: what motivates China's leadership to pursue these denser relationships with the GCC? What are the motivations of GCC leaders in developing closer ties with China? What kind of role will China play in the Gulf? To answer these questions, he looks at international political considerations and domestic political considerations for each case and examines five interactions: political and diplomatic; military and security; trade; people-to-people, and construction and infrastructure projects. However, this dissertation argues that to understand the motivations that lead Arab Gulf states to upgrade and improve their ties with any rising

⁴²See Jonathan Fulton, *China's Relations with the Arab Gulf Monarchies: Three Case Studies*, Doctoral Dissertation, (London: University of Leicester, 2016).

power, external factors and international and systemic factors have the upper hand not the domestic factors neither political views or concerns of decisions makers in these states. The survival of the royal family means the survival of the state. Therefore, Arab Gulf leaders seek to protect their rule, authority, and survival by any means. Also, the royal family's voice is the only voice in the state. There are no different political voices regarding the states' foreign policies, no internal debates regarding the states' ties with external powers, no different political groups or interest groups who would have different political views regarding the states' behavior and foreign policies. Contrary to what Fulton argues, pressure by internal factors or domestic actors has no significant role in shaping these states' policies. Moreover, the perceptions of Arab Gulf leaders regarding any external power may change not as a result of internal factors such as internal pressure or based on academic and specialist recommendations, they only change based on external factors. For example, Arab Gulf leaders, especially the Saudis, changed their views, and accordingly their policies, toward the U.S. only when it changed its policies toward them and their region—a reaction to an external change.

There are few studies that shed light on the hedging concept and strategy in investigating China's ties with the Middle East and the Arab Gulf states.⁴³ For example, in *Hedging Against Oil Dependency: New Perspectives on China's Energy Security*

⁴³See Øystein Tunsjø, "Hedging Against Oil Dependency: New Perspectives on China's Energy Security Policy," *International Relations*, 24;1, (2010): 25-45. See Mohammad Salman and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and China's Economic Policy in the Middle East," *China Report*, 51;2, (2015): 102-120. See Dania Thafer, "Kuwait and East Asia: from the 1950s to Today," in *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region*, by Tim Niblock and Yang Guang, (eds.), (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2014): 93-111. See Naser Al Tamimi, "China Saudi Arabia relations: economic partnership or strategic alliance?," Discussion Paper, (Durham: Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah Programme, 2012): 1-24.

Policy by Tunsjø, and Strategic Hedging and China's Economic Policy in the Middle East by Salman and Geeraerts, the authors argue that, in order to ensure its energy security and oil supplies, China keeps its energy policies open and keeps diversifying its energy/oil resources. Therefore, China has imported oil from all rich energy countries in the Middle East, as Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman and avoided putting all its eggs in one basket. According to Salman and Geeraerts, this hedging behavior by China has led to the improving and upgrading of China's economic ties with oil producing countries in the Middle East (Salman and Geeraerts: 2015:116).

Not only China is pursuing an economic hedging strategy in the Middle East to ensure its energy security, Arab Gulf states too are using their growing ties with China to hedge against their long-standing ally, the United States. According to Al Tamimi's article China Saudi Arabia relations: economic partnership or strategic alliance?, and Alterman's and Garver's book The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East, since the 9/11, Saudi Arabia has been pursuing a hedging strategy against the U.S. in the Arab Gulf region by looking to an Asian alternative; China was on the top of the list. "Saudis have been pursuing a 'hedging strategy' towards the United States, by developing a more robust relationship with China." (Al Tamimi, 2012:11) Although previous studies have referred to hedging strategy, however, the authors were either interested in explaining China's economic strategy toward the wider Middle East or have focused on explaining the strategy of one Arab Gulf state, Saudi Arabia, toward the United States. This dissertation aims to provide wider, broader, and in-depth

analysis of Arab Gulf states' strategies toward U.S. and China at the same time. Also, in investigating Arab Gulf states' strategic responses toward China, this dissertation examines not only the economic aspect, but focuses in depth on the political and security aspects. Finally, this dissertation goes beyond the 9/11 event to study the impact of further security elements and events happened after the 9/11 and made Arab Gulf states hedge—keep hedging—against U.S. and China.

Finally, there are many volumes that focus on Asia/China ties with the Middle East and Gulf region from political, economic, strategic and security aspects, explaining the importance of the Gulf region to the Asian powers, suggesting the required and desirable security order in the Gulf region and proposing conditions that facilitate Asian future security role in the Gulf region. However, in all these volumes none of the Asian powers can offer the protection that the U.S. offers to the Gulf region; there is no competitor to U.S. military power, thus, the U.S. remains the only capable power to safeguard the region.⁴⁴

All the above writings offer useful and insightful economic, political, and security data regarding the Asian-Middle Eastern ties, Asian-Gulf ties, and Sino-Arab Gulf ties. However, most of them have focused to a large extent on the economic aspect, especially energy and oil trade, which this dissertation finds a crucial element in explaining and studying these ties. However, this dissertation proposes going beyond

⁴⁴See Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region, edited by Tim Niblock and Yang Guang, (2014), Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century, edited by Tim Niblock and Monica Malik, (2013), A New Gulf Security Architecture: Prospects and Challenges for an Asian Role, edited by Ranjit Gupta, Abubaker Bagader, Talmiz Ahmad, and N. Janardhan, (2014), and China's Presence in the Middle East: The Implication of the One Built, One Road Initiative, edited by Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Niv Horesh, (2018).

the economic aspect and paying more attention to the crucial impact of the security and political disagreements between China and the Arab Gulf states, and China's security behavior toward the region in order to draw a clear picture of the nature and depth of Sino-Arab Gulf ties, and China's future role in the region.

Moreover, most of these studies have paid more attention to the Chinese side—China's motivations, China's needs, and China's ties and competition with the U.S., rather than the Arab Gulf states' side, in examining their different ties with China. Although there are specific studies as Huwaidin (2002) and Olimat (2013, 2014, 2016) which have focused specifically on the Gulf states or the Arab Gulf states' ties with China, their attention was more on China's side not on the Arab Gulf states' side in forming closer ties. In addition, their analyses have not paid enough attention to the security and strategic aspects of Sino-Arab Gulf ties. Therefore, this dissertation aims to fill a gap in the Sino-Arab Gulf states' literature by focusing extensively on the Arab Gulf states' side, with emphasis on the political, security, and strategic aspects that lead these states either to form or to refrain from establishing closer ties with China.

Also, many scholars studied the Arab Gulf states under the larger Middle East or have included all the Gulf region's states. However, this dissertation argues that the Arab Gulf states need to be studied and examined as a separate block from the larger Middle East because they enjoy different political, economic, and social characteristics, as explained below. Finally, this dissertation is the first academic work that aims to reveal the nature and shape of China's rise in the Arab Gulf region and to examines the Arab states' strategic responses toward China and its rise.

Chapter Three: The Historical Involvement of the United States and China in the Arab Gulf Region From (1930s-2016)

Chapter 3 is divided into three sections. Section one covers the Arab Gulf states' historical and long-standing security alliance with the United States from the 1930s to 2001. Since 2001, the United States has changed its security policies in the region, which impacted negatively its security ties with Arab Gulf states. The section explains how Arab Gulf states have reacted toward these new security policies. Arab Gulf states have hedged against the U.S. by looking for alternatives, and in their eyes China was the next promising alternative. Section two explains the importance of the Gulf/Arab Gulf region for China and provides a view of China's historical involvement in the region by covering four historical phases: Phase One: One Stone and Two Birds: Fighting Against Western Imperialism and Soviet Expansion in the Gulf Region (1949-1970), Phase Two: Revolutionary Action Gains Nothing, Pragmatism Gains All (1971-1989), Phase Three: The Era of Political and Economic Needs (1990-2001), Phase Four: The Era of Political Openness and Economic Interdependence (2001-2016). Section three investigates the shared and divergent security concerns among the three cases and their impacts on their security ties with any external power including U.S. and China.

The Swinging Security Alliance: U.S. and Arab Gulf States

From the beginning of establishing their rule, Arab Gulf leaders understood that alliance with strong external powers is their only way to protect their political authority and their survival internally and externally, especially in a region shared by bigger states thirsty for power and hegemony such as Iran and Iraq (Darvishi and Jalilvand

2010:176; Westphal et al. 2014:29). Thus, they sought to establish strong military and security alliances with the United States, and, for a long period, these historical security alliances succeeded in protecting their political status quo internally from any political uprising, and externally from any threats to their interests, sovereignty, and territory by any regional powers, especially their neighbors Iran and Iraq (Ahmad, 2014:35).

Since the 1930s, the United States has enjoyed strong security, political, and economic ties with the Arab Gulf states; these ties were transformed into solid security alliances after the British withdrawal from the Gulf region in 1971, and since then, the United States has dominated the Arab Gulf region and become its hegemonic power (Faksh and Faris 1993: 278; Mei 2009:15; Olimat 2016:63). The United States security alliances with all Arab Gulf states was and still is based on satisfying Arab Gulf states' internal and external security needs, in exchange for supporting and facilitating U.S. control of the region, its routes, accessing its energy resources, and utilizing these routes and recourses for U.S. own interests (Faksh and Faris 1993: 278; Mei 2009:15; Olimat 2016:63). The United States realizes that the Arab Gulf leaders have ruled by depending on force, and only with the help and support of Western and American power (Faksh and Faris 1993: 278; Darvishi and Jalilvand 2010: 176).

These security alliances were deepened by the fact that the United States shared the security concerns of the Arab Gulf states—with the exception of Oman—especially regarding the threats from Iran to the United States' allies and its political and economic interests in the region such as its nuclear program, its continuous military advancement, its influence over the Shia populations in Arab Gulf states and in other regional states

(Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon), and its ambition to control the region (Al Tamimi 2012:13; Smith 2018:103).⁴⁵ “The United States considers Iran the world’s leading sponsor of terrorism... and a [critical] threat to the US allies and forces in the [Arab] Gulf.” (Rubin,1998:347) Sharing these security concerns tightened the alliances with the Arab Gulf states and made the region an ‘American Lake’ and the United States its ultimate protector and savior (Olimat 2010:324; Kostiner 2010:6; Westphal et al. 2014:29).⁴⁶ More details are provided in section three.

These security alliances have been translated into a strong and vigorous American military presence in all Arab Gulf states either through educating and training the Arab Gulf states’ troops, supplying them with American arms and weapons, or by actual American military presence on these states’ soil. In fact, “U.S. military Education corps has a very close cooperation with [all Arab Gulf states’ military institutions] and they are almost converted into a section of [these states] defense and aviation ministr[ies].” (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 176) Moreover, these states’ military forces have extensively been trained through American military and troops’ education and training systems and programs, and their defensive systems and installations are supervised by American military advisers—who are stationed in Arab Gulf states (Faksh and Faris 1993: 279; Darvishi and Jalilvand 2010: 176-177; Andersen and Jiang 2014:20).

⁴⁵It has been explained before, Oman does not see Iran as much a threat as the other Arab Gulf states do.

⁴⁶The United States’ security ties and alliances with the Arab Gulf states were massively strengthened after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. U.S. played a pivotal role in leading the international community, and military operations to liberate Kuwait. This role proved to the Arab Gulf states that only the U.S. as the world superpower was capable of protecting them and assuring their external survival and stability against their neighbors.

Most importantly, the United States has military bases in all the Arab Gulf states except Saudi Arabia (Gupta, 2014:261). This involvement is quite impressive: “U.S. has at least 20 military bases with equipment including 500 tanks and armored units, three patriot missiles bases, 25 warships, cruisers and warplane carrying ship, 600 warplane and helicopter for various purposes such as spying, identification, fueling and transportation. These military bases are located in Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Kuwait.” (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 175) In Kuwait, there are three American military bases: Camp Arifjan, Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base, and Ali Al Salem Air Base, with 15,000 soldiers spread among them (Brown and Gould, August 31st, 2017). Another three American military bases are located in Oman: Thumrait Naval Air Base, Masirah Air Base, and Seeb International Airport (Yang August 13th, 2017; Cafiero and Karasik April 27th, 2016). Among the Arab Gulf states, Oman is a great supporter of American military presence on its soil, in return for financial and technological aid.⁴⁷ According to “an agreement signed between Oman and United States, [the] U.S. navy [has] the right to stay in the country and use the country facilities and for that 50 million dollars are annually paid to Oman. Oman benefits from the U.S. military presence in the region and establishing relations with U.S. as a provident action in order to be under U.S. protection and also has financial and technological benefits [for its] military modernization.” (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 176-177)

⁴⁷In June 1980, Oman and U.S. signed a military cooperation agreement allowing U.S. forces the use of and access to Omani military facilities, at that time, Kuwait refused this type of military cooperation between Oman and a foreign power; as “Kuwaitis ...were determined to keep foreign powers outside the region,” but Oman persisted, and this military agreement remains in effect (Bahgat, 1999: 450).

Currently there is no longer any American military base or troops in Saudi Arabia except for training purposes. Saudi Arabia used to have an American military presence on its soil since 1950s, when small American military-training mission operated there (Otterman, February 7th, 2005). The U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia peaked during the Iraqi invasion in Kuwait in 1990, “when some 550,000 coalition troops were based in the Saudi desert. Working with the Saudi military, they had two primary tasks: to protect Saudi oil fields from Iraqi troops who were already occupying Kuwait across the border, and to use Saudi soil as the launching pad for driving Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait. U.S., Saudi, and other coalition air forces used bases in Saudi Arabia for the air campaign against Iraq.” (Otterman, February 7th, 2005) However, in 2003, the U.S. withdrew all its military troops from Saudi Arabia and re-located its Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) from Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar; the withdrawal came after two key moments in US-Saudi ties, 9/11 in 2001, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Burkeman, April 30th, 2003).⁴⁸ More details are provided later.

Overall, Arab Gulf states’ security architecture “developed under a US umbrella: it is the U.S. alone who is able to guarantee the security of [their] regimes,” and ensure their troops and forces training and education (Andersen and Jiang, 2014:20). However, the American security umbrella was undermined, and the historical security ties, especially between Saudi Arabia and US faced dangerous turn which impacted

⁴⁸“Shortly after 9/11 the U.S. left the newly finished Sultan base in Saudi Arabia and moved it to Qatar.” (Andersen, Jiang, 2014:20)

negatively their ties and influenced to some extent US-Kuwaiti ties. Omani–US ties were not affected as much as those of the other two states.

No Longer Allies, Only Friends

There is a sharp development that has negatively affected the U.S. long-standing ties with the Arab Gulf states, undermined their historical security alliances, and prompted the Arab Gulf states—mainly Saudi Arabia—to look for alternatives to rebalance the U.S. power in their region, and limit its impacts on their internal and external stability and survival. This turning point was the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. After 9/11 there were also other developments that impacted negatively the US-Arab Gulf states security alliance. More details are in Chapter 4.

September 11 Attacks

After 9/11, U.S. ties with the Arab Gulf states became destabilized, and the long security trust between them was shaken. Fifteen of the 19 attackers on the United States were from Saudi Arabia; this fact shaped a new security era for Saudi Arabia, the big brother in the Arab Gulf region, and the U.S., the region’s traditional ally (Smith 2018:101-102; Luciani 2004:65; Russell 2005: 72; Olimat 2010:328). The Saudi government was accused of being responsible for these attacks, called the ‘bank of terror’ and a source of terrorism (Aufhauser et al. 2004:5; Smith 2018:101-102). The U.S. accused Saudi Arabia of funding Islamic radicalism ideology that fed extremists who were part of these attacks (Russell, 2005:72). As a result, and for the first time, US demanded that Saudi Arabia—and the other Arab Gulf states—stop their financial support to Islamic groups, start immediate internal political changes, and pursue political liberalization to enhance democracy and improve their human rights situation

(Douglas et al., 2006:16). However, Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states rejected all the American accusations, saw US demands as interference in their internal political life, and realized that their ally moved from being a source of security and stability to becoming a source of threat to their internal rule and a factor of regional instability (Ottaway 2009; Olimat 2013:74; Pradhan 2014:178).⁴⁹ For the first time, “Saudi Arabia and the US no longer view[ed] each other as strategic partners. In fact, Saudi Arabia’s government began to view the US as a major security threat to the monarchy...The complexity of the situation made it clear that Saudi Arabia [and other Arab Gulf states] never felt less safe, and less secure as [they] did shortly after the attacks.” (Olimat, 2010:328)

Hedging against the United States by Looking East: Looking to China

The United States’ policy changes in the region and its reform demands caused the Arab Gulf states—except Oman—to “no longer feel safe in the comfort zone of the American.” (Pradhan, 2014:178) They realized that the U.S. cannot and will not provide them with the usual security alliance they have enjoyed for years; the U.S. security umbrella is not granted any more as it has been before (Niblock 2014:26; Ignatius quoted in Friedman 2013:50). As realists argue, security changes always open states’ eyes wide to the reality that “today’s... allies could be tomorrow’s threats and are expensive to keep friendly.” (Gause, 1993: 144) The Arab Gulf states’ alliance with

⁴⁹For more detail, read “The King and Us: U.S.-Saudi Relations in the Wake of 9/11” by David Ottaway, (May/June 2009) and “China Saudi Arabia Relations: Economic Partnership or Strategic Alliance?” by Naser Al Tamimi, (2012).

the U.S. is no exception. The U.S. security changes regarding the Arab Gulf region led the Arab Gulf states to consider themselves as US's friends rather than allies.⁵⁰

As a direct result of these security changes and their drastic impacts on US security ties with the Arab Gulf states, especially its ties with Saudi Arabia, Arab Gulf states were compelled to look for other ways to secure themselves (Olimat, 2010:328). Among the three cases, Saudi Arabia took serious steps to protect itself, its friends, and the region, through improving its self-reliance defense, and searching for other external powers to provide the region with the required security, hedge against the United States, rebalance US security power in the region and limit its influence (Westphal et al. 2014:29; Friedman 2013:50; Ignatius quoted in Friedman 2013:50).⁵¹

As has been explained previously, since 9/11 and its dramatic implications for Arab Gulf ties with the United States, especially the Saudi-US ties, a serious search for a new power was carried out by the Saudis. The Saudis have been looking mainly eastwards for a power that would provide them with security and freedom to maneuver and play against the U.S., and China was on the top of their list (Gause 1993:132; Olimat 2010:328; Sokolsky and Rumer 2003:135; Ignatius quoted in Friedman 2013:50; Andersen and Jiang 2014:5/20; Karasik 2016:6; Al Tamimi 2012:3; Aarts and Rijsingen 2007:29-30). The Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, applied the 'look East' policy, and sought to enhance their strategic, economic, political, and security

⁵⁰Interview, May 3rd, 2016.

⁵¹Interview, March 13th, 2016.

ties with China (Karasik, 2016:6). By increasing their ties with China, these states—especially Saudi Arabia—hoped to achieve two goals: first, utilizing these ties as a strong card to play against the United States, and hedge against its power in their region (Al Tamimi 2012:11; Al Tamimi 2013:35; Cheng February 2016:36/49-59; Pham 2009:187; Bianchi 2013:105).⁵² Saudi Arabia pointedly declared that the “international component of the suggested Gulf security framework should engage positively the emerging Asian powers as well, especially China,” to send further signals to the United States that Saudi policy is serious (Al Faisal, 2004:6).

Second, taking advantage of China’s economic rise to increase their economic ties—especially energy ties—with China in order to increase their economic gains, and enhance their economic stability.⁵³ Some claim that the Arab Gulf states, as welfare states who depend mainly on oil revenues, are in real need of China economically, especially given that China is the largest oil consumer in the world and the largest expected buyer of their oil.⁵⁴ Chapter 5 gives details on Arab Gulf states’ economic ties with China.

The ‘look East’ strategic approach as applied by the Arab Gulf states represented a golden “opportunity for China to edge in.” (Andersen and Jiang, 2014:5) And according to (Olimat, 2010) China “was eager to fill that void,” and strengthen its ties with the Arab Gulf states, especially the economic ones (328).

⁵²Interview, March 13th, 2016; Interview, August 15th, 2016.

⁵³Interview, March 13th, 2016; Interview, August 15th, 2016.

⁵⁴Interview, August 15th, 2016.

Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the United States is the one who is responsible for introducing China as an alternative for the Arab Gulf states. These states “have turned to China to signal their displeasure,” and disapproval of US behavior regarding their region and its security issues, and to limit the American control (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2003:135).⁵⁵ Furthermore, some claim that beside the U.S. security policy changes regarding the region, US ongoing political and media hyperbole concerning China and its economic and military rise made the Arab Gulf states all the more inclined to see China as a desirable alternative. According to an influential Saudi academic voice, “Arab Gulf states were deceived by the media propaganda, namely the American media's exaggeration and propaganda concerning China’s prominent political, economic, and security abilities, but, the reality showed us the opposite, showed us that China has a long way to go before it can provide us with what we really need and look for.”⁵⁶ Also, historically the U.S. opened the door for China to establish partnerships with the region’s states since the 1980s, namely the Sino-Saudi partnership (Shichor 2013:36; Olimat 2010:327). The United States “was responsible in one way or another for the Saudi-Chinese partnership. In mid 1980s, Saudi Arabia sought the purchase of advanced American weapon systems to boost its security in the shadow of the Iran-Iraq war and Israeli military superiority. However, while the Reagan Administration was supportive of supplying Saudi Arabia with quality-arms needs, US Congress, acting

⁵⁵Some claim that the U.S. policies toward the Arab Gulf states reached the level of bullying them, and as a result, these states decided to find an alternative that respects them and their political authority and which is not a bully (Qian, 2016: 45).

⁵⁶Interview, March 10th, 2016.

under the influence of a strong Israeli lobby, opposed the sale of any advanced weaponry to Saudi Arabia, fearing threats to Israel.” (Olimat, 2010:327) Saudi Arabia bought the missiles from China.⁵⁷ More details on this deal are in Chapter 5.

Not all Arab Gulf states saw China as a possible alternative the same way Saudi Arabia did. Arab Gulf leaders saw China “in varying degrees...as a potential strategic partner able to counter the influence of an increasingly unpopular United States.... [and hoped] for the emergence of a credible check on American influence in the Middle East and across the globe... [especially that] China [was] widely perceived as the only credible alternative to US hegemony.” (Zambelis and Gentry quoted in Al Sudairi, 2013:4).

After the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait realized that “more big and rising friends represent more possible defense lines, and China is not an exception.”⁵⁸ However, it is important to understand that Kuwait looked to China not as a security alternative to the U.S., but as a supportive element to its economy and its security defense line in the region. In security terms, Kuwait needs China less than Saudi Arabia does because its ties with US have not been impacted as much as Saudi-American ties have been after 9/11.⁵⁹ Kuwait hoped for an active Chinese security and political involvement in the region through China’s influence and veto in the UNSC regarding the region’s security issues, especially the Iranian nuclear program and the Syrian crisis, but not through military

⁵⁷The missile deal in 1985 not only helped China financially, but also damaged the Saudi-Taiwani ties, and paved the way to formal diplomatic ties between China and Saudi Arabia in 1990 (Wang, 1993:71).

⁵⁸Interview, January 31st, 2016.

⁵⁹Interview, January 31st, 2016.

support or security alliance with China. But, because the political and the security policies in the Arab Gulf region depend on the Saudi orientation and willingness, the smaller Arab Gulf states, with the exception of Oman, always prefer to follow these orientations.⁶⁰ Therefore, Kuwait has followed in the Saudi steps and looked east towards China and used its ties with China as hedging card against the United States. It is important to realize that even though Kuwait followed the Saudis' lead, it tried to portray its look towards China as based primarily on its own economic needs and interests.

As for Oman, its ties with the United States have not been as impacted as those of the Saudis, and Oman does not follow the Saudi orientation as Kuwait does. Therefore, “there are no indications to suggest that Oman is contemplating a shift [in] its traditionally pro-U.S. and pro-Western foreign policy orientation.” (Zambelis, November 18th, 2015:14) Oman has not approached China as a security alternative to the United States in the region. Oman recognizes that China is a critical economic player that can help it improve its economy, but it did not see China as a security alternative to US power. Therefore, Oman did not share the Saudi view on the future of the Arab Gulf region's defense strategy and players; Oman did not see China as an alternative protector.⁶¹ However, Oman's skepticism and caution of any regional or external dominance have driven it to adopt a hedging strategy with all countries; the United States and China are not exceptions. One interviewee argues that Oman always

⁶⁰Interview, July 17th, 2016.

⁶¹Interview, May 29th, 2016; Interview, 2016, May 3rd, 2016.

prefers to keep its strategic options open, therefore, it has pursued a “hedging” strategy against all countries, even against its Arab Gulf neighbors.”⁶² In other words, “Oman... is engaging in the highest level of hedging among the [other Arab] Gulf states. It believes that its ability to maneuver diplomatically, its maintenance of open channels of communication with all parties, and its close ties with the countries that threaten it... reduce the risks to its national security.” (Guzansky, 2015:118)

To summarize, Saudi Arabia looked to China as a security alternative to the U.S., and as an important player to hedge against it. It influenced Kuwait to follow suit and apply the same strategy against the United States. As a result, since 2001 Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have increased their political and economic ties with China and tried to widen their security ones. Oman, as usual, has kept its options open, thus, it looked to China as a vital economic partner, and increased and developed its ties with it in all aspects, especially economically.

Many argue that the ‘Look East’ policy was not a planned policy; it was merely a reaction to the tense ties between the United States and the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, after 9/11.⁶³ This “policy was built only on high expectations, which were proven to be wrong and failed to fulfill the Arab Gulf states’ needs, especially the Saudis.”⁶⁴—China’s stances regarding the region’s security issues were

⁶²Interview, March 13th, 2016.

⁶³Interview, March 2nd, 2016.

⁶⁴Interview, March 10th, 2016.

behind the failure of this policy, and led the Arab Gulf states to rethink their expectations of China. More details on this issue are provided in Chapter 4.

The Importance of the Gulf Region for China and China's Historical Involvement in the Region

China has always viewed the Gulf region as geopolitically and economically important (Poorahmady and Karani, 2009:105).⁶⁵ In China's eyes, the Gulf region has vast reserves of energy resources, especially oil and natural gas; it enjoys a critical and strategic location that connects Asia, Africa, and Europe; and it is considered as a vital market for Chinese arms, goods, and labor and as an important re-export hub to the rest of the Middle East and East Africa (Darvishi and Jalilvand 2010: 169-170; Olimat 2010:333; Wang 1993:65; Andersen and Jiang 2014:14; Ermito February 7th, 2016; Brown December 2014:2; Chen 2011:6; Karasik 2016:1; Rubin 1998:345; Zhen 2014:213; Calabrese 1998:353-354). These factors give the Gulf region a significant strategic and economic weight that is critical for China's economic growth and development needs (Chaziza, 2013:172).

In addition to the region's geographic and economic value, the region enjoys political and security importance for China. To protect its economic, political, and security interests, China prefers the Gulf countries to be free from any dominant external power or any anti-Chinese regime. China needs the region's countries' support of its one-China principle against Taiwanese independence, their support against any separatist groups, mainly the Uyghur separatists, and their silence about its policies

⁶⁵In this chapter, the Gulf region refers to the six Arab Gulf states, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen.

towards the Muslim minorities in China, mainly in Xinjiang (Wu Bingbing quoted in Kozhanov 2014:121-122; Calabrese 1998:353-354; Chen 2011:6; Murphy 2013:7; Olimat 2010:333; Zhen 2014:213; Chen 2013:182). China is worried about the Gulf countries' moral or material support to Chinese Muslim minorities, an issue that impacts China's internal stability and unity. To limit such support, China has sought to link itself economically and politically with the Islamic countries, especially in the Gulf (Calabrese 1998:353-354; Zhen 2014:213). Since the attacks of 9/11, the Chinese awareness of the region's impact on its internal security and unity increased. More details on China's fear of Gulf countries' support to Muslim minorities and Uyghurs in China are discussed later in this chapter.

The importance of the Gulf region paved the way for China's involvement in the region and motivated it to strengthen its ties with the Arab Gulf states to fulfill and meet China's political and economic goals.⁶⁶ For better understanding of China's involvement, this study divides this involvement into four phases:

1. Phase One: One Stone and Two Birds (1949-1971).

⁶⁶Some argue that the Middle East does not carry any value to China, and the region is only a "bridge, springboard, a means to reach the real goal: Europe." (Shichor, 2018:47) According to this vantage point, there is an exaggeration regarding the Gulf region's economic and military importance for China; and the Middle East in general including the Gulf region is not one of China's core interests despite of its rich energy resources; China's oil diversification policy aims to lesser its dependency on Gulf's oil and detach itself from the region (Shichor, 2013:26-27). Moreover, this view believes that Iran is the only Gulf country that gains more from China's economic rise and the resulted available opportunities, especially its OBOR plan (Shichor, 2018:47-48). However, this view overlooks the fact that even if China's eye is on Europe, China cannot overcome the geographic importance of the Gulf as connected hub to Europe, also, even if China finds other energy sources, it cannot neglect the fact that the Gulf region is the biggest energy source and supplier in the world.

2. Phase Two: Revolutionary Action Gains Nothing, Pragmatism Gains All (1971-1988).
3. Phase Three: The Era of Political and Economic Needs (1989-2000).
4. Phase Four: The Era of Political Openness and Economic Interdependence (2001-2016).

The phases followed in this dissertation are more specific and reflect both internal and external factors that led both sides to establish ties. Furthermore, they facilitate explaining China's involvement in the region with more focus on the Arab Gulf's side. Also, these phases address critical turning points, and events that occurred on international, regional, and internal levels and their impacts not only on Sino-Arab Gulf ties but also on Arab Gulf states' view and strategic responses towards China.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ It is important to note that many scholars divided the Chinese involvement in the Gulf region into different stages and phases. For example, Huwaidin (2002), divides it into three main phases: phase one, (1949-1970) China's early involvement in the region; phase two, (1971-1989) China's pragmatic foreign policy towards the region; and phase three, (1990-1999) China's new interests in the region. This dissertation agrees with Huwaidin's division, especially first and second phases. However, it goes further than 1999 to cover more extended period, and the essential events that influenced Sino-Arab Gulf ties such as 9/11. Also, Huwaidin covers China's relations with the whole Gulf region which reduces his analysis 'depth of these ties. However, this dissertation focuses only on three cases. Moreover, Huwaidin's research focuses more on China's side regarding Sino-Gulf links, while this dissertation aims to focus more on the Arab Gulf states' side.

Wu (2011), divides China's involvement into six phases: phase one (1958-1967) focuses on Iraq; phase two (1967- 1971) focuses on the revolutionary movements in the region; phase three (1971-1979) focuses on the opposition to Soviet expansionism; phase four (1979-1990) focuses on Iran and Iraq; phase five (1990-2001) focuses on Iran; and phase six (2001-present) focuses on Saudi Arabia and Iran. Obviously, Wu pays great attention to the three leading and big countries in the Gulf region which are Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, not the smaller states. Similar to Huwaidin, Wu gives great details on these states' ties with China with more focus on China's side rather than the Arab Gulf's side.

Fulton (2016), divides the Chinese involvement in the region into four phases: phase one (1949-1965) indifference; phase two (1965-1971) hostility; phase three (1971-1990) transition; phase four (1990-2012) interdependence. Fulton's division adds important elements to understanding China's motivations for pursuing deeper ties with the Arab Gulf states by focusing on three important cases: Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Although he raises critical elements impacting ties between China and the Arab Gulf states, he does not provide a deep analysis on the impact of these elements namely Islam or China's stances regarding the region's security issues on Sino-Arab Gulf ties. Moreover, Fulton

Phases One: One Stone and Two Birds: Fighting Against Western Imperialism and Soviet Expansion in the Gulf Region (1949-1971)

In this phase, China's involvement in the Gulf region was motivated mainly by external factors: China's perception of and relationships and competition with the West (namely the United States) on the one side, and with the former Soviet Union on the other (Huwaidin 2002:52/134; Calabrese 1990,1991). According to Huwaidin (2002) and Huwaidin (2008), in that phase China feared Western and Soviet hegemony and expansion in the Gulf region, and the resulting limitations on and undermining of China's role in the region (2008:284). For example, China perceived the strong Western presence in the region as an obstacle to gaining formal recognition from the region's countries and establishing economic and political ties with them (Huwaidin, 2002:98). Therefore, from 1949 to the 1960s, China sought to free the Gulf region from any Western power, particularly the American and British. As a result, China fought against any Western or American control of the region. Thus, it supported liberation movements against the local governments that were reliable Western and American allies (Sutter quoted in Pham 2009:178; Huwaidin 2002; Yetiv and Lu 2007:200; Garver 2016:558; Scobell 2018:9; Goldstein 2015:166-167). During the 1960s and 1970s, China mobilized its efforts in the region to prevent any Soviet expansion or

views Saudi Arabia's practices as having important influence over the smaller Arab Gulf states. Nonetheless, when addressing his phases, he does not explain the Saudi influence over his other two cases regarding their ties with any external power including China.

control via applying the same tactic, which is “genera[ting] anti-colonial sentiment in the region... to check Moscow.” (Yetiv and Lu, 2007:200)⁶⁸

Among the Arab Gulf states, Oman was the only state that China utilized as a theatre for its struggle with the West. Only in Oman did China support anti-Western imperialism movements through its support for the guerrilla war in Dhofar (Huwaidin, 2002:101). During the 1950s to 1970, Oman suffered from a civil war between the Sultan of Oman and Imam Ghalib to gain control over Oman. During that civil war, the Sultan relied heavily on external support namely British support to contain and end the war.⁶⁹ Whereas the Imam Ghalib depended on “the supporters of Imamate under the name of Oman Revolutionary Movement (ORM) revolted against the Sultan to restore Ghalib;” for a short time, the Sultan succeeded in containing the war with the help of British support and troops, however, in mid-1960s, the civil war out again (Akseki, 2010: 19-21). In 1965, the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) appeared and was controlled by separatists from tribal origins; and later in 1968, DLF membership expanded to include socialists and Arab nationalists; since then, its name changed to the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), which was mainly controlled by Marxist radicals and funded and supported by China (Akseki, 2010: 19-21).

⁶⁸Since the deterioration of Sino-Soviet alliance at the end of 1950s, China regarded the Gulf region as an arena of its rivalry with the Soviet as well as the West (Huwaidin, 2002:100).

⁶⁹Later his son Qaboos depended on Iran.

China saw this war as an excellent opportunity to achieve its political goals and promote its ideological principles in the region. “The Chinese hoped to encourage the PFLOAG to adopt the Chinese model of revolution and accommodate Marxist ideology to set an example to revolutionary movements in the rest of the world.” (Huwaidin, 2002: 104) Thus, it contacted the Dhofar rebels and offered its political, financial, medical, and military help to fight against the Sultan and his Western ally, Britain (Huwaidin 2002:102-103; Behbahani 1981:165). According to Huwaidin (2002) and Behbahani (1981), that movement was almost entirely dependent on China’s assistance and support which gave China a significant influence on it; interestingly, as a result of this enormous support of the movement, it was referred to as a Maoist movement (2002:202; 1981:178).

However, that Chinese approach made the region’s countries, especially the Arab Gulf states, view China as a source of significant threat to their stability and survival. These states worried about similar movements on their territories, given that the PFLOAG movement had a goal of widening its scope to reach the other Arab Gulf states and end all monarchies there (Huwaidin 2002:103; Fulton 2016). Furthermore, the Arab Gulf states—especially Saudi Arabia—also feared China’s communist ideology and objected to its hostile policies and treatments of Muslims in China; hence, serious obstacles prevented diplomatic ties with China (Huwaidin 2002:213/215; Olimat 2016:63; Fulton 2016).⁷⁰

⁷⁰In the 1950s and after the Cultural Revolution in 1964, China treated the Chinese Muslim harshly and aggressively.

It can be said that during the period from the 1950s to 1990, the Saudi refusal to establish formal diplomatic ties with China was based on two factors: first, China's negative involvement in the region represented by its support for liberation movements. Second, the huge ideological differences between Islam and Communism; apparently, Saudi Arabia viewed China with its Communist ideology as anti-religious and anti-Islam (Huwaidin 2008:229; Olimat 2013:132). Moreover, during the Cultural Revolution in China, the Chinese Muslims faced harsh policies and practices from the Chinese government; for example, mosques and Muslims' schools were closed or destroyed, the Quran was burned, many Muslims were killed, arrested, and dismissed from their governmental positions (Huwaidin 2002:215; Fulton 2016). Thus, during that phase, "China was clearly understood by the Saudi Arabian [and other Arab Gulf states'] leadership[s] as a hostile external power trying to destabilize the region." (Fulton, 2016) Saudi Arabia was the only Arab state voting 'No' to China's admission to the United Nations in 1971.⁷¹

⁷¹Kuwait lobbied devotedly for China's admission in United Nation and Oman was absent (Fulton 2016; Olimat 2016:183).

It is important to note that during the 1970s, Arab Gulf states did not share a common perception of China or its role in their region. At that time, Kuwait was the first Arab Gulf state to realize that it was only a matter of time before China became a member of the UNSC; Kuwait figured that it would need China's support through its position in the UNSC against any external threat, especially the Iraqi claims; thus, Kuwait supported the Chinese admission to the UN (Huwaidin, 2002). Unlike Kuwait, Saudi Arabia saw China and its ideological principles as danger and threat to its Islamic identity; the mistreatment of Muslims in China enforced the above image in the Saudi eyes, therefore, not only did Saudi Arabia vote against China's admission to the UN, it also banned, in 1972, direct trade with China and prevented Chinese imports to protect itself from hostile Chinese propaganda and its potential influence (Fulton 2016; Al Tamimi 2013:128; Shichor 1998).—However, this ban was removed in 1981 after progress in Saudi-Sino ties. As for Oman, it was absent from the General Assembly on the voting day on China's admission to the UN in 1971 (Fulton, 2016). This Omani behavior can be explained by Oman's rational foreign policy. It can be stated that Oman took its time to evaluate the situation and the benefits from voting for or against China's admission. Oman had to rethink about its troubled history with China on one hand, and its future ties with China on the other, especially that in 1971, China stopped all kind of

All the above blocked China's chance to establish any diplomatic ties with any of the Arab Gulf states. Thus, its involvement in the region was constrained by its support for the liberation movements; the later defeat of these movements forced China to re-think its approach and which side it should stand by to achieve its interests.

Phase Two: Revolutionary Action Gains Nothing, Pragmatism Gains All (1971-1988)

In this phase, there were external and internal factors that guided China's involvement in the region. These factors pushed China to change its approach and reshape its foreign policy regarding the Gulf region. The external factor was the increased border clashes and hostilities between China and the Soviet Union; those clashes made China consider the Soviet Union as its key enemy, and the biggest source of threat to its internal and external stability (Huwaidin, 2002:104). Accordingly, China worked to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its power in the Gulf region, wishing to deny it a foothold in or influence over the region. During 1971-1988, China shifted from supporting the Marxists liberation movements in the region to establishing and enhancing diplomatic ties with the region's governments; China became more pragmatic. It abandoned its revolutionary role, realizing that standing by the liberation movements in the Gulf had not weakened the Western/American or Soviet powers in the Gulf region (Huwaidin 2002; Olimat 2010/2016; Fulton 2016). On the contrary, they strengthened their presence and influence because the local governments in the

support for the liberation movement in Oman. Easing support for the liberation movement in Oman also made Oman think differently regarding China and its ties with it. More details are in phase two.

region looked toward their Western or Soviet allies for help, as in the case of Oman and Britain.

Additionally, in 1971 Britain withdrew from the region, which made the Chinese fear a scenario where the Soviets jumped in to refill the power vacuum (Huwaidin 2002:104; Shichor 1979; Fulton 2016). Finally, China understood that its support and funding for the liberation movements fueled instability in the region; such an environment benefitted the Soviets' expansionist and influence intentions (Fulton, 2016). For example, the Soviet Union took the chance and interfered in the region by reaching out to some countries to persuade them to join a "Soviet-proposed Asian collective system, which would enhance Soviet advancement in the Indian Ocean and would benefit the Soviet strategy of encirclement of China." (Huwaidin, 2002:104) Therefore, China changed its foreign policy towards the region and focused more on establishing full diplomatic recognition with its countries and increasing its ties with them (Huwaidin 2002:105-114/134; Fulton 2016).

In 1971, China succeeded in establishing formal diplomatic ties with two Gulf states, namely Kuwait in March, and Iran in August (Huwaidin, 2002:106).⁷² Both Huwaidin (2002) and Shichor (1979), argue that those two diplomatic ties were established after the Soviet Union reached out to Iraq to sign a friendship and cooperation treaty, which was approved later in 1972. Thus, China was mainly trying

⁷²China made political and economic calculations regarding its support of revolutionary movements in the region, it discovered that gain from ceasing its support of these movements are greater than supporting them, especially that China's eyes were on establishing ties with Iran and Kuwait (Huwaidin 2002; Fulton 2016).

to balance the Soviet presence through Iraq in the region by gaining diplomatic recognition from Kuwait and Iran (2002:105; 1979:171-172).⁷³ As for Kuwait, there was an additional reason for taking a step and recognizing China diplomatically. Since the 1960s, Kuwait had faced Iraqi claims that Kuwait belonged to Iraq; those claims prompted Kuwait to pragmatically view China's potential political importance in the UN Security Council (Huwaidin, 2002:191). Kuwait realized that "China's replacement of Taiwan in the UN Security Council was imminent," and Kuwait undoubtedly would need China's support of its position against the Iraqi claims (Huwaidin, 2002:191).⁷⁴

As for the internal factor, China's needs for financial revenue and hard currency to enhance its economic reforms and modernization program, which started in the late 1970s, played a substantial role in reshaping its policies towards the region. China's domestic economic situation and growing needs enforced it to widen its view of the Gulf region beyond its struggle and competition either with the West or the Soviet Union (Calabrese 1992/1993:474; Rynhold 1996:102). The time was perfect for China to serve its goals, especially its economic goals. Since 1979, the region had witnessed many alarming political events such as the Iranian revolution in 1979, which presented

⁷³Preventing the Soviets from expanding in the region also triggered Kuwait and Iran to establish diplomatic ties with China; during that period, most countries in the region were afraid of strong Soviet's presence in their region and tried to balance this presence by establishing ties with China, however, they waited till China changed its radical policies and ceased its support of liberation movements before considering creating formal bilateral and diplomatic relations (Huwaidin, 2002:156/190). In 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan; this invasion showed the Soviet desire to expand their reach and power to the Gulf region (Fulton, 2016).

⁷⁴For more details on the Iraqi territorial claims during 1960s-1980s, read: "The international, regional and legal aspects of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait 1990-1991," by Ahmad Al Sheail, Durham thesis, (Durham University, 2000):29-41.

a source of internal and external threat to the Arab Gulf states, mainly Saudi Arabia, with Oman as an exception, as it has been explained in Chapter 3.⁷⁵ That revolution made the Arab Gulf states afraid of the possibility of facing the same revolution on their soil. Consequently, they looked first to enhance their security alliance with the United States, strengthen their security defense by establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, and increase their weaponry purchases from China.⁷⁶ Also, the Iranian-Iraqi war (1980-1988) presented another opportunity for China to appear as a reliable arms source. During that war, China sold arms to both Iran and Iraq (Huwaidin 2002; Fulton 2016; Olimat 2016). Both Iran and Iraq were major buyers of Chinese arms, they bought “about 70 percent of China’s total arms sales from 1982-1986.” (Huwaidin, 2002:114-115) China sold arms to the region’s countries to get much-needed hard currency for its economic development (Goldstein, 2015:166). During the 1980s, arms trade was the heart of Sino-Gulf states and a critical gate to establish diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia (Rynhold, 1996:109).⁷⁷

The shift from supporting leftists in Oman to the Monarch of Oman repaired, to a large extent, China’s image in Omani eyes and paved the way for China to establish

⁷⁵Fulton (2016), argues that “the large Shia population on the Arab side of the Gulf was seen as a possible fifth column for Iran, making the Iranian revolution both an external and internal security threat for five of the six Gulf monarchies.”

⁷⁶Many scholars agree that the GCC is merely a security organization that was formed as a direct and quick reaction from the Arab Gulf states to face the regional security threats, mainly Iran’s revolution and Iran-Iraq war (Ramazani, Kechichian 1988:191; Al Hamad 1997; Gause 2009:72; Fulton 2016).

⁷⁷Arab Gulf states “built up a formidable collection of weaponry, purchased from a wide range of vendors in many states. The USA is the largest supplier, but the United Kingdom, France, Brazil, Italy, Russia and China have also been selling significant quantities of weapons...From 1985 to 1990 the GCC states used their massive oil revenues to build a modern military. Saudi Arabia spent US\$106 billion on arms; the UAE, \$10.6 billion; Oman, \$9 billion; Kuwait, \$2.04 billion; and Bahrain, \$1.07 billion.” (Fulton, 2016)

formal diplomatic ties with Oman in 1978 (Olimat 2010:312; Huwaidin 2002:203).⁷⁸ Establishing diplomatic ties with Oman provided China with a great opportunity to prove itself as a reliable non-ideological and interest-based partner (Fulton, 2016). Oman also shared China's concerns regarding the Soviets' expansionist intentions regarding the Gulf region; Oman viewed China as a balancing actor against the Soviet (Fulton 2016; Huwaidin 2002:206-207).⁷⁹

China recognized that its best tactic to win its battle against the West and the Soviet Union was not by supporting the liberation movements in the Arab Gulf region, but by establishing diplomatic ties with the region's states. Moreover, since the 1970s, China realized that it needed to widen its ties with the Gulf region states to gain economic and political advantages. Therefore, China tried to utilize its ties with Kuwait as a gate to other Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia (Olimat 2016: 106/182-183; Huwaidin 2002:191/193). Although that tactic worked in the case of Oman, it did not work with Saudi Arabia. After that, China utilized its ties with Kuwait and Oman for similar formal recognition from the other Arab Gulf states as Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, as a result, those states recognized China diplomatically by the end of the 1980s (Olimat 2016: 106/182-183; Fulton 2016; Huwaidin 2002:191/193).⁸⁰ However, China could not gain Saudi diplomatic recognition until

⁷⁸Huwaidin argues that China stopped its support of the revolutionary movement in Oman in order to safeguard and protect its ties with Iran; "China did not want to appear against Iran's policy in Oman, where Iran was supporting the Sultan against the revolutionaries." (2002:205)

⁷⁹The Soviet threats increased in these states' eyes after its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (Huwaidin 2002:206; Fulton 2016).

⁸⁰Moreover, Kuwait and Oman recognized the potential role that China can play in Iraqi-Iranian war, they understood that China was a key player with potential mediation role, especially that China enjoyed balanced and good ties with Iran and Iraq, and fed both with weapons during the war; Oman for example,

1990—more details in phase three. China’s missiles sales to Saudi Arabia in 1985 were the first direct interaction between Saudi Arabia and China, and the cornerstone of the establishment of formal ties between the two countries in 1990.⁸¹ However, it must be clear that this deal made Saudi Arabia view China only as an alternative supplier of weapons denied by the United States and not as a security partner. In the 1980s Saudi-US security ties were very strong and Saudi Arabia had no reason to look for a security alternative.

During the 1980s, the Sino-Gulf ties witnessed political and economic progress including its ties with Saudi Arabia. China’s main vehicle in that phase was its political and economic pragmatic approach. Politically, it abandoned its revolutionary role in the region and moved towards full diplomatic recognition from the region’s countries. Economically, it developed economic ties with the region’s states, mainly arms trade with three main actors in the Gulf: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.⁸²

Phase Three: The Era of Political and Economic Needs (1989-2000)

In this phase, two internal factors guided China’s involvement in the Gulf region. First, the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. After this massacre, China faced international isolation and Western sanctions. To reduce the negative impacts of

contacted China and asked to not sell any missiles to Iran or Iraq, in exchange for helping China in establishing ties with the rest of the Arab Gulf states (Huwaidin, 2002:196/207).

⁸¹Olimat (2016) and Huwaidin (2002), argue that since the end of 1970s China and Saudi Arabia were closer than they used to be as a result of their shared view on many major issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. China supported financially and logistically the Mujahedeen against the Soviets and “was the first country” to send jihadist fighters from Xinjiang to battle them (Olimat, 2016:184).

⁸²As for Kuwait and Oman, their ties with China during the 1980s were primarily economic ties including trade, investments, import, export, and provision of Chinese labor services and loans —Kuwait was the first Arab Gulf state to provide China with loans—, however, arms sales were not part of Sino-Kuwaiti or Sino-Omani ties (Huwaidin, 2002:193-196/208).

isolation and sanctions, China sought strongly to strengthen its existing diplomatic relations with the Arab Gulf countries and sought to gain diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia (Fulton 2016; Olimat 2016:185; Calabrese 1992/1993:475-476). China perceived the Gulf region, especially the Arab Gulf countries, as a vital bridge to the broader Arab and Islamic world and the Middle East at large, accordingly, it would have more opportunities to mitigate the constraints of the political and economic isolation (Fulton 2016; Rynhold 1996:108). Surprisingly, “while many countries around the world worked to distance themselves from [China], Riyadh was prepared to move forward and negotiate the establishment of full diplomatic relations. After signing a memorandum of understanding agreeing to the opening of trade offices in November 1988,” Saudi Arabia and China established full diplomatic ties in July 1990 (Scobell and Nader, 2016:26). China’s ties with the Arab Gulf states were not threatened or negatively affected by this massacre. The Arab Gulf states perceived that matter as a Chinese internal affair that no country had the right to interfere in or criticize; seemingly, they saw the Chinese government’s action as protection of its internal stability (Huwaidin 2002; Calabrese 1992/1993:475-476). It can be stated that during that period, China’s effort to establish new diplomatic ties or strengthen the existing ones benefited both parties. It helped China to counter the Western criticism and reduce the negative impacts of the international isolation on one hand, and benefited the Arab Gulf states economically and politically on the other.

The Saudi decision to establish diplomatic ties with China was explained by the Saudi leadership’s desire to diversify its arms sources, especially after the 1985 deal,

and to take advantage of China's potential role in the region after the end of the Iraq-Iran war in 1988, especially that China enjoyed active ties with Iran and Iraq. Although Saudi Arabia voted 'no' to China's admission to the UN, Beijing became a member in 1971. Being a permanent member in UN Security Council increased China's political importance in the Saudi eyes. In 1990, one month after the establishment of Saudi-Sino diplomatic ties, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia needed China's full support for all UN resolutions against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990. China's position regarding the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 2nd, 1990, is summarized by the following: supporting Kuwait's independence and sovereignty; rejecting the Iraqi invasion; demanding Iraq end the invasion and withdraw its troops from Kuwait; refusing to provide Iraq with arms and weapons; and supporting all UN security council resolutions—except that it abstained on Resolution 678, which allowed the use of force by international coalition to evict Iraq from Kuwait and end the invasion.

The second internal factor was China's urgent need to access enough energy resources to feed its economic demands. In 1993 China became a net oil importer. Its domestic economic needs and its appetite for energy resources had grown dramatically. Therefore, China's view of the Gulf region's importance and value sharply increased. China primarily looked at the region as critical sources of energy that were urgently needed to satisfy its economic growth, continue its economic development, and secure its economic rise and modernization; those needs were main reasons that drove China to enhance and improve its economic ties with the region's countries and increase its involvement in the Gulf region in general (Huwaidin 2008:248; Huwaidin

2002:119/134; Garver 2016: 558; Scobell 2018:9).⁸³ Moreover, China understood that its economic cooperation with the Gulf states could go beyond importing oil and natural gas to include trade in other goods, infrastructure, joint economic projects, investments, and labor contracts. In return, the region's states welcomed such cooperation. Chapter 4 covers the economic aspects between China and three of Arab Gulf states plus Iran.

On the other hand, Arab Gulf countries are welfare states that rely heavily on oil revenues. China with its increasing thirst to buy their oil made a vital economic partner. Strong economic ties between China and the Arab Gulf states means solidifying Arab Gulf states' economic stability and enhancing their rentierism status quo which is a necessity to protect and enhance their internal political authority and stability. In other words, Arab Gulf states' economic prosperity and strength—which depend greatly on energy—are highly and directly related to their political power and authority; the flourishing economic situation in these states is a crucial factor to sustain their internal legitimacy and stability (Drifte 2003:2; Smith 2018:98; Al Tamim 2013:68). Here, China's vital weight was well noticed and valued by these states.

This phase shows that international and regional events and urgent internal economic needs brought China and Arab Gulf region closer than they were in the 1980s. Also, those events and needs were crucial elements that pushed cooperation between China and the Arab Gulf countries, especially the economic ties, to go beyond arms deals to

⁸³Also, China sought to increase its involvement in the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular to ensure energy flow and supply with fair and reasonable prices (Garver 2016: 558-559; Smith 2018:107-108/113).

satisfy both sides' economic interests. In that phase, China recognized the Arab Gulf's political and economic value to secure its international presence and its economic growth. Additionally, Arab Gulf states recognized the importance of Chinese economic partnership and its political support to secure them externally and internally.

Phase Four: The Era of Political Openness and Economic Interdependence (2001-2016)

Like phases two and three, in this phase, China's involvement in the Gulf region has been guided by internal and external factors. As for the internal factor, again the economic factor plays a significant role in China's involvement in the region on the one hand, and Arab Gulf states' desire to strengthen their economic cooperation with China, on the other. China needs to sustain its internal economic stability. At the same time, the Arab Gulf states need to improve their internal economic situation to sustain their internal political authority and stability—Chapter 5 gives details on this multi-faceted economic cooperation. Since the 2000s, China's economic value has increased in the Arab Gulf states' eyes. These states realize that their economic security became influenced to a large extent by China's oil demand. China is their largest expected buyer. If China decides to decrease its energy demand for any reason, the Arab Gulf states' economic security will be negatively impacted, which will ultimately affect their internal security, stability, and welfare status, considering the current low oil prices and diminishing revenues for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Consequently, these states are left

with few options other than dealing economically with China to protect their internal survival.⁸⁴

As for the external factor, 9/11 was the critical factor that paved the way for China to increase its involvement in the Gulf region. The 9/11 attacks on the U.S. and its drastic consequences on U.S. security policies towards the region gave China a golden opportunity to increase its political and economic involvement and improve its multi-ties with the Arab Gulf states. That event was the trigger that caused Arab Gulf states to view China as a possible alternative to the United States. As explained previously, Arab Gulf states were highly disappointed by U.S. regional actions and policies, and its demands for democracy and reform. All these changes made these states, especially Saudi Arabia look east towards China as their promising political and security alternative.

Moreover, these changes made Sino-Arab Gulf ties, especially the Sino-Saudi, flourish and improve economically and politically (Olimat, 2010:327). Economically, after 9/11, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait picked China as a favorable destination for their investments, especially in the energy sector, and gave China numerous investment opportunities in their energy and infrastructure sectors.⁸⁵ Also, in the 2000s, many economic platforms and institutions have been established collectively that include

⁸⁴China's economic value increased after its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001; China's membership in WTO facilitated and paved the way for more economic cooperation and interdependence between China and the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia (Fulton, 2016).

⁸⁵"Quite a few Saudi merchants feared, rightly or wrongly, that their assets in US dollars in American institutions were no longer safe. Hence it made sense to them to find alternative investment opportunities... Like many other investors, they...increasingly put their money in Eastern markets. The result of all this is growing economic ties between the world's largest manufacturers [China] and the world's largest supplier of energy [Saudi Arabia]." (Aarts, Rijsingen, 2007:29-30)

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and China. Politically, the 2000s, especially from 2005-2011, was a golden era for high political visits exchanges. “In 2006 the new Saudi king, Abdallah, made what Jiang’s successor, Hu Jintao, called the three first visits to Beijing (the first-ever visit by a Saudi monarch to China, the first country visited by Abdallah after his succession to the throne, and the first stop on the ruler’s multi-country tour.” (Pham, 2009: 181) Three months later, the Chinese president visited Saudi Arabia and in 2009 made his second visit to Saudi Arabia in less than three years (Pham 2009: 181; Chang 2011:13).⁸⁶ Those exchanges of visits prompted many Iranian diplomats to express frustration and fear concerning their impact on Sino-Iranian ties; in fact, there was an Iranian worry that Saudi Arabia sought to form an alliance with China which would come at Iran’s expense.⁸⁷

From 2005 to 2011, during King Abdullah’s era, there were high expectations that China could play a security role in the region. However, after 2011, the expectation became more economically oriented towards the long-term relationships. Since 2011, China shifted from being a source of stability and security to the region to a source of threats to the stability and survival of the region.⁸⁸ Some argue that the view that China is a threat has grown stronger under the current King, King Salman, who prefers to sustain and increase robust security ties with his country’s traditional guardian: the United States.⁸⁹

⁸⁶It is worth mentioning that all the three cases have exchanged a high level of political visits, but, in the case of Saudi Arabia, visits exchanged were on a presidential level.

⁸⁷Interview, February 28th, 2016.

⁸⁸Interview, February 22nd, 2016.

⁸⁹Interview, February 24th, 2016.

Before explaining the strategic view shift of China from being a source of security support to source of threat, it is essential to understand why Saudi Arabia from the start picked China in particular to be its potential alternative. There are many reasons that explain why China was the alternative in Saudi and Kuwaiti eyes. First, although China has a revolutionary history in the region, China no more presents an ideological threat (Olimat, 2010:312). Second, China has no imperial, domination, or invasion legacy; it did not occupy the region or try to control it through force as some Western powers did (Calabrese 1992/1993:473; Olimat 2010:312). Third, China was welcome because of its non-interference policy, its respect for Arab Gulf states' internal authority and way of rule, and its lack of political baggage when it deals with these countries (Fulton 2016: Al Tamimi 2012:10; Bagwandeem 2014:9). Fourth, China is a giant and thirsty economic partner with which cooperation brings massive economic opportunities in energy, goods, and services sectors (Bagwandeem 2014:9; Olimat 2010:312; Fulton 2016). Fifth, China approaches the Arab Gulf states and the third world countries in general, in a humble and modest style and lacks the West's supremacy. Finally, China is a possible source of weapons and technology that are hard to obtain from the Western powers.

However, the 2000s have not only brought elements of closer ties between China and Arab Gulf states ties but also brought elements of fear, doubt, and worry between the two sides. There are critical turning points that effect Arab Gulf security and political ties with China, especially its ties with Saudi Arabia. The following section explains these points.

In order to understand Arab Gulf states' ties and strategic responses toward China—and toward any external power in their region—it is crucial to explain the Arab Gulf states' security goals, their shared security concerns and where these security concerns and interests diverge. The differences are mainly in their views and perceptions on: Iran as source of security threat, on the Syrian crisis and the Assad regime as destabilizing and threatening factor, and on the implications of robust Iranian-Syrian ties on the three Arab Gulf states' internal and external security stability. Understanding these similarities and differences regarding Iran and Syria represents a key element to understand their security ties and strategic responses towards China and the United States.

Exploring regional circumstances, and the security changes and events which occurred in the Gulf region, is also a vital element in identifying reasons that led the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, to look to China as a potential alternative—in spite of these states' historical security alliance with the United States.

Arab Gulf States: Shared and Divergent Security and Political Interests

All the Arab Gulf states agree on putting security issues and concerns at the top of their agenda (Gause,1993:132). Each of these states seeks aggressively to protect and secure its internal and external survival and stability with all the means and available tools it has. However, it is incorrectly assumed that there is a unified Arab Gulf region, or a political unity among its states regarding the region's interests, goals, orientations, policies, and strategies; instead, the Arab Gulf region is simply a formation of different

states with multi, frequently contradicting, interests.⁹⁰ These states do not share similar views and perceptions on the sources of security threats, and the approaches to secure the region's security order and architecture (Bill 2014:104; Bahgat 1999:445; Al Khalili 2009:82).

The royal families of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Oman have one ultimate goal which is securing themselves from any potential threat internally and externally, however, these states do not agree on the sources of the threats and the best security approach to protect the region. Therefore, “each of them [prefers to] put its internal and external interests first, and plan its internal and external policies independently,” to achieve its own interests.⁹¹ Moreover, the Arab Gulf states suffer from many political and territorial disputes, and lack real coordination either economically or politically among themselves, which make their security divergence wider (Al Alkim, 1994: 161). Also, these states experience a growing situation of political and security uncertainty, a growing regional competition among themselves, a growing situation of mutual distrust, increased doubts, suspicions, and fears, especially from Saudi Arabia and its potential hegemony—and most obviously between Saudi Arabia and Oman (Smith 2018:111; Pradhan 2014:179; Ashraf 2014:103; Friedman 2013:51).⁹² This distrustful and doubtful atmosphere among these states presents huge obstacles in the face of any solid regional security cooperation among them (Smith, 2018:111). As a result, the Arab Gulf states have given—first and foremost—top priority to their individual

⁹⁰Interview, May 22nd, 2016; Interview, March 2nd, 2016.

⁹¹Interview, May 11th, 2016.

⁹²Interview, May 11th, 2016; Interview, March 13th, 2016.

security needs and reacted internally and regionally on the basis of these needs. Moreover, this anxious and troubled atmosphere has made ties between Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states a mixture “of love and hate, of respect and resentment, and of independence and acquiescence.” (Al Alkim, 1994:80/87/89)⁹³

Examining and analyzing Saudi Arabia’s, Kuwait’s, and Oman’s, views on, and their ties with, Iran, and their perceptions on Syria and its crisis, serve as a perfect example of shared and divergent security interests among these states and their impact on these states’ responses toward each other and to any external power—namely China and the United States.

Iran: An Existential Threat or A Good Neighbor?

There are two perceptions among the Arab Gulf states regarding Iran. The first perception sees Iran as an extreme threat to the internal and external survival and the stability of these states. This is primarily Saudi Arabia’s view, and then Kuwait’s view (Cordesman et al. 2014: iii; Olimat 2013:69; Sager 2015:113-116; Al Suwaidi 2014:328/342; Al Tamimi 2012:12). The second perceives Iran as good neighbor and a critical and key player to secure the region. This is the Omani view (Al Khalili 2009:98/122/129; Jones 2014:1-6; Bahgat 1999:445-458; Katzman 2017:9-13). The following section provides details on these two conflicting views by investigating and explaining the three cases’ perceptions and views on Iran’s nuclear program, Iran’s

⁹³As a direct and obvious example of growing tensions between the Arab Gulf states, currently, these states face a huge unprecedented political and security split among themselves, especially between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This split peaked and led to block and cut diplomatic, and economic ties between Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

involvement in the region, and its Islamic identity and influence as a Shi'ite country and the implication of this weight. The section shows that these states not only do not share similar security views, but also apply dissimilar political foreign policies toward Iran (Al Rasheed, 2015:38).

Iran's Nuclear Program

Saudi Arabia, the biggest and the most influential country among the three cases, has the strongest and 'loudest voice' opposing Iran (Bill, 2014:103). Saudi Arabia perceives Iran as the region's devil, one that poses threats not only to the region's security and stability, but also to the whole Islamic world. In the House of Saud's eyes, Iran is a hostile and antagonistic country that seeks to dominate the region and spread its interpretation of Islam to become the undisputed hegemonic power in the Gulf region and the Islamic World.

What makes the Saudi's fear even greater is the fact that Iran is the second biggest country in the Gulf region, with the largest population, representing a rival interpretation of Islam (Shi'ism), with the potential of obtaining nuclear weapons. Therefore, "the realities of geography and demography [and military capabilities] dictate that the Gulf monarchies [especially Saudi Arabia] will always view Iran warily as at least a potential threat." (Gause,1993:166)

Iran's nuclear program has sharpened the Saudi's view on Iran as a threat. Saudi Arabia believes that this nuclear program is not directed against Iran's enemies, namely the United States and Israel, but against Saudi Arabia and the other smaller Arab Gulf states (Russell, 2005:67). Iran's determination to continue its nuclear program despite

all the international and regional efforts to end it—more detail is provided on these efforts later—has the sole aim of changing the region’s balance of power in Iran’s favor, and paving the way for Iranian influence to expand and making Iran the dominant regional power (Sager, 2015:113-116). Moreover, The House of Saud believes that Iran’s continuous military advancement and attempts to obtain unconventional weapons are strategic approaches to “assert [Iran’s] military superiority over one or several of the GCC states.” (Al Suwaidi, 2014:339)

Therefore, in order to protect its leading regional position, Saudi Arabia has completely rejected Iran’s nuclear program, and deeply doubted all the Iranian claims that this program has peaceful developmental purposes (Olimat, 2013:69). Saudi Arabia has used its leverage to contain Iran and its ambitions by approaching many Asian Islamic countries to join in an informal alliance against Iran, with Pakistan and Malaysia among these states (Janardhan, 2014:191). Also, Saudi Arabia has “individually and collectively [with other Sunni states] sought to exploit their close relationship with the United States in order to convince Washington to take robust action against Iran’s nuclear program.” (Ellis and Futter, 2015:85/88) Moreover, Saudi Arabia sought to weaken Iran’s economy and its economic abilities in order to hamper its progress in the program by utilizing its economic power as leading oil producer. It, therefore, insisted on maintaining a high level of oil production in a bid to decrease the oil price and therefore undermine Iran’s ability to finance its program (Ellis and Futter, 2015:85).

Kuwait followed in the Saudi footsteps in its position regarding Iran's nuclear program. Like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait has expressed its total opposition to the Iranian nuclear program and its attempts to obtain a nuclear bomb and viewed this program as dangerous and threatening to its environment and to its survival, and to the region's stability (Boumediene and Al Abdul Razzaq, 2006:37/39-40).⁹⁴

Moreover, both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia believe that this program would increase Iran's ability to "aggressively challenge their interests," in countries around them such as Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain (Ellis and Futter, 2015:85). Therefore, they sought to undermine Iran's nuclear program by not opposing the economic sanctions or the international pressure imposed on Iran. On the contrary, these states were big supporters of these economic and diplomatic efforts and hoped to see them succeed in shutting down the program (Ellis and Futter, 2015:85). Interestingly, some argue that even a non-nuclear Iran is viewed by Sunni Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, as a political and ideological challenge and a threat to their regional and domestic stability (Ellis and Futter, 2015:90). They go even further believing that, regardless of its nuclear program and regime, Iran will never stop its attempts to destabilize and dominate the region (Al Suwaidi, 2014:342).

Oman totally disagrees and rejects the stances that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait took against the Iranian nuclear program. Oman believes the Iranian claims that their nuclear

⁹⁴Kuwaiti officials have occasionally declared their deep fears over Bushehr nuclear plant's safety, and the potential environmental fatal impacts if it faces incidents as Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union, Fukushima in Japan, and the Three Mile Island issue in the United States, and what makes these fears bigger and deep rooted is the fact that Kuwait is nearer to the Iranian Bushehr nuclear power plant than Iran's capital Teheran (Toumi, March 13th, 2014).

program is peaceful and aims to support the Iranian economy and satisfy the country's development needs (Boumediene and Al Abdul Razzaq, 2006:39). Therefore, "Muscat was the only capital among the GCC states that issued joint statements supporting Iran's positions on key issues, especially Iran's nuclear program," and supported Iran's right of obtaining nuclear technology (Al Khalili, 2009:122/129).

Spreading Shi'ism and Interference in Arab Gulf States' Internal Affairs

Iran's and Shi'ism Expansion

A crucial element that feeds the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is their Islamic-ideological differences. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni state and works to spread Sunni Islam, especially Wahhabism, while Iran is a Shi'ite state, and seeks to spread its version of Islam. The ideological difference between these states has been transferred to ideological rivalry and war in the region and in the Islamic World, a conflict into which many countries have been dragged. This ideological/religious element has "trouble[d] Saudi-Iranian relations, [as] both regimes claim to be the interpreters of what 'Islamic politics' means for the rest of the Muslim world." (Gause,1993:167) Also, this ideological/religious element made Saudi Arabia view Iran as an existential threat; it made the Saudi conflict with Iran not only political or strategic but also existential (Alterman, 2013:92).⁹⁵ As an expected result, both Saudi Arabia and Iran have been dragged into an ideological war to control the region and the Sunni and Shiite populations in the Gulf region and the surrounding key countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.⁹⁶

⁹⁵Interview, March 2nd, 2016.

⁹⁶Interview, March 2nd, 2016.

Also, Saudi Arabia perceives Iran as a definite threat on account of its interfering in the internal affairs of the Arab Gulf states (Sager, 2015:113-116). Iran is using Shi'ism to interfere in Arab Gulf states' intelligence and military affairs and strengthen its political and strategic position in the Gulf region through increasing its links with Shia population in the Arab Gulf states (Sager, 2015:113-116). What enflames the Saudi fear is the fact that "20 percent of [its] population is Shi'i, [who] living mostly...near oil installations. [And] since many are employed by oil companies, the main fear [is] that they might disrupt oil operations. Additionally, [they may] act as agents for spreading Iranian Khomeinist...ideology." (Kostiner, 2010:21) Also, Saudi Arabia believes that Iran intentionally expands its support to Shia population in key countries, particularly Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, and, Yemen, in order to surround the Arab Gulf states and spread Shi'ism in the region and the Islamic and Arab world (Sager 2015:113-116; Olimat 2013:69).⁹⁷

Many Senior Saudi officials have declared on various occasions Saudi Arabia's rejection of the Iranian behavior in the Gulf region, starting with opposing Iran's meddling in Arab Gulf states countries with significant Shia communities, such as

⁹⁷"Iran targeted Iranian Shia Muslim groups in the Arab Gulf states and Iraq in order to turn them against the regimes and thereby create an opening to export the Iranian revolution beyond Tehran's borders, akin to Saudi Arabia supporting Sunni Muslim groups in other countries such as Pakistan, in order to disseminate Wahhabism and thereby expand the Saudi sphere of influence. In security policy, politics of identity is a double-edged sword that can either be a foreign policy asset applied offensively against other states, or a weapon that can be abused by ruling Persian Gulf regimes in their domestic politics to legitimate suppression of ethnic and religious groups." (Andersen, Jiang, 2014:15)
The fear of the Shia influence even has reached Jordan, in 2006, King Abdullah of Jordan, referred to growing threat from what he called the 'Shia Crescent,' referring to Shia communities and groups in Iran, southern Iraq, and eastern shores of the Arab Gulf region, Syria, and Lebanon (Andersen, Jiang 2014:15; Kostiner 2010:33; Olimat 2010:325).

Bahrain and Kuwait, Iran's occupation of three Emirati islands in the Arabian Gulf, and Iran's rapidly growing interference in Syria and Iraq (Al Saud, 2013:38). Moreover, Saudi Arabia rejects the aggressive Iranian claim of the small Arab Gulf state, Bahrain, as a province of Iran: "Saudi Arabia will never accept Iran's taking power in Bahrain. This is a fantasy if anyone, including in the West, believes that such an eventuality can happen on Saudi Arabia's watch." (Al Saud, 2013:42). The Saudi Foreign minister Adel Al Jubeir does not miss any opportunity to condemn the Iranian activities in the region.

Kuwait also has "large and politically robust Shi'ite population," estimated at "10-20 percent of [Kuwait's] population [which is] about two million." (Friedman 2012:83; Kostiner 2010:21) Kuwait followed also the steps of Saudi Arabia in this matter for two reasons. First, Kuwait has suffered from Iranian attempts to interfere and recruit Shi'ite groups. "In early April [of 2012], Kuwait announced that it had uncovered eight separate Iranian spy networks operating in Kuwait, two of which were armed...The government also announced that three Iranian diplomats... have been involved in the networks." (Friedman, 2012:80) In 2017, Kuwait asked the Iranian ambassador in Kuwait and 14 other Iranian diplomats to leave the country after links to spy and terror cells were discovered (Westall, July 20th, 2017).⁹⁸ Second, Kuwait prefers to support the Saudi policy toward Iran. Saudi Arabia has a great political weight and influence

⁹⁸Saudi Arabia has been always critical of the Iranian interference in the region's affairs; recently, Kuwait has abandoned its quiet and friendly diplomacy with Iran, and "has appeared more openly and consistently critical of Iranian interference," especially after the events of Arab Spring in 2011 in Syria and Bahrain (Friedman, 2012:83).

on other smaller Arab Gulf states, Kuwait is among these states (Olimat, 2016:106).⁹⁹ This Saudi influence over Kuwait dates to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when Kuwait and the other smaller Arab Gulf countries, except Oman, “became more inclined to follow the Saudi steps [as a direct result of the] external threats...[that] served to enhance Saudi Arabia’s role in influencing the other GCC members’ foreign policies.” (Al Alkim, 1994:80) Kuwait and the smaller Arab Gulf countries have accepted the Saudi’s views and perceptions regarding the region’s security sources of threats precisely Iran (Al Alkim, 1994:87).

Kuwait has preferred to work with Saudi Arabia regarding the region’s security issues and concerns.¹⁰⁰ “In any [external and] regional crisis Kuwait is closer to follow the Saudi direction.”¹⁰¹ Saudi influence has limited Kuwait’s regional orientation and actions in the region.¹⁰² Some have argued that Kuwait’ foreign policy orientation has moved from a semi-independent to “obedient client state,” and follower of Saudi Arabia (Al Alkim,1994:87). Others refused “the word follower, preferring to describe Kuwait as [strongly] supportive of the Saudi position.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹Interview, August 15th, 2016; Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, May 20th, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016; Interview, May 3rd, 2016; Interview, January 31st, 2016.

¹⁰⁰Interview, January 31st, 2016.

¹⁰¹Interview, March 1st, 2016.

¹⁰²Interview, January 31st, 2016.

¹⁰³Interview, March 2nd, 2016. It is highly important to point out that in the crisis among and between the GCC members, Kuwait refuses to pick a side, and is very careful to show its neutrality in these situations. An obvious example is the current crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Kuwait did not pick the Saudi side, and refused the Saudi escalating approach in dealing with Qatar. On the contrary, Kuwait aimed to solve this issue by mediating and bringing brothers to the table for talks and tried to limit and contain this political disagreement. For more details read: “Kuwait, Oman, and the Qatar Crisis” by Giorgio Cafiero and Theodore Karasik, (Jun 22nd, 2017).

Contrary to the other Arab Gulf states, Oman “does not perceive any threat from Iran,” and lacks the fear of Iranian influence over its Shiite minority (Akseki, 2010:104). The “number of Shi’as in Oman is not considerable; 75% of the Omani population are Ibadis.” (Valdani, 2012:26) The rest of the Omani population are 5% Shia and 20% Sunni (Akseki, 2010:104). And as a direct result of “Ibadiism’s tolerance to the other sects and religions” the Shi’ite minority in Oman “are well integrated to the Omani society,” blocking religious rivalry from establishing ground in Oman (Akseki 2010:104; Jones 2014:2; Bahgat 1999: 446). Therefore, fear of Shi’ism is not a factor shaping Omani foreign policy toward Iran, unlike with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Gause,1993:167). One interviewee states that a very high ranked Omani diplomat in China told him “Oman as an Ibadi state, not Sunni or a Shi’ite state, has freed Oman from picking a side,” and looking only to achieve its interest beyond Sunni-Shi’ite conflict in the Gulf region.¹⁰⁴

Overall, Saudi Arabia’s “deep fear and suspicion of the expanding Iranian influence...has [forced it] to look at all regional security issues through the prism of their fears about growing Iranian influence.” (Al Tamimi, 2012:12) Therefore, they look at any Iranian activity in the region or in any surrounding countries namely Iraq, in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain, Yemen, or any Islamic country in Africa, and

¹⁰⁴Interview, May 20th, 2016.

Ibadism is not Sunni or Shi’ite. However, some scholars argue that there is similarity between Ibadi and Shi’ite ideologies that present a key reason behind the strong ties between Oman and Iran; moreover, they claim that Ibadi is Shi’ite sectarian (Al Nafisi, November 29th, 2013).

Southeast Asia as dangerous and provocative activities.” (Al Tamimi, 2012:12). Saudi Arabia and Kuwait see Iran as threat.¹⁰⁵

However, “Oman... has never made reference to Iran as a strategic threat,” and has refused to see Iran as threat to Gulf region’s stability, or to Oman’s internal and external survival and stability (Al Khalili, 2009:98). This view was echoed in many Omani high officials’ announcements. These announcements reveal clearly that Oman is convinced that Iran is not a source of internal or regional threat; it will not attack militarily any Arab Gulf states; it will not threaten them or destabilize their internal peace; and will not shake their internal stability by any means, especially via supporting Shiite minorities and opponents. For Oman, talk about the probability of offensive and aggressive Iran is merely “political propaganda.” (The Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi quoted in Gause, 1993:168) Also, Sultan Qaboos once stated that “Iran is the largest country in the Gulf, with 65 million people. You cannot isolate it.” (Al Khalili, 2009:103) This was the Sultan’s response to a question on the American dual containment policy against Iran (Al Khalili, 2009:104). Additionally, Oman believes that “a prosperous and stable Iran” improves the region’s security and stability, contrary to Saudi Arabia which worked as previously mentioned to weaken the Iranian economy to thwart its military advancement (Al Khalili, 2009:104).

Why is Oman Different?

The Omani view of Iran and its regional importance can be explained by the following: first, geographically, Oman realizes that it must deal and cooperate with its

¹⁰⁵Interview, August 14th, 2016.

neighbor Iran and this is an unchangeable fact that other Gulf states should accept, and act upon. Second, historically, Oman and Iran have enjoyed strong and positive ties since the 1970s. For example, Oman still remembers the Iranian key supportive role during the Dhofar crisis when Iran supported Oman politically, provided military and air aid, and the Shah of Iran sent thousands of soldiers to fight against the Dhofar rebellion (Al Khalili 2009:77; Al Mani' 2014:159; El Orami 2007:34-36; Jones 2014:4; Bahgat 1999:454; Katzman 2017:10). This Iranian military aid was “instrumental in ending the insurgency in Dhofar.” (Al Khalili, 2009:78)¹⁰⁶

Beside the role of geography and strong historical ties, Oman and Iran enjoy cordial diplomatic ties, and growing and robust economic interests, especially because of sharing sovereignty over the strait of Hormuz (El Orami 2007:34-36; Al Khalili 2009:85; Valdani 2012:7; Zambelis November 18th, 2015:14; Bahgat 1999:453).¹⁰⁷ This strait represents “one of the main and continuous factors in the Iran-Oman relationship. Iran and Oman are respectively located on the north and south coasts of the Strait. This factor requires them to maintain good-neighborly relations regardless of what happens at the regional or international levels. Iran and Oman assume that there is a close connection between the security of the Strait of Hormuz and their own security. This point strengthens their motivation to maintain a close and friendly relationship.” (Valdani, 2012:7)¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the Strait of Hormuz is a connective

¹⁰⁶By contrast, the Arab countries were either neutral or hostile to Oman’s crisis (Al Khalili, 2009: 56).

¹⁰⁷For more detail on the Strait of Hormuz economic value for Oman and Iran, read “The Geopolitics of the Strait of Hormuz and the Iran-Oman Relations,” by Asghar Jafari-Valdani, (2012).

¹⁰⁸In 1974 Iran and Oman concluded agreement on joint responsibility to protect the strait and its trade route, and the two countries share oil fields and gas reserves in the strait (Valdani, 2012:26/32).

element between Iran and Oman, with the need to fulfill crucial economic, strategic, security and military roles through coordination and cooperation (Valdani, 2012:12).

Finally, Oman has been known for its independent foreign policy. It has strongly refused any kind of guardianship from any external or regional state—especially the big brother, Saudi Arabia. As a strong sign of its independency, Oman has “pursued foreign policies outside an Arab or Gulf consensus.” (Katzman, 2013:13) Oman doesn’t suffer from any Saudi influence, and totally rejects the Saudi political pressure, and tends to “refuse to see Saudi Arabia as hegemonic regional power.”¹⁰⁹ Also Oman never “waits the Saudi approval or the green light from Saudi Arabia before taking any action either regionally or globally.”¹¹⁰ There are two reasons preventing Oman from being influenced by Saudi Arabia: first, unlike Kuwait, Oman does not face any security threat from its neighbors that might trigger it to look for Saudi help or support. Accordingly, the Saudis lack the ‘card’ that they can utilize to influence Oman to follow in their steps. Second, Oman perceives itself as an influential country in the region enjoying sustainable and strong ties with regional and external powers such as Iran, the Arab Gulf states and Western powers. These strong ties make Oman the only neutral state in the region that has communication channels with every country. This empowered Oman, increased its influence in the Gulf, and made it very apprehensive of losing this privilege by following the Saudi steps.

¹⁰⁹Interview, March 13th, 2016.

¹¹⁰Interview, May 3rd, 2016.

Therefore, Oman frequently opposes any plan by Saudi Arabia, such as its plan for a political union and it occasionally declares its doubts about any proposal that calls for deeper integration among Arab Gulf states (Katzman 2013:13/17; Katzman 2017:10). Oman also does not share the Saudi's view on the future of the Arab Gulf region's security.¹¹¹ It totally rejects any effort to form the Gulf Cooperation Council as "an anti-Iranian front." (Al Khalili, 2009:91) Since the establishment of the GCC in 1981, Oman asked the other Arab Gulf states to integrate Iran in any security plan to secure the region and looked at Iran's participation in the region's security order as a constructive and critical element in securing the region, contrary to the stance of Saudi Arabia (Al Khalili, 2009:91/98/103/109). Also, "Oman has refrained from adopting hawkish and extremist positions," regarding Iran and its occupation of the three Emirati islands (Valdani, 2012:23). Oman preferred to engage not only economically and politically with Iran, but also, militarily by "hosting Iranian naval vessels and holding joint military exercises." (Zambelis, November 18th, 2015:14)

Moreover, Oman looks to its interests with Iran far away from the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and is willing to achieve these interests alone, and "no one should blame Oman, [simply] its interests are with Iran not the Arab Gulf states."¹¹² So, with or without the Arab Gulf states, Oman will achieve its interests, "one senior Omani official said to me: If we cannot protect Oman and its interests through working with other Arab Gulf states, Oman [gladly] will work alone."¹¹³ From the above, of the six Arab Gulf states,

¹¹¹Interview, May 29th, 2016; Interview, May 3rd, 2016.

¹¹²Interview, January 31st, 2016.

¹¹³Interview, May 11th, 2016.

“Oman is perceived as politically closest to and the least critical of Iran.” (Katzman, 2013:13) For the foreseeable future, Oman will remain Oman, and it is not going to change its regional policies.

Arab Gulf States and Syria’s Crisis

Understanding the Arab Gulf states’ views of the Syrian crisis, and the undesirable influences of the rule and role of Assad’s regime, cannot be separated from the influence of strong Syrian-Iranian ties. The Syrian-Iranian ties have negatively impacted Arab Gulf states’ perceptions of Syria, especially its potential role in destabilizing and risking their survival and stability. Since 2011, Arab Gulf states perceive Syria under the rule of Assad’s regime as an extended source of the Iranian security threats, and as a supportive element of Iran’s ambitions of supremacy in the Gulf region.

For these states, especially Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria represent two faces of a coin because of their historical and stable ties. Since 1980s, Syria has been “Iran’s longest-standing’, ‘staunchest,’ and its ‘controversial ally’ in the Arab world (Ansari and Tabrizi 2016:4; Gupta 2014:264; Stephens 2016:42).

There are three explanations for the robust ties between Syria and Iran. Historically, Syria has picked Iran’s side and stood by it during the Iranian–Iraqi War (1980–88), while the Arab Gulf states, except Oman, stood by Iraq; ideologically, Syria’s Shia Alawite leadership sought to reinforce the strategic relationship with the Shia leadership in Tehran with showing great ideological sympathy—while the Arab Gulf states are Sunni states that see Shia as source of threat, again except for Oman which

is an Ibadhi state; geo-strategically, Syria is Iran's vital land bridge to the Shia militia in the Arab World, the Lebanese Hezbollah, which Iran established with strong ideological and military connections (Ansari and Tabrizi 2016:4; Alam 2016:16; Ren 2014:260).¹¹⁴ In recent years, Hezbollah's leaders have spoken openly about their growing connections with Iran, Iran's role in funding their militia and supplying them with weapons through Syria. A broadcast speech by the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, confirmed the above by stating that "Hezbollah's budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran." (Rafizadeh, June 25th, 2016) In return, Hezbollah becomes Iran's instrument for spreading its regional influence and supremacy, especially in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and it becomes Iran's military arms in the region (Hubbard, August 27th, 2017).

Before the Arab Spring in 2011, "there was already little love for the Assad regime in Gulf capitals... The list of Gulf state grievances stems from a host of issues, from its Ba'athist, Alawite, pseudo-secular, pseudo-republican character and socialist economy, to a history of alignment with the Soviet Union, an alliance with Iran, support for terrorist groups and Palestinian factions, and meddling in Lebanon. Still, the longevity of the regime, its canny ability to play a regional role despite weak attributes of power and its surprising resilience to outside pressure mollified Gulf attitudes toward

¹¹⁴"Since the 1980s, Syria's relationship with Iran has been rooted in strategic geopolitics rather than ideological interests, and Damascus believes that Tehran is committed to Assad and the security infrastructure which it views as vital to its strategic interests in Syria. Iran's goal remains to ensure its influence over Lebanon and Iraq indefinitely, and it regards Syria as the vital bridge to both." (Alam, 2016:16)

Damascus.” (Hokayem, 2011:1) Moreover, the leaders of Arab Gulf states have not established strong and friendly relationships with Bashar Al Assad—or his father before him Hafez Al Assad—as some did with the overthrown Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak; Assad “counts no friend among Gulf leaders.” (Hokayem, 2011:3) After the events of the Arab Spring in Syria, with escalation of violence, and Iran’s obvious military involvement to reinforce Assad’s power, the Syrian Spring has mutated from civil uprising to brutal sectarian war among Sunni-Shia Syrian people with Saudi Arabia and Iran as financial and logistical sponsors.¹¹⁵

The growing violence and sectarian war were turning points for Arab Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which have taken a hawkish position towards Assad’s regime. Both states cut their diplomatic ties with Syria and withdrew their ambassadors from Damascus in August 2011, however, Oman is the only state among the Arab Gulf states that still has formal diplomatic ties with Damascus (Cafiero and Yefet 2016; Hokayem 2011:4; Aboud August 12th, 2015; Yang August 13th, 2017; Stephens 2016:42). Moreover, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia called on Assad to step down and leave the country to be ruled by whomever the Syrian people chooses. In addition, both states called on the international community, especially the United Nations and Security Council, to intervene and halt the blood bath in Syrian cities (Arab Times, December 16th, 2016).

¹¹⁵Iran supports Assad financially, logistically, and military and sends troops to fight besides Assad’s troops (Ansari, Tabrizi, 2016: 5). And “until April 2016, the total number of [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] (IRGC), and Iranian paramilitary personnel operating in Syria was estimated at between 6,500 and 9,200.” (Ansari, Tabrizi, 2016: 6)

Also, Kuwait's government offered humanitarian and financial aid to Syrian people. It "hosted three international conventions, pledging financial and relief support for the Syrian people. Kuwait alone contributed \$1.6 billion." (Arab Times, December 16th, 2016) Saudi Arabia "sought to build a credible, alternative opposition coalition that would replace the regime and usher in a new system of government that removes any vestiges of Assad's family from power and rolls back Iran's presence in the country," by supporting the rebels financially, and logistically to influence the military war in Saudi Arabia's and Sunni rebels favor (Stephens 2016:40; Young 2013:21). Moreover, there were many firm Saudi official announcements assuring that Saudi Arabia "will never abandon its religious and moral obligations [and duties] towards what's happening (in Syria)." (Young, 2013:20/21) And many "Saudi clerics have openly called for jihad in Syria," against the Assad regime and its supporters (Young, 2013:21). Kuwait followed the Saudi steps, becoming another 'leading source' and a 'central fund-raising hub' for financial and logistical support and fund for insurgents in Syria through charities by private donors, individual, and businessmen (Russell n.d.; DeYoung April 25th, 2014; Dickinson February 5th, 2013).¹¹⁶ Some argue that "Kuwait has played a no-less pivotal role in [the Syrian] uprising than its neighbors, Qatar and Saudi Arabia." (Dickinson, February 5th, 2013)

¹¹⁶Saudi Arabia has monitored all charitable activities aimed to fund Syrian rebels, and "made clear that anyone who tries to bypass this official process would face trouble." (Dickinson, February 5th, 2013) Both countries totally deny that they provided any money, weapons, or logistical aid to Syrian insurgents (Russell, n.d.).

It is highly important to realize that Saudi Arabia's and Kuwait's efforts are directed not only at ending the war and taking down Assad, they are also directed at "rolling back Iranian influence," from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and over their Shi'ite populations, and preventing extremists sympathizers from spreading and attacking them; the latter represents a big fear for both, especially Saudi Arabia (Stephens 2016:41; Ahmad 2014:36).

After seven years of this civil, sectarian, and regional war, Assad is still in power, and his grip has tightened with regional support from Iran, and international support from Russia and China. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait still strongly hold on to their position, calling for the removal of Assad.

As for Oman, it did not pick sides, and sought to isolate itself and its interests from Syria's crisis and its political and military consequences. From the beginning, Oman understood that the Syrian war is not merely an internal war between Assad and his opponents, but a regional and sectarian war between Sunni Arab Gulf states, and Oman's neighbor and Shi'ite friend Iran. As expected from Oman, it sought to "convene talks involving all the major actors affected by the Syrian conflict. Oman has been trying to organise direct meetings between Riyadh and Tehran, the two key regional backers of the opposition and the government of Syria respectively." (Aboud, August 12th, 2015) Oman is the only Arab Gulf state that has exchanged high-level political visits with the Syrian regime in order to discuss the situation and find a peaceful solution that satisfies all parties—in 2015, the Omani minister of Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi, visited Syria and met Syria's President Assad, after a few

months of a visit by the Syrian Foreign minister Walid Al Moualem to Oman where he met his counterpart (Reuters October 26th, 2015; Reuters August 6th, 2015). Additionally, Oman limited its aid for Syria and its people to cover humanitarian assistance only, not financial or military assistance for fighters or rebel groups (Cafiero, August 17th, 2015).

From all the above, it is clear that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman do not share similar views on the source of threats facing their region, especially regarding Iran and Syria. They applied different policies to deal with Iran and Syria. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait shared the view that Iran and its ally Syria are vital sources of threat to their internal and external stability and survival—the Kuwaiti view was influenced largely by the Saudi view. Therefore, they stood against Iran and Syria, utilizing their connections with regional and international communities to pressure Iran and Assad, weakening their alliance, using harsh political language regarding Iran's nuclear program and Assad's role in the Syrian sectarian war, rejecting Iran's military involvement in Syria and Assad's acceptance of this involvement, refusing Iran's interference in their internal affairs and the affairs of other countries such as Iraq and Lebanon, and aiding Syrian civilians and supporting Syrian rebels financially and logistically but secretly and informally through governmental and individual channels. On the other hand, Oman sees Iran as a geographical neighbor, historical friend, and important partner to ensure the region's security, thus, it refuses the Saudi and Kuwaiti policies towards Iran and rejects their direct and indirect involvement in the Syrian crisis.

All these differences among the Arab Gulf states are crucial elements in explaining the expectations, perceptions, and strategies of the three cases regarding any external and rising power in their region. These differences are essential in explaining their perceptions of China and its role in the region's security issues, and the impact of these perceptions on their strategic responses toward China.

It is worth mentioning that Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman, all share one specific approach to securing themselves and the region, which is allying themselves with strong external power (Gupta, 2014:261). All these states recognize that they need an external backer to secure their rule in the region and protect their internal and external political authority. For a long period this external power has been the United States. More details on U.S. role as the protector are provided in the next section.

On this particular issue, Iran and Oman disagree. While "in Oman's view, reliance on Western powers, and especially the United States, is the only possible way to maintain its national security position...Iran strongly opposes." (Valdani, 2012:27) Iran seeks "to remove [any external power especially] US forces from the Gulf and protect the region with its own forces, which would allow Iranian dominance." (Kostiner, 2010:9) Moreover, Iran perceives that "U.S. military forces are not only an obstacle to the maintenance of peace and security in the region, but also one of the elements of insecurity in the... Gulf." (Valdani, 2012:29) In order to overcome this disagreement, Oman applied a pragmatic policy based on understanding Iran's motivations. Therefore, to not negatively affect their ties with Iran, Oman has justified Iran's need to arm itself against the strong presence of U.S. forces in the Gulf and called

for not escalating the issue of Iranian military advancement because it was purely internal Iranian matter justified by the Iran's fears that U.S. forces are directed against it (Al Khalili, 2009:104).

This chapter reveals that since 2001, Arab Gulf states, mainly Saudi Arabia, have considered and viewed China as a potential security alternative. This strategic view of China was a direct reaction to the U.S. security changes and its reform demands after the events of 9/11. Nevertheless, China failed to fulfill the needs and expectations of these states. China's stances regarding the region's security issues and its ties with Iran and Syria led Arab Gulf states to perceive China as a source of 'threat' to their external stability instead of being a source of security support to them or their region. Chapter 4 explains in detail when, why, and how the Arab Gulf states changed their strategic view of China.

Chapter Four: Security Dimensions of Arab Gulf States' Responses to China's Rise (2001-2016)

This chapter investigates additional U.S. security policy changes regarding the Arab Gulf region and their impacts on Arab Gulf states' security ties with U.S. on one hand, and their view on China as potential alternative on the other. Then, it discusses factors that lowered Arab Gulf states' expectations of China as a reliable alternative and a source of security support. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one analyzes four U.S. security policy changes regarding the Arab Gulf region, after the events of 2001, that have impacted negatively US-Arab Gulf security ties, namely the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, U.S. military reductions in the Middle East—as a result of 'pivoting to Asia'—, U.S. stances regarding the Arab Spring in 2011, and US-Nuclear Deal with Iran in 2015.

Section two shows the golden era of Sino-Arab Gulf political ties from 2001-2011. Then it shows the deterioration of these ties since 2011. Moreover, it shows that Arab Gulf states' expectations regarding China's potential role as their next security partner were built on sand. There are two reasons that lie behind China's failure in being the next security alternative. The first set of reasons: China's negative behavior regarding the region's security issues, including the following:

- China's strong security, military, and political ties with Iran and its continued support of Iran's nuclear program.
- China's strong support of Assad's regime since 2011, causing Arab Gulf states to realize that China will not abandon Iran and its ally Syria to protect them.

- Finally, China's growing influence over Pakistan since 2015.

The second set of reasons is related to China itself:

- China's fears and its security concerns regarding any deep security tie with the Arab Gulf states. From the Chinese perspective, Arab Gulf states pose threats to China. These states are a potential source of radical Sunni Islam threats that impact negatively China's internal stability.
- Second, China's still-low military capacity and its impact on limiting security ties with Arab Gulf states. China lacks the military ability to be the region's security partner. Its military capacity is inferior to that of these states' traditional ally. Here the influence of the long-standing security alliance with the U.S. in limiting the Sino-Arab Gulf security ties will be raised and discussed.

The argument concludes by explaining that not only does China fear these states and has no ability to protect them, it also lacks the desire to protect these states or be involved in their security issues. China's eyes remain on Iran as its promising political and security ally in the region, not on Arab Gulf states.

This chapter concludes all the above have limited the scope of Sino-Arab Gulf security and political ties and made each party perceive the other with deep suspicion, fears, concerns, and uncertain intentions. Ultimately, Arab Gulf states hedge against China too. Also, it concludes that Arab Gulf states discovered that they should focus only on what China can and will offer which is economic cooperation, especially in the

energy sector—which both sides need to survive internally. This conclusion paves the way for Chapter 5, which investigates and analyzes Sino-Arab Gulf states ties from the economic perspective.

U.S. and the Continuity of its Stumbling Security Policies Regarding the Arab Gulf Region

After the 9/11 events, there have been four security shocks that have damaged the U.S. security ties with the Arab Gulf states, especially its ties with Saudi Arabia. The following section discusses each of these shocks and its impacts on US-Arab Gulf political and security ties.

U.S. Invasion of Iraq in 2003

The deterioration of US-Arab Gulf security ties widened after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which created more security dilemmas and threats to the Arab Gulf states, especially for Saudi Arabia and its leading position in the region (Kostiner, 2010:1).

The invasion of Kuwait brought down Saddam Hussain's regime which had been antagonistic to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, yet, in the Saudi eyes it was also a strong and valuable counterweight to Iran (Westphal et al. 2014:29; Mausner and Cordesman 2011:8). By taking down Saddam the U.S. freed Iran from this rivalry and empowered its regional hegemony and influence through the new established political Shi'ite regime and Nuri Al Maliki-led government in Iraq (Olimat 2010:324; Russell 2005: 66/72; Minghao February 3rd, 2016). The former Saudi King Abdullah “view[ed] Maliki as an Iranian agent and has...refused to receive him. The king has also dragged his heels on reopening the Saudi embassy in Baghdad, despite repeated entreaties from Washington.” (Ottaway, 2009:124)

Undoubtedly, the Saudis believed that the U.S. invasion of Iraq weakened the Arab side in general, particularly their side, and strengthened Iran's side; in their view, Iran was the only beneficiary from this invasion, as it strengthened and empowered its presence in Iraq (Ottaway 2009:123; Olimat 2010:325). Also, Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states saw that the U.S. invasion inflamed the sectarian war between Sunnis and Shi'ites in Iraq, increased the possibility of the spread of this sectarian war to their countries, and provided Iran with potential opportunities to support its Shia sympathizers in their countries and in Iraq (Kostiner 2010:1; Olimat 2010:325). Saud Al Faisal, the Saudi former Foreign minister, summarized the situation by stating that the U.S. "had handed Iraq to Iran on a golden platter." (quoted in Ottaway, 2009:123) Therefore, Saudi Arabia strongly criticized the U.S. invasion of Iraq and held the U.S. responsible for the chaotic situation in Iraq and the region (Kostiner 2010:34; Westphal et al. 2014:29).

The ties between U.S. and Arab Gulf states, especially with Saudi Arabia further worsened when the U.S. announced its military forces' withdrawal from Iraq in 2006—which was completed in 2011.¹¹⁷ Saudi Arabia was highly concerned by this announcement, as it saw this American decision "as a terrible error," and an obvious sign of "abandoning the arena to Iran." (Al Tamimi, 2012:12) Moreover, "the Saudis told US Vice President Richard Cheney... that they could not accept a situation

¹¹⁷For more details on U.S. withdrawal policy and its implications for the region and the U.S. ties with Arab Gulf states, read: "Iraq and US Strategy in the Gulf: Shaping US Plans After Withdrawal," by Adam Mausner and Anthony Cordesman, (October 24th, 2011), and "The GCC States and the Security Challenges of the Twenty-First Century," by Joseph Kostiner, (2010).

whereby American forces would leave Iraq while Nuri al-Maliki's government remained in power. [And they] threatened to assist radical religious groups in Iraq... if such a situation were to arise, as a means to strengthen the Sunni parties there.” (Kostiner, 2010:25)

U.S. Military Reductions in the Middle East, and Pivot to Asia

The security alliance between U.S. and the Arab Gulf states was further complicated when the U.S. announced—Obama administration—its new policy ‘pivot to Asia’, declaring a shift in America’s strategic agenda from focusing on the Middle East and the Gulf to focus on the U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region.¹¹⁸ The Arab Gulf states were concerned that “the medium and long-term implications of the pivot [policy] would include a major redeployment of US military assets to the Asia-Pacific theatre: by 2020, 60% of all US naval assets would be stationed in the region.” (Al Sudairi, 2014:79) The Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia saw these U.S. strategic policy changes and military redeployments as another signal of U.S. abandonment of their region. Arab Gulf states realized that the United States was over committed with securing its interests in Asia and its Asian allies’ interests, and with

¹¹⁸Pivot to Asia policy was declared by the Obama administration in 2011, aiming to relocate US diplomatic, economic, political, and security resources to Asia-Pacific region, to play a larger active role in protecting US interests, US allies’ interests, and the region’s security and stability. Also, this policy aims to strengthen the political, economic, and military ties between US and its allies in the region to encircle China, contain its growing economic and military power in the region, and limit its rise. For more details on this policy, its motivations, and its implications read: “Assessing the US “Pivot” to Asia,” by David Shambaugh, (2013); “Pivot but Hedge: A Strategy for Pivoting to Asia While Hedging in the Middle East,” by David W. Barno, Nora Bensahel and Travis Sharp, (2012); “The Problem With the Pivot: Obama's New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive,” by Robert S. Ross, (2012); and “China Middle East Relations in Light of Obama’s Pivot to the Pacific,” by Robert R. Bianchi, (2013).

putting Asia and its rivalry with rising China first; these changes made the U.S. no longer able to satisfy the region's security needs (Sager, 2015:113-116).

U.S. and the Arab Spring Waves

The U.S. responses to the Arab Spring since 2011 have irritated its ties with Arab Gulf states. In Arab Gulf states' view, the U.S. had an 'ill-considered response to Arab Spring.' It supported the downfall of their traditional allies such as Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt—Saudi Arabia's long-standing ally—and approved the political uprising in Bahrain. As a result Saudi Arabia was tremendously angered, and its trust in the U.S. as its traditional ally was undermined, making the gap between the U.S. and its Arab Gulf allies widen (Friedman 2012:84; Al Tamimi 2013:37-38; Al Tamimi 2012:12; Gupta 2014:262; Zhen 2014:227; Andersen and Jiang 2014:19; Westphal et al. 2014:29; Al Sudairi 2014: 84). In the view of Arab Gulf leaders, not only did the U.S. take a negative stance towards their security concerns regarding the Arab Spring, it went further when it called for political reforms in the Arab World, especially in one of the Arab Gulf states, Bahrain (Al Tamimi, 2012:12). They perceived that the U.S. "has been putting issues of political change and reform, with uncertain outcomes, ahead of security and stability of [Arab Gulf states]." (Gupta, 2014:262) The Arab Gulf leaders rejected these American political reform demands and saw them as interfering in their internal affairs.

Moreover, these states were furious because of the U.S. silence regarding the Syrian crisis, the sectarian war there, and the chemical attacks by the Syrian regime against civilians in 2013 (Karasik 2016:6; Westphal et al. 2014:29; Chaziza 2014: 253).

Although President Barack Obama declared that the United States would act militarily if Assad deployed chemical weapons against the Syrian insurgents and civilians, he changed his mind and did not strike against Assad (Chaziza 2014:253; Westphal et al. 2014:29; Olimat 2016:65). For Arab Gulf leaders, the American uncertainty about its objectives regarding Syria, its muddling approach and hesitancy meant “that Syria and Iran would now cease to take American threats seriously,” resulting in empowering both Iran and Syria (Westphal et al. 2014:29; Gupta 2014:262).

U.S. Nuclear Deal with Iran: A Security Trade at the Expense of the Arab Gulf States

The US-Iranian interim agreement in 2013, which paved the way to finalize the historic nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, additionally troubled the Arab Gulf, and again Saudi Arabia most among these states (Karasik 2016:6; Al Sudairi 2014:84; Andersen and Jiang 2014:19).¹¹⁹ These deals relieved Iran from economic sanctions by the U.S., United Nations, and Europe, allowing Iran to gain “access to more than \$100bn in assets frozen overseas, and...resume[s] selling oil on international markets and use[s] the global financial system for trade,” in exchange for limiting Iranian nuclear energy activities and monitoring its nuclear program by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (BBC, October 13th, 2017).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹The U.S. is a member in P5+1 talks with Iran that led to 2015 deal, P5+1 includes US, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China—the Security Council members, plus Germany. P5+1 is also the E3+3, refers to the three European countries United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

¹²⁰Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, US has imposed economic sanctions and embargo on Iran, including banning business as services and goods trade, bank activities and assets, and involvement in oil and energy development; since 2006, the United Nations has also imposed economic sanctions on Iran, targeting material related to Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs; the European Union also imposed economic sanctions on Iran related to Iran’s energy sector, petrochemical sector, nuclear sector, and bank and financial sectors (Levs, CNN, January 23rd, 2012).

The leaders of the Arab Gulf states perceived these deals as a shift in the American policy toward Iran. Rather than containing Iran and eliminating the Iranian security threats, U.S. had opened up to Iran, provided it with unprecedented opportunities to strengthen its economy and its military capabilities, and extend its influence in the region (Sager 2015:113-116; Westphal et al. 2014:29).

Saudi Arabia was the most disappointed state in the region. It refused to welcome the deal, and its official response was very reserved (Westphal et al., 2014:29). Saudi Arabia had always “wanted a much more tough American policy towards Iran, even if it would involve a military campaign.” (Andersen and Jiang, 2014:19) The former Saudi King, Abdullah, had “insisted that the United States [should] attack Iran and ‘cut off the head of the snake’... [and] internally, the Kingdom even threatened to turn its back on the United States, while the official government press railed against the deal.” (Westphal et al., 2014:29) The US-Iranian deal gave the Saudis another sign of U.S. declining interests and presence in the region, showed them the U.S. inability and weakness to force Iran to end its program, and the U.S. acceptance of the Iranian attempts for supremacy in the region (Karasik 2016:1; Al Tamimi 2012:12; Friedman 2012:82).

Arab Gulf States’ Reactions toward U.S. Stumbling Security Policies

Saudi Arabia was the most frustrated and anxious state regarding any U.S. security policy change in the Arab Gulf region. However, as explained before, not all the Arab Gulf states shared similar security concerns or stood at a similar footing. Consequently,

Kuwait's and Oman's responses towards the U.S. security policy changes, and their ties with the U.S., were not as impacted as in the case of Saudi Arabia.

As for Kuwait, since 1990, the U.S. has been this country's strongest ally, and its trusted protector. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait gave Kuwait an unforgettable lesson that only a strong and super external power can protect it from its ambitious neighbors, especially Iraq. Therefore, after Kuwait's liberation in 1991, precisely in October 1992, Kuwait signed a military pact with the United States; this treaty became Kuwait's guarantee for current and future security survival and stability (Kostiner, 2010:7).¹²¹

Although Kuwait showed its disapproval of U.S. security changes regarding the region, which surely raised some Kuwaiti concerns about its protector's intentions of continuing to protect the country, some argue that the Kuwait-US ties were not impacted as much as Saudi-US ties after the 11/9, Arab Spring, and the US-Iranian nuclear deal.¹²² Contrary to Saudi Arabia which showed and announced its anger and criticism of Washington and its security policy changes, Kuwait preferred a quieter policy, and rather than confrontation; it sought to cooperate with U.S. in the region's security issues, especially regarding Iran and Iraq (Kostiner, 2010:27).¹²³ Kuwait still fears its neighbors, Iraq and Iran, senses their danger, knows exactly that only the U.S.

¹²¹Kuwait signed other military pacts with the other Security Council members, to increase its security assurance (Kostiner, 2010:7).

¹²²Interview, January 31st, 2016.

¹²³As an example of Saudi confrontation with the U.S., after lobbying for a year, Saudi Arabia strikingly "reject[ed] its election to a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council in October 2013." (Young, 2013:24) Riyadh's rationale was "the lack of Security Council coordination in Syria," in the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, and in the Iranian nuclear program (Young 2013:24; Andersen, Jiang 2014:20). Moreover, Saudi Arabia accused the Security Council of being manipulated by its members and being a "puppet council that serves the interests of the USA." (Andersen, Jiang, 2014:20)

can guarantee its survival, and provide it with the necessary military training, and weapons (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 173). Therefore, Kuwait strongly supports the U.S. military presence on its soil, and keeps showing its satisfaction with the defense cooperation agreement with the U.S (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 176).

Finally, it is important to realize that Kuwait understands that it is a small state that lacks the Saudi financial and military capacity, and the Saudi ability to influence other states or the region's security events. Thus, it cannot show its anger or frustration with the U.S. or warn the Americans of the consequences of their new security policies as Saudi Arabia did.¹²⁴ Some go further by stating that even when Kuwait showed its disapproval of U.S. security policy changes, this was because of the Saudi influence over Kuwait; the Saudi pressure on Kuwait is persisting and influencing Kuwaiti ties with foreign powers, regional powers, and its responses towards the region's security issues and crises (Al Alkim 1994:87/89; Olimat 2016:106).¹²⁵ This is in line with this dissertation's earlier explanation of Kuwait's ties with Iran and the Saudi influence over Kuwait.

The US-Omani ties have not been as affected as US-Saudi and US-Kuwaiti ties by the changes of U.S. security policy regarding the region. Oman is still "undoubtedly

¹²⁴Saudi Arabia's capabilities and political weight enable it to hold on political positions, take decision and withstand the consequences of these decisions, contrary to the smaller Arab Gulf states (Interview, May 22nd, 2016). Therefore, the interviewee argues that Saudi Arabia should be very cautious before taking any decision and dragging the smaller Arab Gulf states into a situation where they cannot bear the consequences.

¹²⁵Interview, August 15th, 2016; Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, May 20th, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016; Interview, March 1st, 2016; Interview, January 31st, 2016; Interview, May 3rd, 2016.

the most important ally of U.S” in the region (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 173-174). There are four reasons that protect US-Omani ties and ensure their solidity.

First, Oman was the first Arab Gulf state engaging in a formal military base agreement with U.S. in 1979-1980; since then, Oman has enjoyed close and strong military ties and cooperation with the U.S.—the American military bases in Oman have benefited both parties as it was explained previously (Cafiero and Karasik, 2016: 12).

Second, Oman was the first Arab Gulf state to establish diplomatic contacts with Israel in 1994 and 1995; in 1995 Oman and Israel established trade relations and in 1996, Israel set up a trade representation in Oman (Valdani 2012; Akseki 2010: 2/76).¹²⁶ Both states developed economic ties and sought closer ties, moreover, they exchanged high political and official visits (Valdani 2012; Akseki 2010: 2/76). These economic and political contacts make Oman the only Arab Gulf state that has steady bilateral relations with Israel, causing “Oman's importance to be doubled for U.S.” (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 173-174) The United States enjoys very close, and strategic ties with Israel, and sees itself as Israel’s ally, thus, steady Omani-Israeli ties are valuable and supportive elements between Oman and the United States.

Third, Oman is the only country among the Arab Gulf states that has not been part of inflaming security challenges such as funding radical Islamic ideology that pose security threats to the U.S. and its troops in the region. Also, Oman has not used accusing language against the U.S. for being a destabilizing and troubling factor in its

¹²⁶Oman supported the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks and agreement in 1979, and contrary to the other Arab Gulf states, Oman did not join the “rejectionist camp against Egypt.” (Akseki 2010:1; Jones 2014:4)

security policies regarding the region (Darvishi and Jalilvand, 2010: 173-174). Oman itself is one of the most secure countries in the region, one that has been “spared the kind of unrest and instability—including sectarian violence and radical Islamist terrorism—witnessed elsewhere in the Arab world, a consequence, according to many observers, of the widespread legitimacy enjoyed by the Sultan and the characteristically tolerant brand of Ibadi Islam practiced by most Omanis. Indeed, the climate of volatility and turmoil that has come to typify the wider Middle East in recent years [increased] Oman’s value to [the United States and other foreign powers such as] China.” (Zambelis, November 18th, 2015:14) More details on China and Oman are provided in the next chapter.

Finally, as it has been explained before, “Oman has long charted an independent foreign policy trajectory,” one that prevented Saudi Arabia from influencing Oman or playing the big brother role, especially regarding the region’s security policies and issues (Zambelis, November 18th, 2015:14). Both countries have frequently disagreed on the region’s sources of threats, and the proper approaches to protect it and sustain its stability. Consequently, Oman has always rejected the Saudi influence, and refused to toe its line.¹²⁷ As a result, Saudi Arabia has lacked the ability to influence Oman to take similar strategic steps in facing the American security policy changes and shifts. As an obvious example, Saudi Arabia will never forget or forgive the Omani role in the US-Iranian talks that led to their deal in 2015; rather than standing by Saudi Arabia, Oman preferred to focus on its own interests, facilitating contacts between Iran and the

¹²⁷Interview, March 13th, 2016.

United States, and playing an active key role as a mediator in the US-Iran rapprochement (Al Rasheed 2015:38; Zambelis November 18th, 2015:14).¹²⁸

It can be stated that the U.S. security policy changes toward the Gulf region are responsible for Arab Gulf states' search for a new security partner and alternative. Arab Gulf leaders saw China as their promising alternative, but, they discovered it was not. The following section discusses a set of factors that limit China's ability to be the region's next alternative, including China's fears of being tangled in the region's security issues, U.S. influence on Sino-Arab Gulf security and political ties, China's ties with Iran and Syria, and China's influence over Pakistan.

China's Side: The Fear of Radical Sunni Islam

Since 9/11 attacks, China has been exposed to radical Islam and its threats to its domestic stability and its economic interests in the Gulf region (Zenn January 26th, 2016:13). Like the U.S. and many Western countries, China worries of terrorist attacks and Jihadi calls by radical Islamist Sunni groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) to spread Islam and support Muslims around the world, especially Muslim minorities; in this regard, the Chinese Muslim minority is not an exception (Scobell 2018:9; Douglas et al. 2006:26). China has many reasons to make the threat of radical Islam one of its security priorities. For example, China has a huge Muslim population that radical Islam can find a place and supporters among them. Muslims in China are estimated to number 23.3 million in 2010 and predicted to become 30 million in 2030

¹²⁸Some argue that Oman had no choice but to interfere in Iran's favor, "Oman got an order from Iran to get involved as a mediator in the Iranian nuclear program talks and open a dialogue window with the Americans," in order to protect and secure its interests with Teheran (Interview, January 31st, 2016).

(Gonul and Rogenhofer, 2017:5-6). Since the end of the 1980s, China has faced liberalization demands in its northwest parts, namely Xinjiang province, where Chinese Turkic Muslim ‘Uyghur’ and other Muslim Sunni groups live and seek to separate from China (Noi 2012:58; Clarke 2015:128). Since the 1990s, separate demands and political uprisings in Xinjiang increased and the Chinese government has frequently accused radical Islam and Islamic groups such as Al-Qaeda and IS of provoking these riots and establishing networks and links with jihadist movements in Xinjiang (Brown December 2014:2; Douglas et al. 2006:19). In addition to links with IS and Al-Qaeda, some Uyghur captives who participated in riots in Xinjiang claimed that they had financial support for the training from Arab and Muslim sources, which made China’s fears even stronger (Shichor, 2005:134).¹²⁹

China’s response to these riots was a mix of aggressive and repressive policies as daily surveillance, “cultural assimilation, economic exploitation, ecological destruction, racial discrimination [which] gradually turned [Xinjiang] into a time bomb.” (Douglas et al., 2006:19)¹³⁰ The 9/11 events and the rise of radical Islam globally led China to cooperate with the U.S. in its war on terror campaign. For example, China abstained in the vote on the UN resolution permitting the use of force in Iraq in 2003 in order to gain U.S. designation of the East Turkistan Islamic

¹²⁹Some claim that even before these demands and riots appeared in Xinjiang the Chinese government viewed Islam, especially Sunni Islam as a threat to China’s stability, thus, as previously mentioned, it faced Islam by adopting harsh polices towards the Muslims since the Cultural revolution (Interview, February 22nd, 2016).

¹³⁰Also, China has sent thousands of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadres to different provinces to educate the people on Islamism threat to China’s internal unity and external stability (Clarke, 2015:141).

Movement (ETIM) in Xinjiang as a terrorist movement and the Uyghur opposition as terrorists rather than separatists; U.S. approval facilitated the way for China to increase its aggressive campaign against Muslims in Xinjiang (Clarke 2015:129-130; Garver 2016: 660; Goldstein 2015: 169-170).¹³¹ After the Arab Spring protest waves in 2011 and the rise of additional radical Islamic groups, and knowing that there were around 100 Chinese citizens, mostly Uyghurs, fighting with IS and other Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq, China's fears increased (Clarke, 2015:140). Recently, IS and Al-Qaeda gave China a great reason to sustain its fear and caution towards the radical Islamist groups. In 2017, there were two videos uploaded on IS's website directed to Uyghurs, calling for jihad against the Chinese government and its anti-Islam policies (Botobekov, March 8th, 2017). All the above made China view the Middle East in general, and the Arab Gulf region specifically, as extensions of radical ethno-religious groups that threaten China's internal stability, influence its Muslim minorities, destabilize its economic interests and threaten its citizens in the Islamic and Arab World in general and the Gulf region in particular (Scobell, 2018:10-11).

Although China fears Islam in general, there is a specific sect of Islam that makes China most worried. It is the Sunni Salafi and Wahhabi, which is the Saudi interpretation of Islam. China is extremely cautious of the Saudi Sunni Salafism and

¹³¹Silence in Muslim countries, mainly Saudi Arabia and Iran, response toward the Chinese violent policies toward Uyghur (Douglas et al. 2006:19; Clarke 2015:138; Olimat 2013:191; Sike 2015:8). Since the establishment of diplomatic ties with China in 1990, Saudi Arabia choose to turn a blind eye to these aggressive actions, and recently it prevented its citizen—especially of Chinese background—from expressing anger or providing support to Xinjiang's Muslims (Olimat, 2013:191). Iran was even more cautious, asserting that the Iranian regime is not willing to compromise its strong ties, especially the economic and military ties, with China for fragile and crystal prestige in the Islamic world (Clarke, 2015:139). The other Arab Gulf states as Oman and Kuwait also preferred to look the other way.

Wahhabism effects and impacts on Xinjiang's Muslims. For decades, China has suspected that Saudi Arabia has an intention to spread the Sunni Salafi Wahhabi thoughts in China.¹³² From the Chinese perspective, Saudi Arabia has three primary tools to spread Salafism and Wahhabism in China. First: the practice of Hajj: Saudi Arabia receives many Hajj missions from China. During these missions, the Chinese pilgrims become exposed to Salafism and Wahhabism through interaction with Saudi preachers and clerics, consequently, they carry these thoughts back to China via printed writings and audio or video tapes (Al Sudairi 2016:40; Gonul and Rogenhofer 2017:12).¹³³ In 2011, in order to control the Chinese Hajj missions to Saudi Arabia, the Chinese government prevented Uyghur or other Chinese Muslims from traveling to Mecca, unless they move and travel through the state-controlled Islamic Association of China (IAC) (The Brunei Times, November 4th, 2011).¹³⁴ Second, the support from Saudi charities to Muslims in China through Saudi local charity organizations and international Muslim organizations such as the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Muslim World League (MWL); in addition to individuals, mainly Saudi preachers (Al Sudairi, 2016:42).¹³⁵ Since the 1980s, Saudi Arabia, through different channels, has supported the building of mosques and Islamic institutes, printing the

¹³²Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, February 22nd, 2016.

¹³³Huwaidin (2002), gives different viewpoint, he argues that since the late 1970s, the Chinese government utilized Islam in improving its ties with Saudi Arabia; it used Islam and Hajj delegations as tools of foreign policy to improve the Sino-Saudi ties on one hand, and to show the Chinese respect of Islam, and gain the Saudi trust that Muslims in China are treated well and have the freedom to practice their religion without any constrains, on the other (219-221).

¹³⁴From 1963 to 1976 China prevented Chinese Muslims from practicing Hajj which impacted negatively at that time its ties with Saudi Arabia.

¹³⁵For more details on Saudi Arabia's charity activity, fund and support channel, and influence over Muslims in China read: "Adhering to the Ways of Our Western Brothers Tracing Saudi Influences on the Development of Hui Salafism in China," by Mohammed Al Sudairi, (2016): 27-58.

Quran, holding workshops for Chinese Imams (Islamic leader), and providing scholarships to Chinese students to study in Saudi Arabia (Al Sudairi, 2016:42-45). After 9/11, China's fears of Charities from Arab Muslim sources, mainly from Saudi Arabia, increased; as a result, China increased its monitoring of these charities.¹³⁶ Third, Saudi Arabia's financing of Islamic madrassah in neighboring countries, especially in Southeast Asia.¹³⁷ Saudi Arabia supports logistically and financially many madrassahs in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are powerful tools for teaching and spreading Sunni Salafism and Wahhabism thoughts among Uyghurs who escaped or were sent as students from Xinjiang (Shichor 2005:129; Russell 2005: 66).

Undoubtedly, "there are growing circles in China, at the official... level..., that view Saudi Arabia as an ideational and security threat to China through the "export" of problematic and presumably radicalizing "Wahhabi" or "Salafi" influences to China's Muslim minorities (principally the Uyghurs)." (Al Sudairi February 9th, 2016:5) Viewing Saudi Arabia as a threat plays a critical role in limiting the scope of security and political cooperation between China and the Arab Gulf states in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.

As stated previously, China viewed the Arab Gulf region as a source of threats to its internal stability; however, China has not viewed Iran as a source of threats. On the contrary, Iran is increasingly viewed by the Chinese as a "counterbalancing and moderate force to offset malignant Saudi influence" especially in Central Asia (Al

¹³⁶Interview, February 22nd, 2016.

¹³⁷Madrassah refers to a school of Islamic thoughts, instructions, and principles.

Sudairi, February 9th, 2016:5). China sees Iran as a key player in China's anti-terrorism policy in East and West Asia where Iran cooperates with China to limit and prevent the spread of Sunni Salafists into Xinjiang (Noi, 2012:53). Since the 1990s, China and Iran have shared strong interests in fighting against the spread of Sunni Islam in Central Asia (Garver, 2009:198). Contrary to Saudi Arabia, Iran has not tried to spread Shiite Islam in Central Asia; it focuses only on Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, which has facilitated its cooperation with China to fight against radical Sunni Islam, mainly in Central Asia (Peyrouse, 2014). Moreover, both countries have a strong platform that paves the way for expanding their security ties and cooperation to contain the threat of Sunni Islamic extremism which is SCO. As Chapter 5 explains, Iran is an observer, and China is supporting Iran's full admission into the organization. Therefore, it is logical for China to prevent any action that negatively impacts Iran, threatens its internal and regional stability, or weakens its power or influence in the Gulf region.

To summarize, it is clear that China's fear of Sunni Salafi and Wahhabi Islam has significant influence on its political and security ties with Saudi Arabia in particular and other Arab Gulf states. This fear is a crucial reason among others that distances China from forming closer political and security ties with the Arab Gulf states and brings it closer to Iran.¹³⁸

¹³⁸A counterargument is that counterterrorism brings Saudi Arabia and China closer. Cooperation with the Saudi Arabia government helps China isolate radical Salafi groups that are calling for Xinjiang's separation. However, in this dissertation, we argue that this kind of cooperation is likely too difficult to succeed for two reasons. Firstly, there are strong Chinese suspicions that the Saudi government is involved in funding Sunni Wahhabi groups which would seek to support their peers in Xinjiang. Secondly, China recognizes the influence held by non-government Saudi high-profile leaders, such as clerics, charity associations, and other individuals who also support Salafi Muslim fighters in Xinjiang. Therefore, this dissertation aims to showcase that fear of Saudi Wahhabism spreading through Saudi-

China's ties, especially its security and military ones, with the Arab Gulf states are impacted by the influence of a third party, the United States. The following section focuses on U.S. security and military ties with Arab Gulf states and the influence of these ties on Arab Gulf states' security ties with China. The section shows that US' influence over the Arab Gulf states limits Arab Gulf states' security ties with China and drives them to hedge against it.

U.S. Influence on Sino-Arab Gulf States' Security and Military Ties

Since the British withdrawal from the Arab Gulf region in 1971, the Arab Gulf states without exception have enjoyed strong security and military ties with the United States. This strong security alliance satisfied these states' security needs for a long time, and at the same time limited any potential security ties with other powers, including China.

Before 2001, security alliance with the U.S. inhibited the Arab Gulf states' chance to widen their security and military ties with China.¹³⁹ Simply, these states enjoyed being under the U.S. protection umbrella and had no reason to look to other powers while the U.S. was providing them with the desired and required security. But, after 2001 as explained before, there was a backlash between the Arab Gulf states and the U.S. which impacted negatively their security and military ties and caused these states—except Oman—to look to China as a potential alternative.

based funding—especially by non-state entities—given to Muslims in Xinjiang, is a vital factor that keeps China away from closer ties with Arab Gulf states. For more details on Saudi government's funds to Islamic groups and Wahhabi schools, read: "Saudi Arabia in the 21st Century: A New Security Dilemma," by James Russell, *Middle East Policy*, 12;3, (Fall 2005): 66.

¹³⁹Interview, January 31st, 2016.

However, these states discovered that although their alliance with the U.S. and its protection was not guaranteed as before, the U.S. still played a role in limiting their security and military ties with China in three ways. Firstly, the Arab Gulf states, especially the smaller states, realized that if they rushed in expanding their security and military ties with China, they would completely jeopardize their security ties with the U.S., something they sought to avoid, especially in the current chaotic situation in their region.¹⁴⁰ These states are very cautious not to jump into upgrading their security ties with China, especially with their doubts of China's shadowy positions and intentions in the region, and their knowledge of the U.S. sensitivity and refusal of having a rival security power in a region that had been called for decades an 'American lake.'¹⁴¹

Secondly, the Arab Gulf states, after this long security commitment with US, have established their defense systems based on U.S. technology, the most sophisticated and advanced in the world. These states realized that there was no comparison between the U.S.' and China's weapons (Al Tamimi, 2012:13). When comparing the U.S. and Chinese weapons quality the Chinese army products are always inferior.¹⁴² Moreover, China's military naval and armed forces capabilities "remain far behind the capabilities of the United States" and are expected to remain so at least for the next two decades (Shambaugh, 2013:306). So, China lacks the ability and capacity to protect their region. Therefore, it is in their interests to limit and constrain their

¹⁴⁰With the Chinese negative stances regarding the region's security issues, gaining back the U.S. security alliance as it was before is still one of these states' strategic goals, especially Saudi Arabia (Al Tamimi, 2016:37).

¹⁴¹Interview, January 31st, 2016.

¹⁴²Interview, January 31st, 2016; Interview, March 10th, 2016.

security ties with China, especially given that China also does not show any indication of its interest in improving its security and military ties with them, rather it focuses more on its security ties and military cooperation with their rival Iran (Al Zayyat 2016; Al Ajmi 2016).

Thirdly, although China seeks to build a multipolar world, China does not seek to build this world by jumping to establish strong military and security ties with the U.S. traditional allies, the Arab Gulf states, or to increase its military presence in the region. China fully recognizes that even after the U.S. security policy changes since 2001, this region is still a highly sensitive area to the United States and it is better for China to avoid challenging directly the power of the U.S. in the region. Therefore, China preferred to focus mainly on improving its economic ties and cooperation with the Arab Gulf states instead of strengthening its military ties with these states or standing by their side regarding their security issues. China's approach to building a multipolar system in the Gulf region is to reduce and constrain U.S.' ability to harm China's economic and strategic interests, especially regarding security of energy supply, and China is limiting the U.S. ability by strengthening its ties with Iran and Syria not with the Arab Gulf states.¹⁴³

¹⁴³Many scholars have discussed and explained why and how China is not directly challenging the United States' power in the Arab Gulf region. For more details, read: "China 's Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Multilevel Diplomacy in a Divided Arab World," by Joseph Y. S. Cheng, *The China Review*, 16;1, (February 2016): 35-64, "The Role of Outside Powers," by Richard Sokolsky, and Eugene B. Rumer in Richard D. Sokolsky, (ed.), *The United States and the Persian Gulf Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2003): 117-144, "Soft Balancing Strategy in the Middle East: Chinese and Russian Vetoes in the United Nations Security Council in the Syria Crisis," by Mordechai Chaziza, *China Report*, 50;3, (2014): 243-

Also, China is very cautious not to antagonize the U.S. or challenge its security and military power in the Arab Gulf region because, “challenging American power in the [Arab] Gulf remains a relatively low [Chinese] priority. Security concerns closer to home already consume most of China’s energy and resources.” (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2003:132) In addition, China enjoys being a beneficiary of the security role that the U.S. plays in the region and enjoys being a free rider, leaving the United States to be the safeguard (Hokayem 2011:41; Al Sudairi 2012:7; Aarts and Rijsingen 2007:34; Ren 2014:265; Smith 2018:106/113). U.S. protection of the region—including the energy supply routes—has two consequences. First, it gives China no incentives to protect the region because its energy supply regularly and safely arrives to its ports (Smith, 2018:113). Second, it provides China with a golden opportunity to focus on solving its regional and internal issues, sustaining and enhancing its economic rise, developing and upgrading its military capacities and advancement, and strengthening its strategic and military ties with its valued partner in the region, Iran. So “why should China bother itself with protecting the Arab Gulf region while the United States serves China’s interests and protects its businessmen in the region for free?”¹⁴⁴

Arab Gulf States’ Perspective: China and Iran, Syria, and Pakistan

Between 2001-2011, Saudi Arabia not only saw China as a possible insurance and future alternative that will enhance the Arab Gulf states’ internal, external, and regional security and stability, but also influenced the smaller Arab Gulf states, mainly Kuwait,

258, and “The Political Economy of the Sino-Middle Eastern Relations,” by Muhamad Olimat, *Journal of Chinese Political Science/Association of Chinese Political Studies*, (2010): 307-335.

¹⁴⁴Interview, May 20th, 2016.

to form the same idea (Olimat, 2016:241). The drastic improvement in Sino-Arab Gulf ties in 2000s compared to 1980s and 1990s, underpinned and reinforced this Saudi view. However, this positive perception of China as alternative vanished in 2011. Since 2011, Saudi leadership shifted its view of China from a possible alternative to a source of threats to its stability and that of the region. There are three explanations for this extreme strategic view shift. First, China's growing ties with Iran, and its continued support of the Iranian nuclear program. Second, China's supportive stances of Assad's regime in Syria. Third, China's growing influence over Pakistan and the impact of this influence on Saudi-Pakistani ties.

China and Iran: Ancient Partners¹⁴⁵

Since the establishment of Sino-Iranian diplomatic ties in 1971, Iran and China invested heavily in their economic, political, security and military ties. After the Iranian revolution in 1979 China and the new Iranian Islamic political regime continued their cooperation and began viewing each other as highly valuable economic, political, and strategic partners. The Arab Gulf leaders—especially the Saudis—always watch carefully the development of Sino-Iranian ties and calculate the impacts of these growing ties on their stability and security. These leaders—except the Omani leader—see these growing Sino-Iranian ties as a threat to their security because they facilitate Iran's empowerment and the advancement of Iran's economic and military capacities which lead to enhancing Iran's regional power and influence.¹⁴⁶ Improving and

¹⁴⁵John Garver's book title published in (2006).

¹⁴⁶“It is evident from Chinese military and defense publications that Chinese defense specialists not only observe Iranian military development very closely but have clearly also played an important role in this

enhancing Iran's regional power is totally the opposite of what Saudi Arabia and the other smaller Arab Gulf states look and wish for. Chapter 5 provides details on Iran-China economic ties in the energy sector, investments, trade and arms trade; Iran's value to China's economic projects such as OBOR, and Iran's and China's cooperation in many important economic and security platforms such as SCO. All these kinds of cooperation play a vital role in enhancing Iran's power in the region.

Because of these growing ties, the Arab Gulf leaders also look with increasing doubt to China and its real intentions regarding their region and its security issues (Al Tamim, 2016:36). Since 2011, there has been a growing perception among the official circles in Arab Gulf states and among the Arab leaders themselves that China is closer to Iran than to them; Iran is China's promising ally in the region; and the Sino-Iranian ties are expected to be even closer in the future, economically, politically and militarily.¹⁴⁷

This dissertation agrees that China is closer to Iran than to the Arab Gulf states; in China's strategic thinking Iran is the best target in the region (Ghafouri, 2009:86). Iran shares with China important and critical common interests and views and enjoys national abilities which strengthen Sino-Iranian long-term partnership (Garver, 2013:70). It is Iran which is seen by the Chinese not only as a valuable partner and best

development.” (Goldstein, 2015:171) Sino-Iranian military cooperation started in 1980 and since then China and Iran have been enjoying growing military ties; not only does China develop Iran's military capacities, it also provides it with advanced weapons, missiles, and technology; in addition, both countries exchange high level military visits, and navel port visit; for example, in 2013, two Iranian navy ships visited Zhangjiagang port in China, and two Chinese destroyers visited Bandar Abbas in Iran in 2014 (Garver 2009; Garver February, 2016).

¹⁴⁷Interview, July 17th, 2016; Interview, April 5th, 2016; Interview, March 10th, 2016; Interview, March 1st, 2016; Interview, February 22nd, 2016; Interview, May 29th, 2016.

supporter, but also as a potential ally, unlike any of the Arab Gulf states (Garver 2016; Chang 2011:9; Douglas et al. 2006:2).

The reasons why Iran is China's vital partner in the region are the following:

- China enjoys stronger historical ties with Iran than it does with most of the Arab Gulf states. Iran and China established diplomatic ties in 1971, while China's ties with Saudi Arabia were established in 1990.
- China sees Iran as the best partner to help Beijing build a real multipolar world (Legrenzi and Lawson 2015:65; Garver 2013; Douglas et al. 2006:2). From a Chinese perspective, Iran is an independent state and the only state in the region that will function as a Chinese agent, while the Arab Gulf states are unable to do that, due to their close ties with the West and their alliance with United States.¹⁴⁸
- Iran is the "Chinese Gate."¹⁴⁹ Iran is China's gateway and its potential tool for exercising future influence and power, if the United States leaves the region, which would allow China to fill the empty space and power vacuum.
- As mentioned earlier, Iran plays a critical role in internally securing and stabilizing China and Central Asia in general, while the Arab Gulf

¹⁴⁸Interview, March 10th, 2016; Interview, January 31st, 2016.

As an example, China realizes that in case of an oil embargo enforced by the U.S. against China, none of the Arab Gulf states will stand with China against the U.S., it is Iran that will stand with China and challenge the U.S.' decision (Garver, 2016: 571).

¹⁴⁹Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, March 13th, 2016.

states—especially Saudi Arabia—present a threat through the radical Sunni Wahhabi Islam.

- Finally, China and Iran share elements that bring them closer: both countries were once strong empires and great civilizations; based on this historical view, they still prefer to interact with each other (Alterman 2013:97; Douglas et al. 2006:2; Pham 2009:181).

For all the above reasons, China provides Iran with needed help and support. China has supported Iran's nuclear program since 1985. It supports the program in two ways: first, by improving the program and Iran's nuclear capability, second, by preventing any international or regional action to shut it down (Garver 2009:205; Chang 2011:8-9; Douglas et al. 2006:9; Pham 2009:186). From 1985 to 1997, China helped Iran logistically to improve the program by building and providing research reactors, constructing uranium enrichment plant, and supplying Iran with uranium and nuclear technology. However, this support and supply ceased in 1997, after massive pressure and long talks and negotiations with the Americans (Garver, 2009:228). Since then, China has changed its manner of supporting Iran's program from being a vital partner in its development to being an important defender. Since 2004, China has utilized its position as a permanent member in the Security Council to block any international action to refer the Iranian nuclear program issue to the Security Council and rejected the imposition of economic sanctions on Iran and its economy (Garver

2009:205; Chang 2011:8-9; Douglas et al. 2006:9; Pham 2009:186).¹⁵⁰ Contrary to the U.S., China believes that it is Iran's right to obtain a peaceful nuclear program and no power should have any say in this matter.

Chapter 3 explains the Arab Gulf leaders'—except the Omani—fear of this program and its impacts on their security. Based on this fear, these states have always looked to China's support of Iran as a way of weakening them. To reduce the impact of China's support of Iran they cooperate with the U.S., support the various international sanctions by the U.S. and the EU, and work with international and regional organizations to contain Iran's nuclear program and limit and cease any further international support of it.

China persists in its support of Iran's nuclear program. However, the Sino-Arab Gulf ties flourished between 2001-2011, which can be explained by the necessity to adjust the security changes made by the U.S. in 2001. These changes forced the Arab Gulf states to overcome their fear of Sino-Iranian nuclear cooperation temporarily in order to adapt to these security changes, and one way to do so was building stronger ties with China.¹⁵¹ Also, these states realized that this program, especially since 2004, caught the international attention when many Western powers sought and worked to shut it down which is also the goal of the Arab Gulf states. Overcoming the Sino-Iranian

¹⁵⁰For more details on China's help and assistance to Iran's nuclear program, read: "China and Iran: Ancient partner in Post-Imperial World," by John Garver, (2009).

¹⁵¹According to Al Ajmi (2016), the worries and doubt of China's role in the region increased after the historical Iranian nuclear deal in 2015; based on this deal the economic sanctions on Iran were lifted, thus, the Sino-Iranian cooperation, especially its security aspect was expected to increase, in particular through the SCO—after the removal of these sanctions, Iran's full membership of the SCO was facilitated, and it was only a matter of time before Iran becomes a full member (28).

nuclear cooperation paved the way for Arab Gulf states' ties with China to grow from 2001-2011. Nevertheless, in 2011 China's position in Syria has again disappointed the Arab Gulf states, mainly Saudi Arabia, and made it very clear to these states that China is not willing to compromise or downgrade its ties with Iran to satisfy their security needs (Janardhan, 2014:205).

Syria

In 2011 an uprising broke out in Syria. With the exception of Oman, Arab Gulf leaders, especially the Saudis, as explained in Chapter 3, demanded and worked regionally, internationally, and even via unofficial channels to take down Assad's regime in Damascus. Taking down Assad would mean weakening Iran's power and influence in the region and eliminating Iran's vital and historical ally. Therefore, Arab Gulf leaders sought to gain international support and hoped that China would this time stand by them in facing both Assad and Iran. However, China did not, and preferred to stand with Assad and Iran. Interestingly, Syria is not important to China economically, and there are no major Chinese interests in Syria such as trade, oil, and labor contracts (Shichor, 2013:52). However, there are two main reasons that explain the Chinese position in Syria. First, China seeks by protecting Assad to protect its ties with Iran (Al Mashagba, 2017:257). Second, China seeks by protecting Assad to avoid compromising its ties with Russia (Shichor, 2013:52).

China realizes that if it chose to stand by the Arab states regarding Syria's crisis, it would implicitly lose Iran, and endanger its economic and strategic ties with it. And when it comes to protecting its interests in the region, China always picks the side that

will enhance its interests not compromise them. Therefore, China picked the Iranian-Syrian side, because being on Iran's and Syria's sides means being with a more profitable side not only in terms of economic and commercial gains and profits but also in terms of strategic significance. For example, Iran and Syria play a tactical role in China's strategic thinking; these two states can serve—as mentioned before—as future Chinese agents in the region where they can assist China to counter the U.S. power in the Arab Gulf region. China also recognizes that these states share its eagerness to create a multipolar international system that is not dominated by the United States. China's positions on Iran's nuclear program and the Syrian crisis reflect China's desire of creating this multipolar world that limits U.S. influence and power in the region and reduces its ability to enforce its solutions on the region's security issues and challenges (Chaziza, 2014:251).

Some argue that China established a Sino-Shi'a nexus with Iran, Syria, and Iraq (Lee, 2011:325). The main aim of this nexus and China's close and growing ties with the Shi'ite governments in the region, mainly Iran, Syria, and Iraq is to hedge against the U.S. and any possible U.S. policy that undermines China's economic interests in the region (Lee, 2011:330/336). In other words, the "Sino-Shi'a relations... have been an amalgam of Peking's global strategies to dilute the U.S. power peacefully and harmoniously." (Lee, 2011:336) It is very important to understand that the Chinese are very cautious "not to tread on U.S. toes" in the Gulf region (Pham, 2009:183). Even though China challenges the American objectives and decisions by supporting Iran and Syria, it does that without a direct or escalated confrontation (Chaziza, 2014). On the

contrary, China avoids precipitating any conflict—particularly armed conflict—with the U.S. in the region because of the high cost of the confrontation that China cannot bear the negative impacts on China’s economic interests in the Gulf region, especially the U.S. ability to block energy supply routes, and a possible aggressive response by the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific where China’s core interests are.

Also, China is highly cautious of not damaging and undermining its ties with Russia, especially given that these two countries are not only strategic partners, they are allies (Shichor, 2018:44). In order to protect its ties with Russia, China stands with Syria which enjoys robust economic, military, and strategic ties with Russia (Shichor 2013:52; Karar 2014:168; Ren 2014:268; Ferdinand 2013:17).¹⁵² In Russia’s eyes, Syria is the “only foothold in the Middle East,” thus, Moscow will not hesitate to take all necessary actions to secure it (Minghao, February 3rd, 2016). China understands that being on the Syrian side means solidifying its relationship with Russia whose “support to Beijing is more substantial than that of Arab [Gulf states]. Russia’s strategic support could also be extended to East Asia while the Arab world has no such impact.” (Chaziza, 2014:250)¹⁵³ China sees Russia as a valuable ally that will stand by its side

¹⁵²Because of the strong and historical ties between Russia and Syria, Russia has security and political commitments that bonds it to Assad (Bianchi, 2013:111).

¹⁵³Russia and Syria enjoy long standing alliance since the cold war; Russia has economic, strategic, and military interests in Syria; the two countries have established strong commercial, arms, and energy ties; also, Syria offers Russia access to a strategic navy port ‘Tartus’, where Russia has its only military navy facility in the Mediterranean (Donaldson et al. 2014:411; Hill March 25th, 2013). Generally, Syria is not only Russia’s ally in the region, it is its only foothold; Russia has also other interests which motivated it to protect Assad; Russia fears that the regime change in Syria may cause chaos in its regional atmosphere by inspiring neighboring countries in Central Asia; it fears that the fall of Assad would create a power vacuum in Syria that could be filled by Islamic radical groups threatening Russia’s interests in Syria as well as threatening Russia internally by targeting the Russian Muslims, and regionally by establishing

in case of escalating confrontation with the U.S. and its Asian allies in the Asia-Pacific region—especially in regard to the South China Sea issue—while none of the Arab Gulf states holds such promise (Karar, 2014:168).¹⁵⁴

Like the case of Iran’s nuclear program, China utilized its position in the Security Council and blocked six of the Council’s resolutions in 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016, which aimed to impose sanctions on Assad’s regime under Chapter Seven of the UN charter, support the Arab League Peace Plan to end violence in Syria, call on Assad to step down and refer the Syrian crisis file and Assad to the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Alo 2016:93; BBC February 28th, 2017).¹⁵⁵ Moreover, China declared its opposition to and refusal of any external military action by international or regional powers to take down Assad; China insisted that the Syrian crisis was an internal affair that should be solved peacefully through talks between Assad and the Syrian opposition. It held that if international and regional powers desire to get involved, their involvement should only encourage and facilitate these peaceful talks.

links to Islamic groups in North Caucasus and Chechnya; the fear of radical Islam caused Russia to get involved militarily in the Syrian crisis since 2015 (Talukdar May 17th, 2016; Notte 2017).

¹⁵⁴When analyzing China’s positions in the region there is always a third party who is involved in these decisions. For example, China’s stances on the region’s security challenges are shaped to a large extent by its ties and relationships with the U.S., Iran, and Russia. China’s decisions regarding the region sought to limit the U.S. power, increase Iran’s power, and sustain its ties with Russia, undermining the power of the first, increasing the power of the second, and protecting its ties with the latter are benefiting and satisfying China’s political, economic, and strategic interests.

¹⁵⁵<http://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10403.doc.htm>

<http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10536.doc.htm>

<http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10714.doc.htm>

<http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11407.doc.htm>

<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s20161026.php>

China's six vetoes and its announcements are perceived by the Arab Gulf leaders, especially the Saudi as a direct support to Iran first and then to Assad (Olimat, 2013: 108-109). Because of this support, Iran increases its interference in the Syrian affairs and enjoys a vital role in the region's security issues and their proposed solutions. Now, the Syrian crisis is impossible to solve without Tehran's being a part of the proposed solution (Alo, 2016:96). As a result, the Arab Gulf states view the Chinese support of Iran and Assad as a threat to them and to their stability which consequently have negatively impacted their ties with China (Murphy, 2013:24).

China's Influence Over Pakistan

The Arab Gulf states—especially Saudi Arabia—watch cautiously the vital role China plays through its ties and growing influence over their traditional allies, namely, Pakistan. For decades, these states and Pakistan have enjoyed solid and robust political, military and strategic ties. The most obvious relationship is between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have established an “Islamic Sunni ideological alliance,” where the two sides see this alliance as a cornerstone to win any future conflict they could face (Pande, 2015 :257). From Pakistan's perspective, Saudi Arabia is Pakistan's ‘ideal ideological Muslim ally’ that does not hesitate to stand by its side in any internal crisis or regional conflict, especially with its rival India (Pande, 2015:257). For many years, Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan during times of natural disasters and economic crisis, paid Pakistan's foreign debts, supported Pakistan financially by providing loans for economic projects; Saudi Arabia also participated directly in improving Pakistan's military capabilities via assisting it to purchase

sophisticated arms and equipment from the West and being Pakistan's guarantor whenever it acquired military hardware from the United States (Pande 2015:260/262; EIU April 30th, 2015). Additionally, since the 1970s, Saudi Arabia has been a vital source for donations via informal channels, mainly wealthy individuals, preachers, and charities to establish Sunni Wahhabi madrassas in Pakistan which spread Sunni Wahhabi thought—as mentioned before, these madrassas were hubs for spreading Wahhabism among students from Asia, especially Southeast Asia (Pande, 2015:262-263).

In the Saudis' view, Pakistan has long been their first supporter and strongest ally in Asia. It “provides Saudi Arabia [and the smaller Arab Gulf states] strategic depth in the sense of trained manpower (economic but primarily military), defense capability (conventional but also nuclear), and territory to continue its proxy war with Iran.” (Pande, 2015:271) On many occasions, upon Saudi request, Pakistan sent military troops to Saudi Arabia for defense and military training and assistance purposes; also, many Pakistani volunteers worked in Bahrain's military Guard and army forces (Pande 2015:261; EIU April 30th, 2015; Kamran 2013).¹⁵⁶ To ensure Pakistan's support and help whenever Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states need it, these states continue to offer it their financial aid and support.

On the other hand, China is also viewed as Pakistan's 'ideal strategic ally' for many reasons; China is a rising power with massive economic opportunities, has a

¹⁵⁶Saudi Arabia sought Pakistan's protection of the two holy cities and the Saudi royal family during the 1980s and the 1990s (Kamran 2013; Akkad February 21st, 2018).

permanent seat in the UN Security Council, plays a critical and important role in Asia, considered as a source of economic and military support, and China is a strong competitor to India (Pande, 2015:256). The latter is a very vital element in making the Sino-Pakistani ties very warm and close and “in Pakistan’s eyes [the] hostility [between China and India] ... ensure[s] Chinese support in the event of Pakistan’s conflict with India.” (Pande, 2015:258) Also, the American-Indian alliance causes Sino-Pakistani ties to be closer because both perceive this alliance as a threat to them and to their interests in Asia (Olimat, 2010:332).¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, both seek to enhance and upgrade their economic and security cooperation.

Obviously, Pakistan has robust ties with China and the Arab Gulf states, however, recently the Arab Gulf states have been alarmed by the strength of the Chinese-Pakistani ties, and these ties’ impacts on their regional security issues on the one hand, and their ties with China and their responses toward it, on the other. Currently, there is a growing perception in the official circles in the Arab Gulf states, especially the Saudi circle, that China has negatively affected their ties with Pakistan, especially their military and security ties.

During the long security alliance between the Arab Gulf states and Pakistan, the latter never rejected a request from these states to send troops to participate in defending them and their region. But, in 2015 Pakistan rejected a Saudi request to send military forces, aircraft, and warships to support a Saudi led-military coalition and

¹⁵⁷In 2006, the Bush administration signed with India a civil nuclear deal and when Pakistan approached the U.S. for a similar deal its request was rejected; the U.S. stated that “each country would be treated differently;” US’ rejection made Pakistan approach China for a similar deal (Pande, 2015:266).

‘Operation Decisive Storm’ against Iran-backed Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen; China and its pressure on Pakistan stand behind this reluctance (EIU April 30th, 2015; Chaziza 2015:23).¹⁵⁸ “According to Pakistani officials, Chinese President Xi assured his Pakistani counterpart that China would stand behind Islamabad in the event of its ties unraveling with the Arab world. China's assurance of \$46 billion in economic investment and assistance to Pakistan was one of the factors that persuaded Islamabad to turn down the Saudi request for military support for its campaign against Houthi rebels, despite immense pressure from Riyadh.” (Chaziza, 2015:23)¹⁵⁹ Since then, Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states have started to consider and calculate the role that China plays through its ties with Pakistan. This Chinese influence on Pakistan gives these states another reason to be more cautious with their ties with China, and uncertain regarding its intention towards them.

There are many reasons that explain why Pakistan rejected its ideal Muslim ally's request. First, Pakistan did not wish to undermine its ties or shake its interests with China. China offers golden economic and military opportunities to Pakistan going far beyond the Saudis ability (EIU, April 30th, 2015). China is capable of backing up Pakistan financially in case Saudi Arabia cuts or reduces its financial support (EIU, April 30th, 2015). China is a leading partner in many vital economic projects as: the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar Sea Port (Goldstein

¹⁵⁸Interview, May 22nd, 2016.

¹⁵⁹When Saudi Arabia started its ‘Operation Decisive Storm’ in Yemen in 2015, the Chinese president Xi postponed a planned visit to Saudi Arabia and announced that it was not the perfect or right time for the visit; China was avoiding being seen as a supporter of war (Foley, 2018:74).

2015:173; Clover and Hornby October 12th, 2015; Calabrese 2014/2015:1). The Gwadar Sea Port is the most important and prominent joint project.¹⁶⁰ This port has strategic and economic value for both countries. The port is “located at the southern edge of Pakistan's Baluchistan province on the Makran coast of the Arabian Sea, 100 km from the border with Iran and 400 km from the Straits of Hormuz.” (Calabrese, 2014/2015:8) This strategic location enables it to be a key energy transport hub (Ze and Chenxi May 2015:46; Calabrese 2014/2015:8; Ashraf 2014:97). Also, this location benefits Pakistan and China by making the first a shipping gateway for western China and other countries in Central Asia, and the latter closer to the Gulf region and nearer to its western parts than its other ports on its eastern coast (Pande, 2015:265). Also, strategically Gwadar port provides China with a naval presence in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf region that enables China to monitor naval movements in the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz to ensure and secure energy supply, especially from Iran and Africa (Pande 2015:265; Olimat 2013:78; Janardhan 2014:195). All the above opportunities and joint economic projects explain why China undoubtedly “dominates the relationship and drives the bilateral agenda.” (Calabrese, 2014/2015:3) It is also what drives Pakistan to avoid taking decisions that would negatively impact its ties with China.

Secondly, Pakistan refused to go along with Saudi Arabia in its war in order to keep itself distant from Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Sending troops to support Saudi Arabia

¹⁶⁰China is also establishing a port in Djibouti. Building these two Chinese bases plays a vital part in applying “string-of pearls” strategy which seeks to enhance China’s navy presence along the Indian Ocean coastal.

in Yemen would badly impact Pakistan's ties with Tehran, a country with which it shares a border. Pakistan avoids undermining its ties with Iran, especially with its awareness of the robust and strong Sino-Iranian ties and the opportunities that could come from collaborating collectively with these two countries, especially after the nuclear deal in 2015 (Foley, 2018:74). Since 1991 the three countries worked to expand and strengthen their ties and cooperation, especially in the economic and security areas (Huwaidin, 2002:168). For example, the three countries are collaborating to build the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline that links Gwadar port to the Iranian border and would extend to Xinjiang in China (Calabrese, 2014/2015:8-9). The estimated cost of building this project is 2 billion dollars, China will fund 85% of this amount and Pakistan will provide the rest (Panda, April 10th, 2015). This gas pipeline promises to bring these states closer and to facilitate more their economic interaction and cooperation, especially in the energy sector. Moreover, it is expected that security and political collaboration between these three countries would expand after Pakistan's full admission to the SCO in 2017—Iran is expected to be next soon. Increasing security cooperation and economic integration between China, Pakistan, and Iran, is likely to pave the way for a nexus that benefits all parts economically and strategically and achieve their internal and regional goals (Garewal, December 21st, 2017). Finally, of Pakistan's estimated population of 200 million, 35 million are Muslim Shiite which is (20-25%) of the total population; undoubtedly, Pakistan's intervention in the war in Yemen would inflame a sectarian war in the country and turn it into a battlefield for Sunni-Shiite/Saudi-Iranian rivalry as the case is in Yemen (Akkad February 21st, 2018;

EIU April 30th, 2015). For all the above-mentioned reasons, Pakistan said no to Saudi Arabia, preferring to put its economic and security interests first.

This chapter shows that there is a huge gap in security interests between China and the Arab Gulf states. China's security concerns contradict with the Arab Gulf states' security concerns for four reasons. First: China's increasing fear of radical Sunni Islam. Second, China's strong ties with Iran, and its support of Iran's nuclear program. Third, China's support and help of Assad's regime. Fourth, China's influence over Pakistan.

These four reasons caused the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, to shift their early view of China as a reliable and possible security alternative to a source of indirect threat. As a result, the Arab Gulf states do not trust, and cannot depend on China in security and military areas. This doubtful and uncertain view of China makes China's political and security presence low and below expectations. Therefore, for now and the near future, China will not have a military presence or rise militarily or politically in the Arab Gulf region. Also, the Arab Gulf states' fears, doubts, and uncertainty toward China led them to pursuing a hedging strategy against it to contain its threat.

Also, this chapter shows that, like the Arab Gulf states' ties with US, the scope and degree of the Chinese threats facing the three cases diverge, therefore, the degree to which the ties with China are impacted vary from one case to another; the Sino-Arab Gulf states' ties have been affected to a degree that differs from one case to another. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were the most disappointed by China's stances regarding

Syria and Iran, while Oman was not. Therefore, Sino-Saudi ties and Sino-Kuwaiti ties are the most negatively impacted, while Sino-Omani ties are merely impacted or changed. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia view China's strong ties with Iran and Syria as a source of threat to their stability and survival, while Oman is not. Thus, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are pursuing a hedging strategy against China to limit its security threats. Interestingly, although Oman does not view China's ties with Iran and Syria as threat to its survival, Oman also hedges against China. Chapter 6 provides details on these states' hedging strategy against China and explains it utilizing political, economic, and institutional indicators.

Chapter Five: Economic Dimensions of Arab Gulf States' Responses to China's Rise

In order to have a full image of the strategic responses of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Oman toward China's rise, this chapter analyzes the economic ties between China and four Gulf states: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Iran.¹⁶¹ The chapter is divided into the following main sections; energy ties, investments and trade ties, and institutional economic forums and collective economic projects. The chapter reveals that China enjoys strong economic ties with the Arab Gulf states; however, these strong ties are mainly in the energy sector and are not predicted to go beyond this sector at least for the next decade. Arab Gulf states do not play promising or valuable roles in China's economic projects, notably the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project. Sino-Arab Gulf economic dialogues and forums are merely prestigious without any impact in achieving their aimed economic goals. By contrast, Iran is viewed by China not only as an important and reliable energy partner, but also as a central actor in OBOR. It is Iran, who is a member with China of the powerful platform in Asia, SCO. The SCO provides both with a golden opportunity to cooperate, improve and upgrade their economic, political, and security ties.

Energy is the main commodity that binds China with the four aforementioned countries. It is necessary to introduce China's energy needs and the motives that drove

¹⁶¹Iran is included since it plays a vital role in shaping the ties between the Arab Gulf states and China, and their strategic responses to the latter.

it to strengthen its relationship with these states to enhance its energy security.¹⁶² Thus, the following section paves the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the economic aspect, before examining the nature and form of the energy ties between the two sides.

Why has China looked West?

With the revitalizing of its economic reform agenda in 1992-1993, China changed its strategy toward the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular (Harrold and Lall 1993:vii; Huwaidin 2002:52).¹⁶³ Before that year, China's main drive was to actively engage itself in the Middle East and the Gulf region, in an attempt to prevent other external powers from dominating these regions, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. Since 1993, China has been expanding its drive to secure and enhance its economic development—which started with Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and 'opening up policy' in 1978—by improving its economic and military capabilities (Huwaidin, 2002:52). 1993 was the turning point; China went from being a self-sufficient oil producer to a net oil importer.¹⁶⁴ According to Olimat, China witnessed a new economic struggle since the nineties as its "domestic production was

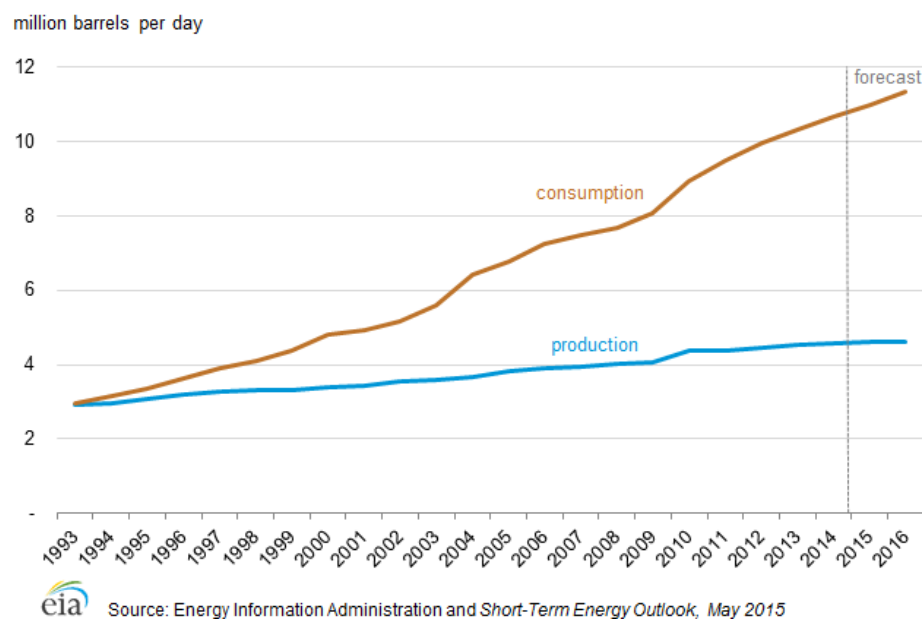
¹⁶²John Keefer Douglas, Matthew B. Nelson, Kevin Schwartz in their paper titled "Fueling the Dragon's Flame: How China's Energy Demands Affect its Relationships in the Middle East," (2006), go further by stating that "as oil imports have grown, China has been forced to formulate an energy security policy, especially concerning the Middle East. In practical terms, this has manifested itself in a major restructuring of the Chinese oil industry in 1998. The government aimed to refocus the major oil firms, end the division of labor between them, and push them to emulate the major multinationals, seeking upstream production rights overseas to complement domestic activities." (21)

¹⁶³The Gulf region is made up of: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain—the six Gulf Cooperation Council members—plus Iraq and Iran.

¹⁶⁴Mahmoud Ghafouri, in his article "China's Policy in the Persian Gulf," (2009), states: "in 1993, China became a net importer of oil products and, in 1996, a net importer of crude oil." (80-92)

insufficient to meet its growing demand for oil to fuel its economic growth.” (Olimat, 2010: 313) As a result of this vital transformation, China started an endless hunt for new sources of energy and oil to curb the growing gap between its domestic production and consumption, and satisfy its growing economic needs.¹⁶⁵

Figure 5.1: China’s Oil Production and Consumption between (1993-2016)



Source: (EIA, 2015).

Based on forecasts by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the British Petroleum Energy Outlook (BP), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the gap is expected to widen, leading China to

¹⁶⁵The gap between China’s production and consumption is widening every year. “The shortfall between oil consumption and production was 400,000 barrels per day in 1996 and is projected to grow to around 5.2 mb/d in 2020...China’s oil import dependence will increase from around 11 percent in 1996 to almost 60 percent in 2020...The share of imports in China’s natural gas consumption is expected to be at least 30 percent by 2020.” (Downs, 2000:8)

become by 2035 “the world’s largest energy importer, overtaking Europe, as [its] import dependence rises from 15% in 2014 to 23%.” (BP Outlook, 2016) Also, EIA estimates that in 2014, “China consumed an estimated 10.7 million bbl/d of oil, up 370,000 bbl/d, or almost 4%, from 2013. Notably, China became the largest global net importer of oil in first quarter of 2014, surpassing the United States, and the country’s average net total oil imports reached 6.1 million bbl/d in 2014. EIA forecasts that China’s oil consumption will continue growing through 2016 at a moderate pace to approximately 11.3 million bbl/d.” (EIA, 2015:3) In 2014, China’s oil consumption growth was predicted to increase by 2.6% yearly, “through to 2040, reaching 13.1 million bbl/d in 2020, 16.9 million bbl/d in 2030, and 20.0 million bbl/d in 2040.” (EIA, 2015:3) EIA estimates as well that China’s oil consumption would by 2034 exceed that of the United States (EIA, 2015:3).¹⁶⁶ China’s only solution to feed its energy needs is to increase foreign oil imports. It is predicted that by 2020 foreign oil will make up 70 to 80 percent of China’s oil consumption (Cheng 2016:40; Bagwandeem 2014: 5).

These data show that the Middle East and Gulf regions are central to China’s energy plan. The Middle East controls 65% of global oil reserves, 54% of which are located in the Gulf region (OPEC 2016; Niblock 2013:6/8). Therefore, it is not a surprise that these unmatched energy reserves led China to look to the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular, as the key destination to feed its growing energy appetite (Olimat, 2010: 313). The Middle East—specifically the Gulf region—

¹⁶⁶“China’s oil demand growth depends on several factors, such as domestic economic growth and trade, transportation sector shifts, refining capabilities, and inventory builds.” (EIA, 2015)

is the largest source of China's crude oil imports. In 2014, the Middle East supplied China with 3.2 million bbl/d, or 52% of China's total imports, and the largest supply came from the Gulf region (EIA, 2015:10). The Middle East, especially the Gulf region, is China's primary source of oil as half of China's oil supplies come exclusively from the Gulf (Downs 2013:55; Daojiong and Meidan 2015:1). Among China's top oil suppliers in Gulf region are: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran.

As for natural gas, China possesses significant reserves of the resource, and production from these reserves is predicted to rise by 6% per year (Niblock, 2013:12). Despite this, China must increase its natural gas imports from other regions to satisfy its growing energy consumption, which is expected to rise by 7.6% per year (Niblock, 2013:12). As the Middle East and the Gulf region enjoy vast natural gas reserves, with GCC countries alone accounting for 20% of natural gas global reserves, these states are essential suppliers to China (Ze and Chenxi, 2015:51).¹⁶⁷

China: The Energy Octopus

China adopted an “advanced strategy of developing two resources (both domestic and international)” to secure its economic needs and ensure its energy supplies, taking full advantage of both domestic and international markets in the energy sector (Chen, 2008: 84). “Domestically, China tries to expand domestic oil and gas production, promote the use of renewable energy, purify coal, and construct strategic

¹⁶⁷Tim Niblock in his chapter titled “Gulf-Asia Economic Relations, Pan-Gulf and Pan-Asian Perspective,” (2013), explains China's need to increase its natural gas imports, “in 2030 it is expected that China will be consuming almost as much as natural gas as the European Union does today, with natural gas imports having increased 14-fold over the 2010-2030 period. This is itself not surprising as China is expected by then to be the largest economy in the world.” (12)

petroleum reserves.” (Chen, 2008: 84) Internationally, China initiated the “going out” strategy in 2000/2001 (Wang 2016; Salidjanova 2011). This strategy encouraged the Chinese national energy companies (NECs) to go overseas in search of oil and energy investment opportunities, oil equity, exploration, construction of pipelines, development of upstream and downstream industries, and establishment of inward and outward joint refineries (Chen 2011:1; Dorraj and English 2013:46; Chen 2008: 84-85).

The three vital energy companies China has are state-owned and are considered China’s energy arms in the world. These companies are: the National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC).¹⁶⁸ “CNPC is the leader in China’s oil and gas industry, the largest producer and supplier of crude oil and a major supplier of refined oil products and petrochemicals in China. As the largest refinery and petrochemical manufacturer, Sinopec is the second largest oil and gas producer in China, [and lastly] CNOOC has an exclusive prerogative to carry out offshore oil and gas E&P, and cooperate with foreign investors in the offshore as an agent of the Chinese economic entity.” (Chen, 2008: 90)¹⁶⁹ All these companies have targeted the Middle

¹⁶⁸For more details on China’s national oil companies (NOCs), their private commercial motivations and incentives, and their role in securing China’s oil demand, read Shao Feng Chen’s article titled “Motivations behind China’s Foreign Oil Quest: A Perspective from the Chinese Government and the Oil Companies,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 13;1, (2008): 79-104.

¹⁶⁹There are other subsidiary companies that are active in the Middle East and Gulf region such as the “China Petroleum Engineering and Construction Corporation (CPECC), a subsidiary of the China National Petroleum Corporation. Another CNPC subsidiary, the Great Wall Drilling Company, also became increasingly active in the region with [its] drilling operations,” in different countries such as Iran and Oman (Daojiong, Meidan, 2015: 6).

East, and the Gulf region especially, to secure long-term energy supplies through signing long-term supply and service contracts, and participating in joint strategic investments in upstream, downstream, and petrochemical industries. The following sections provide details on these contracts with each of the cases.

Although energy is at the heart of Sino-Gulf ties, China is still extending and expanding its economic ties to non-energy sectors, such as trade, infrastructure contracts and investments, labor contracts services, and armament trade to fulfill its economic interests and strengthen its economic ties with the Gulf region. Also, China has established one to one and collective economic forums, dialogues, and institutions with the Gulf states. China works at state level with each Arab Gulf state, or collectively through the GCC organization, and even through wider institutions that include the whole Arab world such as the Arab League—which includes the three Arab Gulf states: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman, and excludes Iran.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, China has established an economic platform with Iran, and shares memberships with the Persian country in many economic organizations in Asia. More details are provided under the collective economic agreements, institutions and joint economic projects section.

¹⁷⁰It is important to understand that even though China finds it easier to deal with each Arab Gulf state individually, it does not miss an opportunity to work collectively with Arab Gulf countries through the GCC and the Arab League. These two organizations play a role in paving the way for China to have a wider access into the Arab world and to expand its influence. Also, by working collectively via the previously mentioned organizations, China promotes an image of itself as a rising power that seeks and encourages collective work, win-win outcomes and cooperation with larger number of partners in the region. Moreover, China utilizes its membership in these two organizations to upgrade its bilateral ties with the Arab countries under the framework of these two organizations.

Energy Ties

Oil

While China was a self-sufficient oil producer during the seventies and eighties, it started importing oil from Iran in 1974, then from Oman in 1983; making Oman the first Arab Gulf state to export oil to China; it then started importing from Kuwait in 1993, and Saudi Arabia in 1995—or the late nineties (Dorraj and Currier n.d.; Huwaidin 2002; Rynhold 1996:110; Olimat 2014:162; Zambelis 2015: 13).¹⁷¹

China's choice of energy partners is predictable and understandable. All these states are vital global and regional energy players. Saudi Arabia ranks as the second largest source of proven oil reserves in the world after Venezuela (USEIA, 2017). According to the OPEC annual statistical bulletin 2017, Saudi Arabia “possesses around 22 percent of the world's proven petroleum reserves, and ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum proven oil reserves.”¹⁷² Saudi Arabia's proven natural gas reserves are 8,619.3 billion cu. m., its crude oil production is around 10,460.2, (1,000 b/d), and its marketed production of natural gas is around 110,860 million cu. m. (OPEC, 2017). Iran is among the world's top 10 oil producers and top 5 natural gas producers, with the world's fourth-largest proven oil reserves and the second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia (USEIA, 2015/2016). Its proven crude oil reserves are estimated at 157, 200 million barrels, which makes Iran the holder of “almost 10% of the world's crude oil reserves and 13% of OPEC reserves.” (OPEC 2017; USEIA

¹⁷¹It is worth mentioning that Sino-Kuwaiti energy cooperation goes back to 1983, when “CNPC began to move into Kuwait with limited contracts to provide labor and other services.” (Ghafouri, 2009:89)

¹⁷²Saudi Arabia proven crude oil reserves estimated by 266,208 million barrels, including the shared Neutral Zone between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where half of the total reserves in the Neutral Zone belongs to Saudi Arabia (OPEC, 2017).

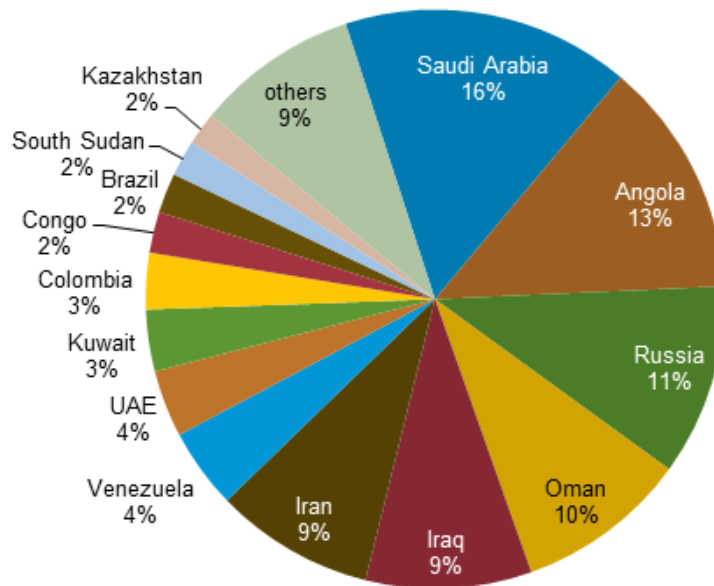
2015) Iran’s proven natural gas reserves around 33,721.2 billion cu. m., almost “17% of the world’s proven natural gas reserves and more than one-third of OPEC’s reserves.” (USEIA, 2015) Iran’s crude oil production capacity reaches 3,651.3 (1,000 b/d), and its marketed production of natural gas is around 226,905.0 million cu. m. (OPEC, 2017).


Kuwait ranks sixth among the world’s top proven crude oil reserves, and is the 20th largest natural gas holder in the world (USEIA, 2015/2016). It possesses around 101,500 million barrels, and its proven natural gas reserves are about 1,784.0 billion cu. m. (OPEC, 2017). Its crude oil production is 2,954.3 (1,000 b/d)—including the share of Neutral Zone production—and Kuwait’s marketed production of natural gas is 17, 291.0 million cu. m. (OPEC, 2017). Oman ranks as the 7th largest proven oil reserve holder in the Middle East, 21st in the world, its proven oil reserves are estimated at 5.4 billion barrels, while its natural gas proven reserves are 24 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), ranking Oman as 29th largest proven natural gas holder in the world (USEIA, 2016).¹⁷³ These reserves make Oman the largest oil and natural gas producer in the Middle East outside the membership umbrella of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (USEIA, 2016).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³24 trillion cubic feet = 679.6 billion cu m.

¹⁷⁴In order to avoid any restrictions related to pricing and production, Oman is a member neither of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) nor of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC).

Figure 5.2: China's Oil Imports by Country, 2014



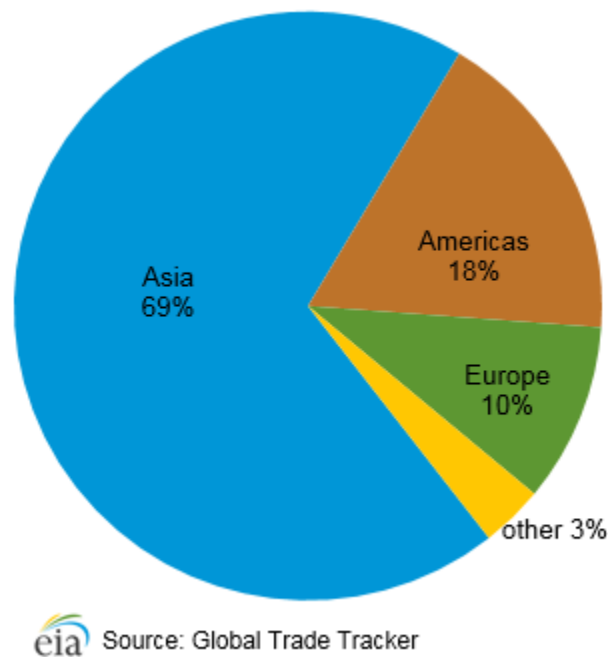
 Sources: FACTS Global Energy, Global Trade Information Services, Inc.

Source: (EIA, 2015).

Since the 2000s Saudi Arabia has been either the first or the second largest oil exporter to China. In “2002 [it] became for the first time China’s top supplier for oil,” however, in 2016, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia for the first time to become China’s largest oil supplier (Al Tamimi 2014:147; Aizhu and Meng January 23rd, 2017; Reuters August 23rd, 2017). Saudi Arabia’s oil imports to China have increased dramatically since the nineties; Saudi Arabia provided China with 50,000 barrels per day (b/d) in 1999, which increased to 445,000 b/d in 2005, the increase continued and Saudi oil exports to China reached 841,000 b/d in December 2009—surpassing the United States

as the biggest consumer of Saudi oil for the first time (Dorraj and English 2013:49; Al Tamimi 2014:147; Al Sudairi 2012:11; USEIA 2015). In 2010, Saudi oil exports to China exceeded 1 million b/d, reaching 1.2 b/d in 2014, which accounted for almost 16 percent of China’s total oil imports; the percentage was sustained in 2015 and 2016 (Dorraj and English 2013:49; Al Tamimi 2014:147; Al Sudairi 2012:11; USEIA 2015).

Figure 5.3: Saudi Arabia’s Oil Exports by Region, 2016

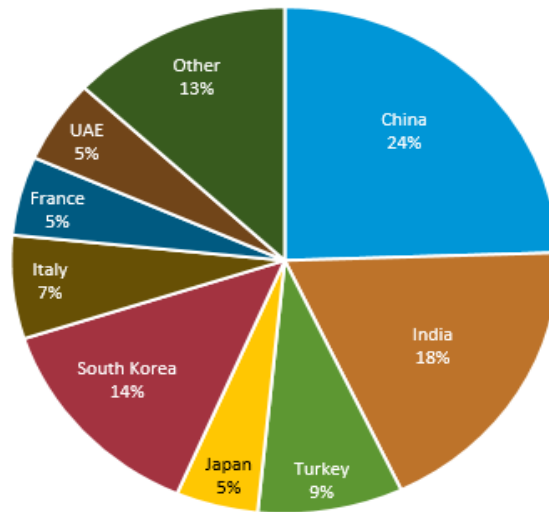


Source: (EIA, 2017).

Meanwhile, Iran exported 200,000 tons of crude oil to China in 1976, which increased to 300,000 tons in 1977, and reached 1 million tons/year (25,000 bbl/d) in 1982 (Huwaidin 2002: 158/165; Olimat 2013: 156). The levels further increased to 2 million tons/year (40,000 bbl/d) between 1989 and 1990 (Huwaidin, 2002: 158/165).

In 2003, Iran was the second largest oil exporter to China, after Saudi Arabia (Bagwandeem, 2014: 17). In comparison to Saudi Arabia, in 2005, Iran supplied China with 11.2% of its imported oil, compared to 0.6% in 1994, whereas in 2005, Saudi Arabia provided China with 17.5% of its imported oil compared to 1.2%, in 1994 (Yetiv and Lu, 2007:203). Iranian oil exports to China have dramatically increased as “Chinese imports of Iranian oil doubled from 2000 to 2009 (although Chinese imports from Saudi Arabia increased by seven times in same period).” (Scobell and Nader, 2016:59) In 2009, Iran was among China’s top 10 crude oil suppliers with “Saudi Arabia (First), Iran (Third), Oman (Sixth), and Kuwait (Eighth).” (Dorraj and English, 2013:47) According to the EIA data, in 2012 China’s oil imports from Iran were around 439,000 b/d (EIA, 2015). These imports have “constitute[d] 10 percent of [China’s] total imports. In contrast, Chinese oil imports from Saudi Arabia have surpassed one million b/d and accounted for 21 percent of China’s imports.” (Dorraj and English, 2013:51) In 2014, China’s oil imports from Iran constituted 13 percent of its total oil imports (Douglas et al., 2006:5).

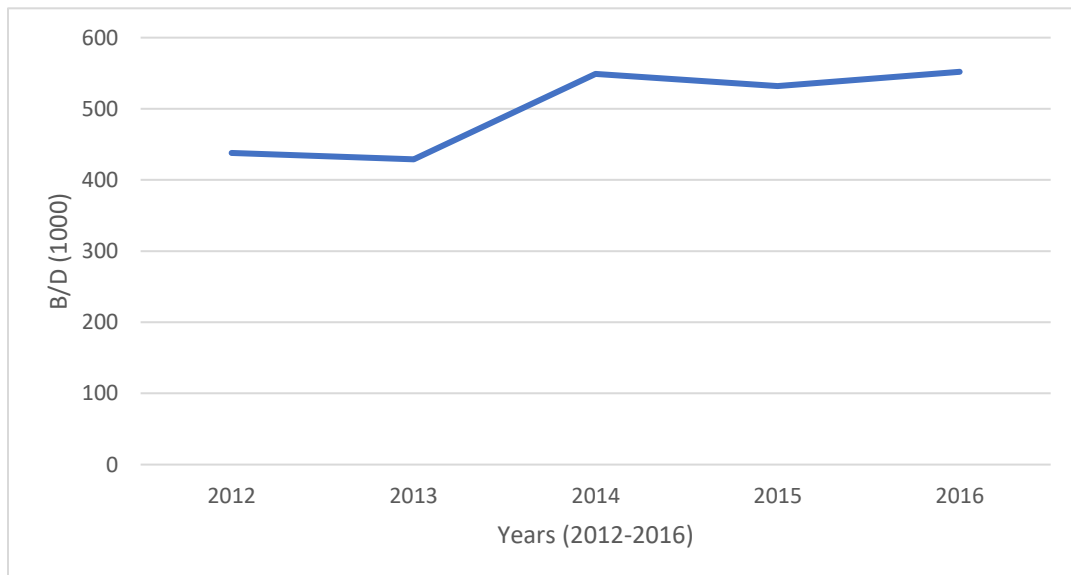
Figure 5.4: Iran's Oil Exports by Country, 2017



 Source: Clipper Data

Source: (EIA, 2017).

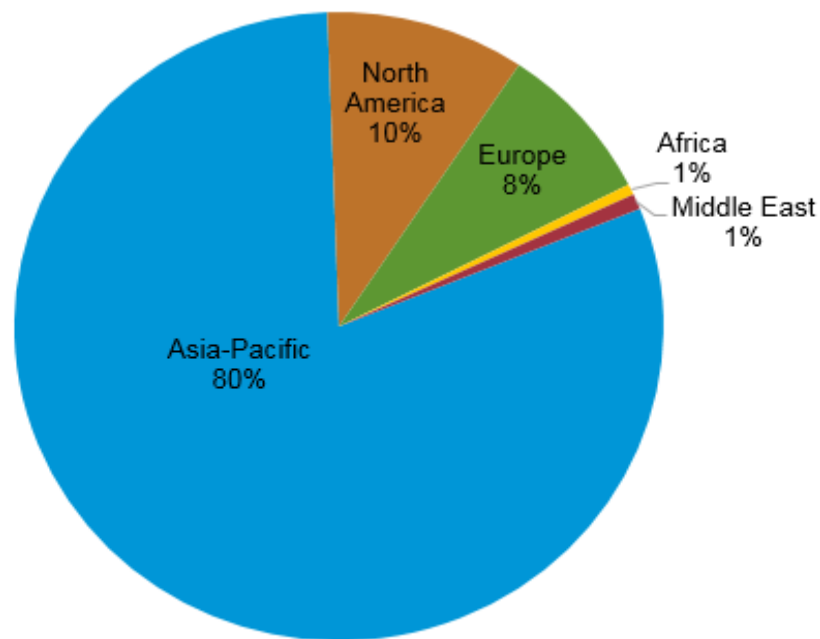
Figure 5.5: China's Oil Imports from Iran between (2012-2016)



Sources: Data compiled by the author from (EIA, 2015) and Middle East Institute, (July 7th, 2016).

Between 2001 and 2010, “China’s crude oil imports from Kuwait increased nearly seven-fold, from 1.46 million tons to 9.8 million tons.” (Dorraj and English, 2013:58) In 2015, China imported 290,000 b/d of Kuwaiti oil, which ranked Kuwait seventh on China’s top 10 oil suppliers (Al Alanba March 22nd, 2016; USEIA 2016). In 2016, China’s crude oil imports from Kuwait accounted to 16% of Kuwait’s total crude oil exports (USEIA, 2016). In 2017, Kuwait exported around 300,000 b/d to China (KUNA, October 26th, 2017).

Figure 5.6: Kuwait’s Oil Exports by Region, 2016

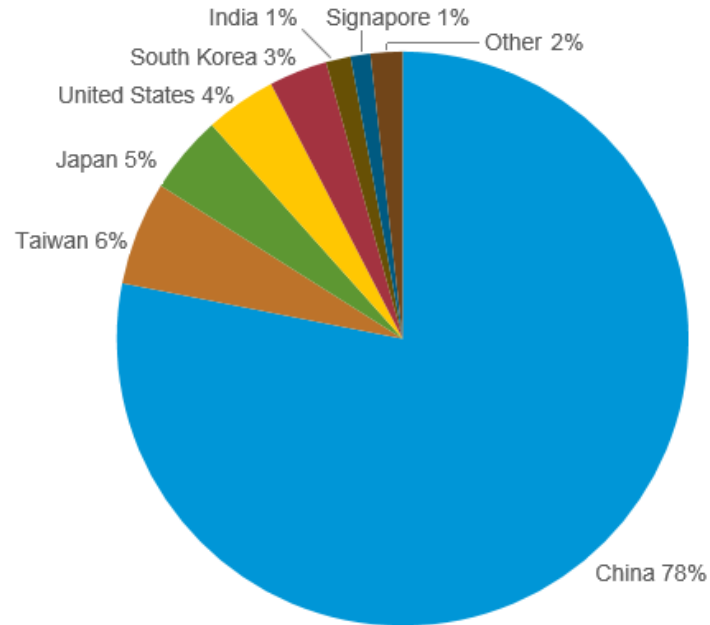


Source: Lloyd's Intelligence List, APEX Tanker Tracking database

Source: (EIA, 2017).

Omani oil has supplied China with 10% of its total oil imports, and “China is the top destination for Oman’s oil exports. Over 97 percent of Omani oil finds its way to markets in East Asia with an overwhelming percentage destined for China.” (Zambelis, 2015:13) In 2014, Oman exported 579 thousand b/d of oil to China, which means that 72% of Omani oil went to China (USEIA, 2016). By 2015, “about 95 percent of Oman’s oil exports in September were delivered to China.” (Zambelis, 2015:13) In 2015, China exported 237.56 million barrels, out of 308, 14 million barrels of Oman’s total crude oil exports, and in 2015 and 2016 China was Oman’s top oil importer (James, October 3rd, 2016). In 2017, “China imported 132.67 million barrels of Oman Crude during the January-July period of this year, out of the country’s 171.90 million-barrel exports,” keeping its position as Oman’s top oil importer (James, August 27th, 2017). It is expected that China will remain for a long period either the first Omani oil importer or at least the second.

Figure 5.7: Oman's Oil Exports by Country, 2016



 Source: Central Bank of Oman

Source: (EIA, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, in 2016, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia as China's top oil supplier making Saudi Arabia became second, Oman fourth, Iran sixth, and Kuwait eighth (Meidan December 2016; Arab Times June 28th, 2017; Aizhu and Meng January 23rd, 2017). Whether Saudi Arabia regains its position as China's top oil supplier in 2017 or not, it will continue to be among China's top 10 crude oil sources, with the other cases, and play a dynamic role in feeding China's energy hunger.

Table 5.1: Oil and Natural Gas Reserves, and Oil Production of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran.

Countries	Proved Oil Reserves (million barrels)	Oil Production (1,000 barrels/day)	Proven Natural Gas Reserves (billion cu. m.)
Saudi Arabia	266,260	9,959.2	8,715
Kuwait	101,500	2,704.2	1,784.0
Oman	5.373	970,00	651.3
Iran	155,600	3,867.3	33,810

Sources: (OPEC, 2017) and (EIA, 2017).

Natural Gas

China's eyes are also on these states' natural gas reserves and their future capacity of production. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman have substantial natural gas reserves. However, production of these states is limited and faces two major challenges which hinder their ability to export natural gas to China. Natural gas production by these states is restricted either by their growing consumption needs, or the lack of technology and foreign investment to develop them. For example, "Saudi Arabia does not import or export natural gas, [because] all consumption must be met by domestic production."¹⁷⁵ (USEIA, 2014) Also, Kuwait's consumption led it to

¹⁷⁵“Gas is found in nature in two forms, associated with oil or non-associated. In Saudi Arabia, a very large amount of gas reserves are of the associated type.” (Mabro, 2002) 80% of Oman's gross natural gas production comes from non-associated natural gas fields (International Trade Administration, 2016). As for Kuwait, the “associated natural gas production makes up most of [its] overall production at 80% of the total natural gas production. Production of non-associated natural gas from northern Kuwait is seen as the most promising source of future natural gas production growth, because Kuwait's challenging fiscal and political climate has not allowed for much progress in exploring offshore prospects.” (USEIA, 2016) Furthermore, 85% of Iran's natural gas reserves are in non-associated undeveloped fields (USEIA, 2012).

import natural gas from Qatar, Oman, and other states, to satisfy its consumption growth (USEIA, 2016).¹⁷⁶

Iran faces the same problem of increasing domestic gas demand, which turned it into a gas importer in 1997 (Jalilvand, 2013:3/15). Despite this increasing gas demand, Iran's major natural gas reserves are undeveloped, which puts Iran in urgent need for foreign investments and technology—especially western advanced technology—to develop these reserves (USEIA, 2015). Without these investments and technologies, Iran cannot be an influential gas exporter (Jalilvand 2013:13; Shamseldin August 29th, 2016; USEIA 2015). Moreover, international sanctions—especially the U.S.-2012 economic sanctions that targeted the Iranian energy industry and its Central bank—have negatively impacted its natural gas sector (Dorraj and English 2013:50; USEIA 2015). “Iran's natural gas sector was expanding, but production growth has been lower than expected as a result of the [the sanctions that led to the] lack of foreign investment and technology,” which Iran desperately needs to develop its natural gas reserves (USEIA, 2015).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are working to improve their natural gas sector, however, “contract structures and political uncertainty remain principal impediments to any rapid expansion of either reserves or production.” (USEIA, 2016) Kuwait faces another issue; its “new natural gas discoveries are geologically more complex, mainly in tight and sour natural gas deposits that require more sophisticated development and have higher capital costs.” (USEIA, 2016)

¹⁷⁷For background information on the international sanctions on Iran, read Zachary Laub's article “International Sanctions on Iran,” (July 15th, 2015), he draws a timeline of the different sanctions that have been imposed on Iran by different international players namely: the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union; alongside the reasons, the impacts, and the lifted sanctions. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/international-sanctions-iran>

Oman is the only state—among the other two cases—that has provided China with natural gas. In 1997, China started importing Oman’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) (Huwaidin, 2002:210). China “imported 59,300 tons of natural gas from Oman in 2007 and 65,600 tons in 2009.” (Dorraaj and English, 2013 :60) However, because it faces the same increasing consumption dilemma, Oman had to import natural gas in 2014, and imported “approximately 73 Bcf of natural gas from Qatar.” (USEIA, 2017) This “prompted the Oman LNG company to announce in 2015 that it would divert all its currently exported volumes of natural gas away from foreign markets and toward domestic consumers by 2024.” (USEIA, 2017)

The question that needs an answer here is: What does China gain from targeting natural gas sectors in states where domestic consumption is increasing or reserves are undeveloped? In other words, why is China interested in natural gas coming from countries that do not export it, or do not have an impressive capacity to do so? The answer is simple: China faces the same dilemma of satisfying domestic need for natural gas for local consumption. This has led China to be “the third largest buyer of gas in Asia after to Japan and Korea,” with a predicted “reliance on imported natural gas [that] would go up from the current 33% to 50% in the end of 2020.” (International Trade Administration, 2017) Therefore, China is keen to grab possible and long-term opportunities to acquire a stake in any possible future plans to develop the natural gas sectors in these states. This ultimately guarantees future economic gains presented either by business/services contracts for its energy companies, or long-term natural gas supply contracts.

Energy Agreements and Projects

China has signed various energy agreements and has been involved in vital energy joint projects with the states previously mentioned to enhance and secure its energy supply. Saudi Arabia and Iran hold the largest share of these agreement and projects. The trail of Saudi Arabia's energy cooperation with China was blazed by the visit of President Jiang Zemin to the kingdom in September 1999; during that visit, the formation of a "strategic oil partnership" was announced between China and Saudi Arabia (Olimat 2010: 328; Al Sudairi 2012:9). In the same year, China and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement which gives Chinese companies access to part of Saudi Arabia's domestic oil and gas market; with the exception of the upstream oil exploration and production—Saudi Arabia bans foreign companies to invest in its oil upstream sector's exploration and production—but, it gave authorization for Chinese firms to invest in its upstream gas sector and refinery (Olimat 2010: 328; Al Sudairi 2012:9). In return, China opened its downstream sector to the Saudi national oil company—the state-owned ARAMCO—to contribute and invest in the refining business, and establish a foothold in China's energy market (Olimat 2010: 328; Al Sudairi 2012:9).

The 2000s are described as a golden era for Sino-Saudi energy cooperation. In 2004, Sinopec successfully won a bid for a contract to tap Saudi Arabia's Rub' al-Khali fields; "sign[ing] a 10-years deal with ARAMCO to develop a 38,800 km in the Gahwar 'Block B' fields located in the North of the Rub' Al-Khali under a project named Saudi Gas Initiative 2 (SGI2) ... Under the terms of SGI2, Sinopec established a joint venture

with ARAMCO called Sino Saudi Gas Limited; an exploration and drilling enterprise in which Sinopec retained 80 percent ownership.” (Al Sudairi, 2012:10) In addition, ARAMCO signed an agreement with Sinopec to create a joint oil refinery in Yanbu in Saudi Arabia in 2011 (Al Sudairi, 2012:13).

The Yanbu project was China’s first significant investment in the Saudi oil industry, with operation scheduled for 2014 at a capacity of 400,000 b/d (Al Tamimi 2013:76; Al Sudairi 2012:13; Al Yousef 2017:151). 62.5% of the Yanbu ARAMCO Sinopec Refining Company (YASREF) is held by ARAMCO and Sinopec holds the balance (Al Sudairi 2012:13; Al Monitor January 20th, 2016). The refinery was opened in 2016 by the Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Saudi King, King Salman (Al Monitor, January 20th, 2016).

Since 1997, Saudi Arabia has negotiated with China to invest and build refineries to process Saudi crude oil (Huwaidin, 2002:235). In Huwaidin’s words, “China lacks the ability to process certain Saudi Arabian crude oil; [therefore], China continued to urge Saudi Arabia to invest in the development of the Chinese refineries.” (Huwaidin, 2002:235) During the 2000s Saudi Arabia invested in building many refineries across mainland China; such as the refinery of Quanzhou in Fujian province, worth \$5 billion, where ARAMCO held a 25% share, Fujian Petrochemical Company Limited held 50%, and Exxon Mobil China Petroleum and Petrochemical Company Limited 25% (Olimat 2010: 328; Thorpe and Mitra 2008:116; Scobell and Nader 2016:37). Saudi Arabia also built a \$1.5 billion refinery in Qingdao (Huwaidin 2002:

235; Thorpe and Mitra 2008:116; Calabrese 1998: 358; Scobell and Nader 2016:37). Building the Qingdao refinery “included a commitment by Saudi ARAMCO to supply 10 million tons of crude oil over a 30-year period.” (Calabrese, 1998: 358) Moreover, ARAMCO is finalizing a deal with Petro China to invest in a Yunnan refinery, and is expected to invest around \$1-1.5 billion in it; ARAMCO has also signed an agreement with China North Industries Group Corp (Norinco) to build a refinery and chemicals complex in northeast China (Reuters, August 23rd, 2017).

In regard to the petrochemical cooperation, the key Saudi actor in this sector is the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC); which is among the world’s top largest petrochemical firms, and is currently the world’s fourth largest petrochemicals company; behind Sinopec, Dow Chemical Co DOW.N and BASF (BASFn.DE) (Reuters May 2nd, 2017). SABIC has many offices in many major cities in China; presently, it has 18 offices in: Shanghai, Qingdao, Suzhou, Tianjin, Beijing, Chengdu, Dalian, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Xiamen, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong (Al Sudairi 2012: 24; Chang 2016). SABIC has three plants in three locations in China: in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing (Al Sudairi 2012:24; Trade Arabia 2007; Trade Arabia 2008). It also has a 50-50 joint venture with Sinopec in Tianjin; SABIC’s key industrial and manufacturing locations in China are in Zhongshan, Tianjin, Shanghai, Nansha, Chongqing and Longquan (Al Sudairi 2012:24; Trade Arabia 2007; Trade Arabia 2008). In 2012, SABIC announced a \$100 million plan to invest in establishing a sophisticated high technology center in Shanghai, with two other centers in Saudi

Arabia and India; the Shanghai center was inaugurated in 2013 (Al Sudairi 2012:24; Scobell and Nader 2016:39; Qide December 2nd, 2013).

Meanwhile, Iran has opened one-third of its oilfields and gas sectors in 2003 for foreign companies in order to develop these fields and improve its crude oil production to reach 7 million b/d by 2025 (Al Madani, March 14th, 2004). In 2004, China and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding that allows Sinopec to be “engaged in negotiations and conclude an agreement with the Iranian Ministry of Oil in 2007 to develop the Yadavaran oilfield in southwestern Iran... The Yadavaran venture turned out to be one of Sinopec’s most successful ventures in Iran and in the region.” (Olimat, 2014:56) This deal, worth \$70-\$100 billion, is “China’s biggest energy deal yet with any major OPEC producer. [According to this agreement] China committed to developing the giant Yadavaran oil field in Iran and buying 250 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) over the next 30 years; in return, Iran agreed to export to China 150,000 barrels of oil per day, at market prices, for 25 years.”¹⁷⁸(Zhiqun, 2013:55) The agreement gave China its first key role in developing the Iranian oil industry, and provided Tehran with a long-term customer for its natural gas (Alterman and Garver, 2008: 39).¹⁷⁹ Also in 2004, CNPC bought “the 49 percent stake in the Masjed-i-Suleyman oilfield, Iran’s oldest, held by Canada’s Sheer Energy,

¹⁷⁸As explained previously, Iran does not have the financial or the logistical capacity to export LNG; however, this did not prevent it from signing agreements with China. Read “Importing of Iranian oil and gas... Present and Future,” by Ahmed Shamseldin, (August 29th, 2016) for more details on Iran’s LNG sector and the difficulties it faces.

¹⁷⁹For more details on the Yadavaran deal and its stages, read “The Vital Triangle: China, The United States, and The Middle East,” by Jon Alterman and John Garver, (2008): 39-40.

for an undisclosed sum.” (Pham, 2009:181) In 2006, “Sinopec signed an agreement with Iran to jointly develop the Garmsar oil block, one of 16 oil blocks that Iran offered for international tender in 2003.” (Douglas et al., 2006: 5) In 2006-2007, Iran and CNOOC signed an agreement on upstream and downstream development of the North Pars natural-gas field, the deal involved investments amounting to \$16 billion (Alterman and Garver 2008:25; Pham 2009:181). Also, in 2007, CNPC signed an agreement to develop share of the South Pars natural gas field by investing \$1.8 billion on exploration and \$1.8 billion on constructing a LNG plant (Pham, 2009:181). A 25-year agreement to develop Iran’s North Azadegan field and a memorandum of understanding to develop the first phase of the South Azadegan field were signed in 2009 (Dorraj and English, 2013: 54). In order to develop this oilfield—which is the second largest oilfield in Iran—China signed a deal in 2011 to invest \$2.5 billion for enhancements in South Azadegan; and in 2013, Sinopec signed a deal that aims to invest \$1.5 billion to develop the Iranian oil refinery ‘Isfahan’ (Scobell and Nader, 2016:60).

To secure and ensure supply between China and Iran, the two countries have planned to “build a pipeline in Iran to deliver oil to the Caspian Sea, which will then be carried along another pipeline between Kazakhstan and China.” (Yetiv and Lu, 2007:205) Interestingly, Oman and Iran share a similar plan for a similar purpose. In 2014, Oman agreed on “a pipeline construction project with Iran that ... would enable it to export Iranian LNG to India and other Asian countries [China being on the top of the list]. [This] pipeline would offer [China, Oman, and] Iran strategic advantages,”

and open the door for more economic cooperation between these three countries (Westphal et al., 2014:26). As a result of the troubled and complicated ties between Iran, Saudi Arabia and to some extent Kuwait, it is difficult to witness collective and joint projects that include these three states with China.

The cooperation between Iran and China has extended to petrochemical aspect; as an example, Iran revealed a Chinese plan to finance the completion of seven methanol plants in South Pars in 2014, and invest \$2.6 billion in a petrochemical complex in Bushehr (Scobell and Nader, 2016:61). In the same year, Chinese corporations declared that they are planning to invest more than \$600 million to construct the Lordegan Petrochemical complex (Scobell and Nader, 2016:61).

Both Kuwait and China worked in pursuit of investment opportunities in each other's energy sectors. From 1985 to the present day, many Chinese energy firms have participated with Kuwait in energy projects and "received multiple oilfield service contracts for refinery renovation, oil tank construction and pipeline installation."¹⁸⁰ (Dorraj and English, 2013:58) After Kuwait's liberation from the Iraqi invasion, Sinopec won the contract to renovate Kuwait's Al-Ahmadi refinery plant (Huwaidin 2002:200; Thafer 2014:101). In 1995, the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and the China Petroleum Engineering Construction Company (CPECC) signed a deal worth \$398 million to construct oil tank farms in Kuwait (Thafer 2014:101; Huwaidin 2002:200).

¹⁸⁰In his book "China's Relations with Arabia and the Gulf: 1949-1999," (2002), Mohamed Bin Huwaidin discusses in great detail the Sino-Kuwaiti energy cooperation before and after the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between the two nations in 1971 (190-200).

In 1996, China's Maritime Engineering Company reached a 16-month agreement with KOC for the construction of the Shu'aybah refinery in Kuwait (Huwaitin, 2002:201).

Kuwait has a huge interest in downstream infrastructure in China. Kuwait's strategy was, and still is, founding long-term relationships, and improving the value of its oil industry (Thorpe, Mitra, 2008:116). In 1985, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) has taken a 15 percent stake in China's Yacheng offshore gas field, and in 1986, KPC announced a joint venture—the Sino Arab Chemical Fertilizer Company to invest in the Qilu petrochemicals facility in China's eastern Shandong province (Dorraj and English, 2013:57).

In 2004-2005, KPC started negotiations with China's Sinopec to build a \$9-10 billion refinery and petrochemical venture with the Guangdong Provincial Government (Olimat 2010: 333; WikiLeaks 2009). The refinery was meant for refining Kuwaiti oil (Olimat, 2010: 333). China “gave final approval to the project, making Kuwait the second Arab oil producer behind Saudi Arabia to have a major downstream facility in China. Sinopec has announced a planned commission date of 2014; however, analysts predict a much longer timeframe, with a likely start-up in 2018- 2019. Kuwait aims to increase its exports from 200,000 bbl/d to 500,000 bbl/d with the completion of the refinery.” (USEIA, 2013)

According to WikiLeaks, cable on Kuwait and China: “KPC entered into a multi-billion-dollar joint venture with oil giant Petro China Co., one of China's largest SOEs, to build a 240,000 barrel per day refinery and 1,000,000 tons per year ethylene

cracker in the Nansha district of Guangzhou.” (WikiLeaks, 2009) In 2009, Sinopec won a contract worth \$400 million for installations—built within Kuwait—to boost Kuwait’s oil production by more than four million b/d by 2020 (Dorajj and English 2013:58; Davidson 2010:19).¹⁸¹

In 2005, KPC opened a representative office in China—which is KPC’s second office in East Asia after the first in Japan—to expand and encompass its activities in China’s energy sector (KUNA, March 30th, 2005). By establishing this office, KPC seeks to increase oil imports, strategic stocks, oil products imported by China, “and maximizes the intensive involvement with the Chinese firms.” (KUNA, March 30th, 2005) Moreover, this office represents a platform for strengthening cooperation between China and Kuwait by “develop[ing] supply contracts through mutually beneficial joint venture investments in refining, petrochemicals, and infrastructure projects.” (KUNA, March 30th, 2005) The latest deal between China and Kuwait, according to KPC’s Annual Report for 2015-2016, was a signed agreement that aims to solidify KPC’s position as a supplier of crude oil in China (KPC Report, 2015/2016: 63).

Oman, as mentioned earlier, is the first Arab Gulf state that exported oil to China in 1983; and Omani oil is a light sweet oil with low sulfur content, which Chinese refineries can process without needing to upgrade their refineries (Abdel-Khalek and

¹⁸¹To reach this level of production, Kuwait is also “expected to spend \$115 billion on energy projects over the next five years.” (Times of Oman, February 19th, 2017)

Korayem 2007:416; Pham 2009:180). Therefore, “the suitability of Oman’s crude oil to China’s existing refining technology and ability [made] Oman... a very successful trading partner with China. This is significant because, if China wants to be a major importer of crude oil from other major exporters [Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iran] of oil in the Gulf and Peninsula region, it will have to spend billions of dollars to upgrade its refining technology to suit the type of crude oil that these other exporters in the Gulf region.” (Huwaidin, 2002: 210)

Oman and China do not need to cooperate in building oil refineries, but that does not limit the scope of Sino-Omani energy cooperation; it goes beyond the exporting and importing equation. The two states, represented by the Oman Oil Company (OOC) and several Chinese firms—one of them being Sinopec—have signed a number of agreements to boost bilateral and joint projects on industrial estates; in addition to constructing two storage facilities in China, particularly in Xingang port—a port ranked as the world’s fifth biggest (Rakhmat, May 10th, 2014). During the 2000s, several Chinese companies were investing substantially in “Oman’s oil and gas sector, including petrochemicals, training, and exchange of expertise.” (Olimat, 2014:166)¹⁸²

Contrary to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Oman does not ban foreign investment in its upstream oil and gas sectors. Oman has sought to attract foreign companies to

¹⁸²In his book “China and the Middle East since the World War II,” (2014), Muhamad Olimat mentioned that in 1993, China requested from Oman the “training of their personnel at the Omani facilities in the Tarim Basin oilfield [and was] responded positively.” (166)

explore new oil and gas fields, and improve the existing fields, in order to increase its oil production and reach 1 million b/d (Stevenson and Suddaby, 2000). Therefore, Oman has signed several deals and agreement with foreign investors and companies, with China's firms being among them. For example, "in 2002, CNPC signed its most significant oil contract with Oman on the basis of sharing contract for a 50% in the block 5 in Oman. There are two fields in this zone: the Daleel and the Meزون oilfields... CNPC has also managed to operate a natural gas plant based on the Build, Own, and Operate framework (BOO), China's most favored model of oil and gas development." (Olimat, 2014:166) Moreover, CNPC offered a wide range of oilfield services that were vital to developing the Omani oil and gas sector (Olimat, 2014:166-167).

In 2004, Oman signed an oil concession contract with Sinopec to invest \$22 million for exploration finance, this agreement "gives the Chinese company the rights to explore and produce oil and gas in blocks 36 and 38 in the southern part of the country." (Gulf News, August 26th, 2004) By 2004, there were 31 Chinese companies in Oman investing in energy and services, three of those companies were operating in the oil, gas and petrochemicals sectors, with projected investments of about \$600 million (Gulf News, August 26th, 2004). Also, Sinopec's operations in Oman have actively expanded including importing and storing of Omani oil in China (Olimat, 2014:167). By March 2011, Sinopec finalized constructing a 1.88-million-cubic-meter commercial crude oil storage facility in Maoming, in Guangdong province, that is planned to store primarily Omani crude oil (Olimat, 2014:167).

Oman has two joint operation businesses in China (Oman Oil Company, n.d.). One company is in the refining and marketing sector, Qingdao Lidong Chemical Co. Ltd (QLCC); the company is an aromatics petrochemical plant that is promoted by GS Caltex in the People's Republic of China (Oman Oil Company, n.d.). The shareholders are: GS Aromatic Qingdao Hongxing 62.00%, Organic Co Ltd 8.00%, and OOC 30.00% (Oman Oil Company, n.d.). The total capacity of the company is 700k ton per year of Paraxlyene, 250k ton per year of Benzene, and 150k ton per year of Toluene (Oman Oil Company, n.d.). The other company is in energy infrastructure, Qingdao Lixing Logistics (Lixing), this company provides port facility services for the Qingdao Lidong (Lidong) aromatics project; the partners are GS Group 70.00%, and OOC 30.00% (Oman Oil Company, n.d.).

All the above shows that China established strong energy ties with the four Gulf states. Sino-Gulf economic energy ties, including oil, gas, and investments in the energy and petrochemical sectors, ensure that both sides seek to strengthen their economic ties to satisfy their economic needs. As for China, the four Gulf states play central role in satisfying China's energy needs and providing businesses opportunities to the Chinese firms. But, upon making a comparison between the four states and their energy importance to China, we find that Saudi Arabia and Iran are the most important energy partners. Saudi Arabia as explained before has massive oil reserves and plays crucial role in the oil market and energy organizations. Also, Saudi Arabia has the financial ability to make investments in China's energy sector mainly building

refineries. Saudi Arabia has succeeded in entering the Chinese energy sector by building oil refineries—and planning to build more.

On the other hand, Iran represents a golden opportunity to China. Iran opened its energy sector to China free from the restrictions it faced in Saudi Arabia. Also, unlike Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Iran does not ban the Chinese energy companies from investing in its upstream oil sector. In the Iranian energy sector, China lacks the western competition it faces in the Arab Gulf states' energy sectors, making China the only player. Because of its strong political and security ties with Iran—as explained in Chapter 4—China realizes that Iran would not abandon it or hesitate to secure its oil supply in case of oil embargo, unlike the other Arab Gulf states whose security alliance with the U.S. limits their ability to take such step, especially if such embargo is imposed by the United States. Thus, Iran is not only feeding China's energy thirst, it also represents an energy insurance card.

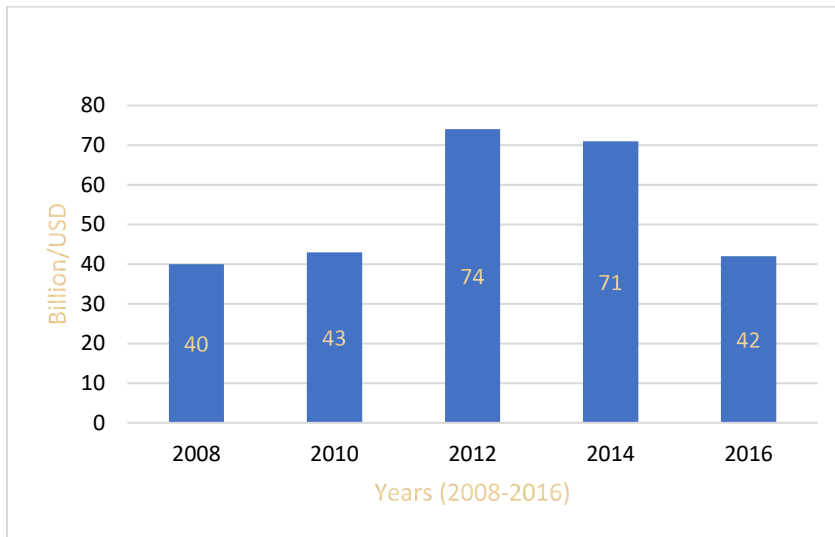
Investments and Trade Ties

China has growing trade and commercial ties with all the previous states. Energy products dominated China's selection of imports from Gulf states. These imports are crude oil, oil products, natural gas, petrochemical products, fertilizer, and liquefied petroleum gas (Cheng 2016:38-39; Al Sudairi 2012:18; Zhong March 20th, 2017). While its selection of exports to these states are: construction machinery, steel, garments, textile fabrics, electronics, plastic goods/toys, furniture, telecommunication equipment, and manufacturing equipment (Cheng 2016:39; Al Sudairi 2012:18; Zhong March 20th, 2017; Alsaaty and Sawyer 2012:125).

Among these states, Saudi Arabia is China's biggest trade partner in Middle East and North Africa (Al Tamimi 2012:18; Al Sudairi 2012:18; Fulton June 21st, 2017). Saudi Arabia has been "China's biggest trade partner in West Asia (including the Middle East and the League of Arab States) for the last ten consecutive years." (Al Tamimi, 2012:18) It is vital to mention that for the first time, in 2011, the U.S., the traditional ally and long-standing economic partner, was overtaken by a rising China as Saudi Arabia's top trade partner (Al Tamimi 2012:18; Al Sudairi 2012:18).

Trade between China and Saudi Arabia has been growing dramatically; "the two-way trade between Saudi Arabia and China in the last two decades increased almost 50 times from \$1.28 billion in 1990 to about \$64.39 billion in 2011." (Al Tamimi, 2012:18) In 2008, trade reached an estimated \$40 billion, \$64.4 billion in 2011, \$73 billion in 2013, more than \$71 billion in 2014, and \$42 billion in 2016 (Al Sudairi 2012:17-18; Zhong March 20th, 2017; Kechichian February 9th, 2016; Alkhereiji January 22nd, 2016)—the sharp decline in oil prices negatively impacted the trade volume between the two countries.

Figure 5.8: Sino-Saudi Trade Volume from (2008-2016)



Sources: Data compiled by the author from (Gresh, 2016) and (Olimat, 2016).

Even though oil is at the core of Sino-Saudi trade, China and Saudi Arabia have extended their trade and economic activities to non-energy sectors in the form of vigorous infrastructure contracts and investment (Al Sudairi, 2012). Among these non-energy activities and investments is the signing of a contract in 2007 worth \$3 billion between a Saudi company and the Aluminum Corporation of China Limited (CHALCO), to build an aluminum plant in Saudi Arabia (Alterman 2009: 67; Scobell and Nader 2016:39; Al Sudairi 2012:33). The Saudi Binladen Group signed this agreement with (CHALCO) to develop and operate the aluminum smelter in Jazan Economic City in order to produce 1 million metric tons yearly; the project is a joint venture between CHALCO, retaining %40, Saudi Binladen Group, %40, and MMC International Holdings Limited %20 (Al Sudairi 2012:33).

In 2009, China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) bid successfully to win The Haramain High Speed Rail project, worth \$1.8 billion (Arab News, July 19th, 2017). An agreement was signed to build a railway between the holy cities of Mecca and Medina; a 450-km electric railway “designed to serve 60 million passengers annually via 35 trains.” (Al Sudairi 2012:33; Arab News July 19th, 2017) The railway was scheduled to open in 2016; but as a result of many “difficulties including allegations of delays in the completion of the civil works, which are being undertaken under separate contracts, windblown sand in the inhospitable climate, and disputes within the consortium,” the new official inauguration date has been rescheduled to March 2018 (Railway Gazette International May 12th, 2016; The Express Tribune November 19th, 2016). Also, the China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), signed a \$533 million contract in 2009 with the Saudi Ministry of Education to build 200 primary and secondary schools in the kingdom (Al Sudairi 2012:33-34). In 2012, Saudi and Chinese cooperation extended to the nuclear energy sector, as both states have signed an agreement to build 16 nuclear power reactors over the next 20-25 years, the first reactor is to be inaugurated in 2022 (Eid-Oakden and Rahall October 16th, 2014; Al Yousef 2017:151).

Since 9/11, Saudi Arabia had been increasing its foreign direct investment (FDI) in China as a result of unstable relations with the United States. Following 9/11, “the United States became a less attractive destination for Saudi investments, [and] the Saudis have increasingly turned to the Chinese economy for recycling some of the enormous liquidity accumulating in the country from record-high oil revenues.”

(Abdel-Khalek and Korayem, 2007:414) In 2010, there was high FDI flow estimated at \$484 million from Saudi Arabia to China, for investments in energy and non-energy sectors (Eid-Oakden and Rahall, October 16th, 2014).

In 2014, there were 88 projects for a total amount of \$537 million between Saudi Arabia and China (Al Yousef, 2017:153). China provided 44% of the capital of 12 industrial projects and 77% of the capital of 76 non-industrial projects (Al Sudairi, 2012:31).

In turn, China has also targeted Saudi Arabia as an investment destination, where its total investment flows into Saudi Arabia “between 2009 and 2010... amounted to \$3,605 million, and between 2010 and 2011 totaled \$1,961 million.” (Al Sudairi, 2012:30) In 2014, the total amounts of Chinese investment flows into Saudi Arabia were around \$730 million (Al Yousef, 2017:153). In 2017, China and Saudi Arabia signed “\$65 billion worth of economic and trade deals, spanning sectors from energy to space,... also [they] deepened their energy relationship with more than 20 agreements on renewable energy.” (Gramer, March 16th, 2017)

There are around 59 Saudi companies operating in China, with investments value reaching \$5.58 billion, most of these investments are in the oil and petrochemical sectors (Al Sudairi, 2012:28/31). There are around 140 Chinese companies operating in Saudi Arabia, the majority of which are involved in construction, telecommunications, and petrochemical sectors (Niblock, February 16th, 2016). One of the most recent Chinese investments in non-energy sectors in Saudi Arabia is through

Huawei—a Chinese technology firm that provides telecom services and equipment, and delivers management network services to Mobily in Saudi Arabia (Arab News February 25th, 2016; Anderson August 31th, 2016). Huawei “has been awarded an investment license to start operating in Saudi Arabia with 100 percent ownership, [becoming the] first commercial license for an IT firm awarded in the country and the first to a Chinese firm.” (Anderson, August 31th, 2016) Moreover, Huawei has established a strong and vital relationship with ARAMCO (Allison, February 2nd, 2016). It developed a nationwide telecoms network for ARAMCO and a \$70m voice over internet protocol (VOIP) program as well as other projects—related to smart cities—in Yanbu and Jeddah (Allison, February 2nd, 2016).

When the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 1988 to establish a Trade Representative Office, and after establishing formal diplomatic ties in 1990, they enhanced their trade and investment ties, with many economic entities emerging such as the Saudi-Chinese Friendship Association in 1997, and the Saudi-Chinese Business Council in 2003 (Huwaitin 2002:222-223; Al Sudairi 2012:17/25).¹⁸³ According to Al Sudairi, these economic organizations—especially the Saudi-Chinese Business Council—“have acted as ‘interest groups’ in the context of Sino-Saudi relations, forwarding suggestions and reports regarding regulations, streamlining joint venture procedures, encouraging a greater utilization of available

¹⁸³According to Huwaitin (2002), the decision of establishing commercial representative offices in Saudi Arabia and China was signed in Washington between the Chinese ambassador and the Saudi ambassador to United States (223).

resources in Saudi Arabia by their Chinese partners, issuing media statements, and placing pressure on pertinent institutions.” (Al Sudairi, 2012:25)

Also in 2010, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce “set up an office in Riyadh to assist mainland companies seeking to enter the Kingdom... lobbying and... bringing Chinese investors and owners in direct contact with the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and the Saudi-Chinese Business Council,” with the number reaching a total of 62 companies and enterprises (Al Sudairi, 2012:31-32). This shows the growing Chinese desire to expand in Saudi Arabia’s market, and to regulate the existing Chinese companies.

The last important element in trade ties between Saudi Arabia and China is arms. Arms deals have contributed to a limited degree in trade activities between the two countries. As explained before, the United States was the one who pushed Saudi Arabia to look into China as a promising and possible source of weapons. During the Iraqi-Iranian war in the eighties, Saudi Arabia sought to strengthen its air defense and was “desperately looking for a supplier of advanced missiles, following Washington’s refusal to provide them with such weapons owing to pressure exercised by pro-Israel lobbies.” (Al Madani, March 14th, 2004) China saw the opportunity, and pursued it.

In 1985, Saudi Arabia secretly purchased 36 CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM), and 15 mobile launchers from China for the missile package worth \$3-3.5 billion (Huwaitin 2002:225; Al Sudairi 2012:16; Al Madani March 14th, 2004). These “missiles have a range of more than 1,500 miles and can carry a payload of more

than 4,000 lbs.” (Alterman and Garver, 2008: 32) Moreover, “some sources claim that a Chinese artillery battalion was also dispatched to Saudi Arabia to maintain and operate these purchased missiles with a potential range of 2,500 km in two separate bases south of Riyadh.” (Al Sudairi, 2012:16) When the deal was unveiled in 1988, Saudi Arabia moved swiftly to join the Non-Proliferation-Treaty (NPT) in order to allay U.S. concerns that the ballistic missiles could be used to deliver future nuclear warheads (Nuclear Threat Initiative July 2017; Al Sudairi 2012:16). In addition to confronting Iran, the Saudis’ aim was “leveraging [this deal] to obtain additional benefits from its existing security ties with the United States [rather] than laying the foundation for an extensive strategic partnership with China.” (Kechichian, February 9th, 2016)

From 1988 to 2016, Saudi Arabia’s collection of Chinese arms grew to include the following: PLZ-45 155-mm self-propelled howitzers, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), IRBMs, DF-21 missiles—with maintenance check and upgraded facilities (Al Sudairi 2012:16-17; Scobell and Nader 2016:43-44; SIPRI 2017).¹⁸⁴ From 2008 to 2011, China's sales of arms to Saudi Arabia amounted to \$700 million (Ramani, November 16th, 2016). In 2014, some reports pointed out that Saudi Arabia is interested in purchasing JF-17 fighters that are

¹⁸⁴Most of these military deals, not only with Saudi Arabia but with the other cases as well, are highly secretive and difficult to accurately estimate.

manufactured by China and Pakistan jointly; however, there is no sign that a contract has been signed (Kechichian February 9th, 2016; Keck January 24th, 2014).

As for Kuwait and China, they enjoyed growing commercial ties during seventies and eighties.¹⁸⁵ “The volume of China’s trade with Kuwait jumped from US\$20.44 million in 1970 to US\$33.88 million in 1972, then to US\$78.48 million in 1974, reaching US\$174.97 million 1979.” (Huwaidin 2002:192) Before 1990, China trade with Kuwait was estimated at \$700 million; and before the Iraqi invasion, there were around 20,000 Chinese workers living and working in Kuwait (Dorraj and English, 2013:57).

After the liberation of Kuwait, trade between the two countries significantly increased (Huwaidin, 2002:201). From 1991 to 1995, the trade volume between the two countries jumped from \$19 million in 1991 to \$100 million in 1993 and \$130 million in 1995 (Huwaidin 2002:201; Thafer 2014:101). In 2000, China’s export of goods to Kuwait reached to more than \$316 million, these exports have “increased more than nine-fold from \$192 million in 2001 to \$1.85 billion in 2010,” reaching up to \$5 billion in 2015 (Dorraj and English 2013:58; Kuwait Times April 8th, 2017). Bilateral trade between Kuwait and China has steadily increased, totaling \$12 billion in 2013, in 2015, it declined to \$11.25 billion, and to \$9.5 billion in 2016—because of

¹⁸⁵According to Olimat (2014), and Huwaidin (2002), Kuwait sent its first trade delegation to China in 1965, the delegation was led by Sheik Jabir Al Sabah—the Kuwaiti Finance Minister at the time and the main purpose behind this delegation is discussing the establishment of economic and trade ties between the two countries. China took the opportunity and show its desire to import oil and fertilizers from Kuwait (Olimat, 2014:127-128).

the dramatic decline in oil prices (Olimat 2014:127-128; KUNA September 4th, 2017; Alanba March 22nd, 2016).

According to the General Statistics Bureau in Kuwait in 2015, there are around 4,000 Chinese citizens living in Kuwait—most of them workers in Chinese companies. These Chinese companies are “currently taking part in several vital projects in Kuwait, implementing around 84 projects worth some \$18.12 billion, in oil, housing, and infrastructure sectors.” (KUNA, September 4th, 2017) What marks Sino-Kuwaiti economic and trade relationships is the existence of two vital economic Kuwait organizations which aim to strengthen trade and commercial ties between the two countries: the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), and the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA).

Since the eighties, Kuwait has been considered a vital source of loans to China through the KFAED (Huwaitin, 2002:193).¹⁸⁶ According to data obtained from KFAED, the organization has given China its first loan in 1982; the loan was “of an amount equivalent to about \$46.1 million to assist in financing Ningguo Cement Factory.” (KFAED, n.d.) During the last 25 years, KFAED has contributed in financing 35 to 39 major projects in China; through the loans it provided (KFAED, n.d.). The total amount of these loans is estimated at \$929 million to \$1billion, covering energy, transport, agriculture, and industry (KFAED n.d.; Alanba March 22nd, 2016). In an

¹⁸⁶After Kuwait’s liberation, Kuwait’s loans policy has resumed as KFAED has continued to provide China with “long-term, [and] low interest loans.” (Dorraj, English, 2013:58)

interview with a senior Kuwaiti official, he argued that China benefited not only from direct loans it had obtained from KFAED, but also from work and services contracts.¹⁸⁷ That benefit came from being a partner of local Kuwaiti companies in operating and building major projects, such as infrastructure projects either in Kuwait or in other regions, financed by KFAED.¹⁸⁸

The second economic entity that strengthens Sino-Kuwaiti trade ties is (KIA)—which is Kuwait’s Sovereign Wealth Fund. In 2011, KIA opened its representative office in Beijing, the Kuwait Investment Beijing Representative Office (KIRO), to look for investment opportunities in the following sectors: security, banking, real estate, transportation, construction and communication (KIA, n.d.). “KIRO is KIA’s first representative office after KIA’s London office which was established in 1953.” (KIA, n.d.) “Selecting China as the destination for KIA’s office was a logical decision because of what China offers in terms of an encouraging economic foundation.” (KIA, n.d.)

Even before the establishment of this office, KIA invested in China. In 2006, KIA purchased \$720 million worth of shares in the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China—one of China's biggest (Thafer 2014:104; Davidson 2010:16).¹⁸⁹ Also, according to the managing director of KIA Bader al-Saad, the deal has shown that KIA

¹⁸⁷Interview, February 3rd, 2016.

¹⁸⁸Interview, February 3rd, 2016.

¹⁸⁹According to Niazi, (2009), Kuwait recognized the importance of investing in China since 1980s, and “was the first Arab country to directly invest in China. The investments in the public as well as private sectors were mostly in oil and gas, and also in the banking and industrial sectors.”

has long-term strategic investment plans in China, and extensively works to extend these investments to other sectors (The New York Times, September 24th, 2006).

Moreover, Kuwait widened the scope of its investment in China. In 2005, Kuwait, represented by KIA, established the Kuwait China Investment Company (KCIC) with the China Investments Corporation (Thafer 2014:104; Cheng 2016: 45). “KCIC is 15 percent owned by KIA and has a capital base of about \$350 million, about half of which is held in cash. It has specialized in investments in Chinese agribusinesses, particularly those producing crops with a high export value, such as rice, wheat, corn and sorghum.” (Davidson, 2010: 17) Kuwait’s financial investments in China have increased 5 times through the last decade, reaching \$10 billion (Alanba March 22nd, 2016; KUNA October 16th, 2011). In 2009, Wen Jiabao, China’s former prime minister, has “pledged to allow the Public Investment Authority (PIA) of Kuwait to enroll at the Shanghai Stock Exchange in the capacity of a local investor and thus trade in the Chinese currency as a domestic trader.” (Niazi, 2009)

Between 2003 and 2015, China ranked 14 on Kuwait’s top inward investing countries, while China was Kuwait’s top recipient of outward investments for the same period (Dhaman, 2015). Data shows that between 2003 and 2015, China received \$9.264 million from Kuwait as investments in various projects—mostly in the energy sector, while Chinese investments in Kuwait were estimated by \$97 million (Dhaman, 2015). Between 2012 and 2016, China ranked third on Kuwait’s top inward investment countries, with five companies operating in six projects for a total value of \$685 million

(Dhaman, 2016). China State Construction Engineering Corporation alone is operating projects valued at \$580 million (Dhaman, 2016). Chinese companies operate “in Kuwait [mostly] in the fields of communications, infrastructure, construction, labor, [and] engineering services.” (Niazi, 2009) They have been awarded contracts to build Boubyan port in 2010, and the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University in 2011 (Edwards, 2013:71). Moreover, Huawei “has launched Huawei Technologies, a limited liability Kuwaiti company,” to invest \$1.68 billion in Kuwait’s information and communications technologies sector (KUNA October 19th, 2015; KUNA June 23rd, 2015). Being the first Chinese company to obtain a Kuwaiti license to set up a local company tax free on capital transfer and earnings (KUNA October 19th, 2015; KUNA September 6th, 2017).

Kuwait and China sought to strengthen their economic ties and boost their bilateral trade by establishing various economic bodies such as Joint Economic and Trade Committee in 1986, and China-Kuwait Economic Cooperation Forum (KUNA July 28th, 2002; Olimat 2014:129). The latter “is the main platform of dialogue among the business community in two countries.” (Olimat, 2014:129) The Forum’s last meeting in 2013, paved the way for 200 enterprises from Kuwait to communicate directly with their Chinese counterparts and discuss investment chances in China (Olimat, 2016:116).

In terms of arms deals, Kuwait and China signed a memorandum of understanding on military cooperation after Kuwait’s liberation in 1995, which is

China's first military agreement with an Arab Gulf state (Thafer 2014:100; Huwaidin 2002:200). Under the agreement "China agreed to further develop the Kuwaiti armed forces," through direct training and maintaining the Kuwaiti armed forces (Thafer 2014:100; Huwaidin 2002:200). Following that, China has signed its first arms contract with Kuwait in 1998 (Thafer 2014:100; Olimat 2014:132; Huwaidin 2002: 199-200).¹⁹⁰

From 1998 to 2001, Kuwait purchased 18 PLZ-45 155mm self-propelled guns, PCZ-45 ALV, Type-85 APC, W-653/Type-653 ARV, all these weapons were part of two deals that are estimated to amount around \$387 million (SIPRI 2016; Thafer 2014:100; Olimat 2014:132; Huwaidin 2002:200).¹⁹¹ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Trend Indicator Values (TIVs)—that is expressed in millions—arms exports to Kuwait from China were \$15 million in 2001, in 2002 \$20 million, in 2003 \$21million, totaling \$56 million (SIPRI, 2016).

As for Oman, "Chinese exports to Oman dominated the trade relations between the two countries," during the late seventies and the eighties; they have increased significantly from \$5.85 million in 1976, to \$9.06 million in 1983, and to \$10 million in 1986 (Huwaidin, 2002: 209). In order to facilitate and enhance these commercial ties, the two countries have established a bilateral trade commission in 1989 (Dorraj

¹⁹⁰In their article "China, Global Energy, and the Middle East," (2007), Steve A. Yetiv and Chunlong Lu state that "a senior Kuwaiti official asserted that China had coerced Kuwait by hinting strongly that if Kuwait did not engage in the \$300 million purchase, China would withhold its support at the UN for extending trade sanctions against Iraq. But, Kuwait also may have been seeking to improve ties with a critical UN member." (212) The same information has been mentioned in "China's Middle East Policy," by Barry Rubin, (1998): 345-353.

¹⁹¹Armored recovery vehicle (ARV), armored logistics vehicle (ALV), armored personnel carrier (APC).

and English 2013:59; Davidson 2010: 14). During the nineties “China’s trade with Oman... increased from being only 3 per cent of China’s total trade with the Gulf and Peninsula region countries in the 1980s to 15 per cent” due to the significant increase in China’s import of Omani crude oil (Huwaidin, 2002: 212).

“From 1991 to 2010, China’s export of goods to Oman increased from approximately US\$9 million to over US\$900 million.” (Dorraaj and English, 2013:59) From 2010 to 2013, bilateral trade between China and Oman doubled, and in 2013 the trade volume between the two countries estimated at \$23 billion annually which has made Oman China’s fourth largest trading partner in the Middle East (Olimat 2014:162; Rakhmat May 10th, 2014). In 2014, their bilateral trade was \$25.861 billion, and is expected to hit \$50 billion by the end of this decade (Olimat, 2016: 135)—Like that of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, oil trade represents the bulk of Sino-Omani bilateral trade.

There are around forty Chinese companies conducting business in Oman (Rakhmat, May 10th, 2014). Sino-Omani investments have been steadily growing; with Chinese investments in Oman reaching \$2 billion in 2015; while trade between them was up to \$17.2 billion (Al Monitor April 19th, 2017). The Sino-Omani trade investments cover a “wide range of areas such as oil and gas, [petrochemical industry], construction, power-plant construction, irrigation systems, highways and road construction, housing unit building, airports, and infrastructure projects, port-

development, fishing industry, ship-building, telecommunication, IT, consumer goods, services, appliances, etc.” (Olimat, 2014:162)

The Chinese FDI flows to Oman from 2006 to 2010 were (in \$ millions and annually): -16, 9, 49, 27, 31, respectively (UNCTAD). Between 2003 and 2015, China’s inward investments in Oman totaled around \$3.473 million through three Chinese companies that are operating in three projects (Dhaman, 2015). Among these investors/companies are Huawei, and Sino Hydro (Export.gov, August 4th, 2017). China is also one of the destinations for Oman’s Sovereign Fund outward investments that were estimated at \$14.2 billion in 2014 (Olimat, 2014:164). From 2003 to 2015, Oman’s outward investments in China have been estimated at \$85 million (Dhaman, 2015).

One massive joint investment and project that Oman and China are designing and planning for, predicted to boost trade between the two nations, is the Duqm port. “With little cash of his own, the Sultan [of Oman] is letting Chinese managers expand Duqm, his new Indian Ocean port, in exchange for \$10 billion of investments earmarked for Chinese companies.” (The Economist, July 8th, 2017) Duqm’s “planned investments include an oil refinery, a cement plant, a factory making pipes for the petroleum industry, an automobile assembly plant, and a 1-gigawatt solar power generation facility.”(Reuters, May 23rd, 2016)¹⁹² The two countries are jointly working

¹⁹²A partnership deal has been signed between the Oman Oil Company (OOC) and the Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) to develop the Duqm oil refinery and Petrochemical Complex (SEZD) (Times of Oman, November 9th, 2016). This refinery will be worth “around \$7 billion, with a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day when it is completed in 2019.” (Al Monitor, April 19th, 2017)

to establish the Sino-Omani industrial City (SOIC) in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Duqm in Oman (Times of Oman April 8th, 2017; Reuters May 23rd, 2016). Oman is preparing to sign agreements with various Chinese companies to carry out numerous projects; including methanol and diesel projects (Times of Oman April 8th, 2017; Reuters May 23rd, 2016). This industrial city is expected to attract billions of dollars including \$370 million that Chinese firms will spend on infrastructure; and all the projects in this port are expected to be financed by Chinese banks (Times of Oman April 8th, 2017; Reuters May 23rd, 2016).

Currently, Oman's arms and military equipment are massively dominated by western weapon systems, specifically American and British (Olimat, 2014:170). According to SIPRI data of TIV exports to Oman from 2001 to 2016, Oman has purchased Chinese weapons only in 2002 and 2003; in 2002, it purchased Type-90 122mm self-propelled multiple rocket launcher (MRL) and acquired APCs in 2003. However, this limited arms trade does not mean that Oman is not considering China as a promising source of weapons; recent Chinese military advancements were appealing in Oman's eyes as a possible alternative to Western weapons (Olimat, 2016: 141).

Since the last decade, Sino-Iranian trade has significantly improved (Olimat, 2014:57). In 1990, the trade volume was \$314 million; in 1993, it rose to \$700 million (Rubin 1998:347; Douglas et al. 2006:7; Salman and Geeraerts 2015:112). After 1993 "Sino-Iranian bilateral trade has been skyrocketing due to China's ever-growing thirst for energy resources and Iran's desire to protect its position as a major power in the

Middle East.” (Salman and Geeraerts, 2015:112) In 1994, the trade volume between Iran and China reached \$400 million, then it jumped to \$5.6 billion in 2003, \$7 billion in 2004, \$10 billion in 2005, \$27 billion in 2008 (Olimat 2013:157; Alterman and Garver 2008:66). In 2009, China has surpassed the European Union (EU) and became Iran’s largest and most important trading partner, with the bilateral trade volume reaching \$21 billion, which rose to \$29.4 billion in 2010 (Olimat 2013:160; Bazoobandi 2013:64; Wuthnow 2013:109). In 2012, trade volume between China and Iran was around \$36.5 billion (Olimat 2014: 58; Scott April 6th, 2016; Keck March 22nd, 2013). From 2013 to 2014, the trade volume between Tehran and Beijing has witnessed a 72% rise from \$39.54 to \$51.85 billion (The Iran Project March 3rd, 2015; Scott April 6th, 2016). Then it dropped to \$33.8 billion in 2015, and to \$31.2 billion in 2016 (Tehran Times, February 4th, 2017).¹⁹³ However, according to Iran Daily, the bilateral trade between the two countries is predicted to rise again; trade between the two countries “from January to June in 2016 amounted to \$13.7 billion, [whereas]in the first half of 2017 [it]stood at \$18 billion, showing a 31% increase compared to the figure for the same period in 2016.” (Iran Daily, July 26th, 2017)

¹⁹³The decline of trade between China and Iran in 2015-2016 is a direct result of the decline in oil prices.

Table 5.2 Sino-Iranian Trade Volume from 2008-2016

Years	Volume/billion USD
2008	27
2010	29.4
2012	36.5
2014	51.8
2016	31.2

Compiled by the author

The presence of Chinese companies in Iran reached more than 100 companies in 2010; operating in “Tehran’s subway, power stations, ferrous metals smelting factories, and petrochemical plants.” (Bazoobandi 2013:65; Aarts and Rijsingen 2007:33) The significant growth in bilateral trade between Tehran and Beijing was reflected in the increasing number of those companies. Currently, there are “250 Chinese companies [that are] involved in a variety of projects or retailing in low-cost consumer products in Iran.” (Bagwandeem, 2014:16)

Iran has also sought to boost and expand Sino-Iranian ties in all economic sectors, especially the non-energy area, by establishing various economic platforms. These include: the Chinese-Iranian Joint Commission on Economic, Trade, Scientific,

and Technical Cooperation in 1993, the China-Iran Business Forum, and the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce and Industries (I.C.C.C.I.) (Scott April 6th, 2016; Bagwandeem 2014:16; Olimat 2014:59). The number of (I.C.C.C.I.) members has jumped “from 65 members in 2001 to 6,000 today furnish[ing]... evidence of the expansion of the [economic] relationship.” (Scott, April 6th, 2016)

Chinese FDI to Tehran is not only found in energy sector, but also in non-energy sectors, “where the Chinese North Industries Corporation (NORINCO) is helping to expand the Tehran subway system, a Chinese fiber optic manufacturer is helping build a broadband network, and Chinese automobile and television manufacturers have opened factories.” (Abdel-Khalek and Korayem, 2007:415) Also, China showed its “interest in strengthening labour ties between the two nations and the possibility of initiating co-operation with regards to aerospace ventures,” in 2005, and in 2009, during the Iran-China Economic Cooperation Conference, “many Chinese companies finalised negotiations and signed agreements to improve Iranian infrastructure and the country’s mining and construction industries.” (Bagwandeem, 2014:16) As a result, in 2011, the two countries have “signed an agreement aimed to boost bilateral cooperation in the industrial and mining sectors. As reported, this agreement envisages \$20 billion of Chinese investments in the economy of the Islamic republic.” (Kozhanov, 2014:117) Moreover, in 2012, China won construction contracts to improve and build the Iranian high-speed railroads with estimated amount of investment up to \$1 billion (Hong 2014:17; Kozhanov 2014:124). On the other hand, Iran has announced its intention to invests in various projects in China including “forming a joint oil refining company,

taking an active role in the creation and development of the Chinese strategic oil reserve, and to cooperate in a project for the construction of a large department store in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” however, these suggested projects have not reached the stage of formal agreement (Kozhanov, 2014:118).¹⁹⁴

Sino-Iranian arms deals were initiated during the Iranian-Iraqi war that lasted for eight years, from 1980 to 1988 (Olimat 2013:153; Rubin 1998: 348). Since the eighties, China has delivered weapons to Iran that have gone far “beyond simple transactions to include transfer of designs, manufacturing techniques, and technology.” (Chen, 2011:3) Also, China has become “Iran’s number one supplier of unconventional arms.” (Rubin, 1998: 348) China has provided Iran with Silkworm (HY-2), (CS-801), (CS-802), (C-107) anti-ship missiles, and tactical guided missiles—that are manufactured specifically for Iran (Alterman and Garver, 2008:69). Also, China supplied Iran “armoured vehicles; fighter planes; artillery; anti-tank,” and played a supportive role in developing “Iran’s missile, nuclear and chemical warfare capability.” (Rubin, 1998: 348-349) From 2002 to 2012, Iran was China’s top arms consumer in the Middle East with amount of \$874 million, and “in 2012, China’s unconventional arms sales to the entire region [Middle East] totaled a mere \$45 mn. (\$44 mn. to Iran).” (Murphy, 2013:22)

¹⁹⁴This can be explained that Iran itself is in desperate need to attract, not send, FDI in order to boost its economy and develop its energy and non-energy sectors. Naser Al Tamimi, in his article “Why Iran is not the next China?,” (October 8th, 2016), touches upon Iran’s need for foreign direct investments to improve its economic sector; especially the energy industry.

China and the four Gulf states sought to boost and widen the scope of their bilateral trade. However, exporting oil and energy products to China continues to be the core of the Gulf states'—especially the Arab Gulf states'—trade ties with China. Exporting oil to China and inwards and outwards investments, and cooperation in the energy sector dominate Sino-Arab Gulf trade ties. Meanwhile, other aspects of Sino-Arab Gulf trade ties such as arms trade are very limited and constrained for two reasons: first, China's arms low quality compared to the West's, mainly the U.S., and the Arab Gulf states' long-standing security alliance with the U.S.—as it has been explained in Chapter 4. As for Iran, oil also represents a vital aspect in Sino-Iranian trade ties, but, unlike the other Arab Gulf states, arms trade represents a central aspect of China's trade ties with Iran. Also, when comparing the number of Chinese business companies operating in Iran, it is found that there are more than 250 Chinese companies operating in Iran, while there are 140 in Saudi Arabia. It can be stated that the scope of Sino-Iranian trade ties with Iran is wider than that which the three Arab Gulf states have with China.

After reviewing the economic ties in the energy and trade sectors, and one-on-one economic commissions between China and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran; the following section focuses on collective agreements, economic institutions, and joint economic projects which include China and the previously mentioned states.

Collective Economic Agreements, Institutions, and Joint Economic Projects
Free Trade Agreement Talks between China and GCC

Economic growth between China and the GCC from 1993 to 2004—and to a large extent the tension that occurred in USA-GCC political ties after 9/11—have motivated GCC states and China to extend and intensify their political and economic ties by launching Free Trade Agreement talks in 2004 (Mei 2009: 8-11; Al Sudairi February 9th, 2016:2; Al Sudairi 2012:17-18; Cheng 2016:48; Yetiv and Lu: 2007:206-207).

In July 2004, the Finance Ministers of GCC states and the Secretary General of the GCC made a joint visit to China, where they met with Premier Wen Jiabao and their Chinese counterparts (Mei 2009: 8-11; Cheng 2016:52-53; Liu 2016:11-12). The fruits of this meeting were signing the Framework Agreement on Economic, Trade, Investment and Technological Cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and GCC states, and launching Free Trade Agreement (FTA) talks between GCC states and China (Mei 2009: 8-11; Al Sudairi February 9th, 2016:2; Al Sudairi 2012:17-18; Yetiv and Lu: 2007:206-207).

Launching FTA with China has economic and political implications for GCC countries. The economic implication is helping these countries “diversify oil-import sources/export destinations.” (Mei, 2009: 8) The political implication is providing these countries with major opportunities “to balance US dominance of the region. After 9/11, the GCC leaders felt an urgent need to reduce US presence in the region. Thus, what emerged was that the GCC states tended to seek alternatives in the East [precisely

China].” (Mei, 2009: 8) Signing FTA agreements was one big attempt by GCC leaders to limit U.S. domination in their region on one hand, and opening new economic doors and find new markets for their oil products in China on the other.

From 2004 to 2012, there were six rounds of negotiations between the two sides, however, “progress so far appears to be limited” for many reasons such as differences in service sectors, and difficulties and differences on market access (Cheng 2016:53; Al Sudairi 2012:17-18; Mei 2009:9). GCC investors face difficulties in “reaching certain sectors in China, especially in the areas of satellite communications, as such investments faced various procedural restrictions.” (Mei, 2009:9) Another issue is the disagreement over petrochemical and petroleum products tariffs (Mei 2009:10; Al Sudairi February 9th, 2016:2; Al Sudairi 2012:17-18). China fears that the Arab Gulf states’ low-cost petrochemical products undermine its own investments in the sector (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014:9). This prompted China to impose restraints on GCC petrochemical exporters to protect its petrochemical sector from competition (Andersen and Jiang, 2014: 27). In an interview with a senior official, he stressed that the economic reasons mentioned previously, along with China’s protective policies, were the only reasons preventing the finalization of FTA talks.¹⁹⁵

On the other hand, a scholar claims that economic reasons were valid only until 2011, and in that year a political reason surfaced.¹⁹⁶ He claims that after the Syrian

¹⁹⁵Interview, May 21st, 2016.

¹⁹⁶Interview, May 22nd, 2016.

revolution in 2011, with Iranian involvement and support to Al Assad regime, GCC states—especially the Saudis—have demanded from China a more active political and security role in the Gulf region. The GCC started to blend politics with economic needs when dealing with China; whereas China disagreed and refused to interfere.¹⁹⁷ As a result of these factors, FTA talks were suspended for seven years, from 2009 to 2016 (Xinhua, January 20th, 2016).

Economic Institutions

Many platforms and institutions have been established collectively and include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and China on one hand, or include Iran and China on the other. These institutions aim to improve and expand the relationships between these countries and China in all aspects including economic ties. China, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman are all members in collective forums such as the GCC-China Trade Conference formed in 1992, the GCC-China Regular Consultations formed in 1996 that support increased economic and trade cooperation, the China-GCC Economic Forum established in 2010, the China-GCC Trade and Economic Joint Committee established in 2010, the China-GCC Strategic Dialogue established in 2010, and China-GCC Forum on Sustainable Development formed in 2012. Also, these states are members in bigger institutions that include China and Arab countries such as the China-Arab Friendship Association which was established in 2001, and the China-Arab State

¹⁹⁷Interview, August 15th, 2016; Interview, March 1st, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016.

Cooperation Forum (CACF) established in 2004. It is important to mention that Iran is not a member of any of the previously mentioned organizations.

A former senior official from the Arab Gulf region views all these economic organizations that include Arab Gulf states and China, especially the CACF and GCC-China Strategic Dialogue, as “talk shows.”¹⁹⁸ These organizations are useless with weak influence on the progress of Sino-Arab Gulf ties (Karar, 2014).¹⁹⁹ For example, after more than a decade of the establishment of CACF, no progress was achieved in Sino-Arab ties either economically or politically (Karar, 2014). The failure of these organizations and forums in achieving real economic goals or progress in their ties with China—despite the general approach by the Arab Gulf leaders that shows willingness and enthusiasm for any collective work with China—can be explained by two reasons: the first is the absence of economic and political expertise from the Arab Gulf states’ side. Although Arab Gulf states show their support for any Chinese economic involvement or political participation through the previous dialogues and forums, these states have minimum knowledge of China and they lack experts or specialists on China, its foreign policies, its strategic thinking, and its culture and language (Karar 2014: Al Sudiari 2016).²⁰⁰ The absence of appropriate knowledge of China makes any economic or political talk difficult and slow. As an obvious example, for 14 years the FTA between the Arab Gulf states and China is still pending. The Arab Gulf states thought

¹⁹⁸Interview, March 31st, 2016.

¹⁹⁹Interview, April 5th, 2016; Interview, August 15th, 2016; Interview, February 22nd, 2016.

²⁰⁰Karar (2014), goes further by stating that the Arab countries do not know what they want from China, whereas on the contrary China knows exactly what it needs and looks for from its ties with the Arab World and the Arab Gulf states (166).

they could use this agreement to pressure China regarding its position toward the region's security issues, however, they misunderstood China and miscalculated the situation. The Arab Gulf states should know that China would not allow them to blackmail it in order to finalize this agreement. They should know that China refuses to mix its economic needs with their security needs. The second is the absence of planned and long-term strategy or vision by the Arab Gulf states toward China (Karar, 2014). The Arab Gulf states do not have a long-term strategy toward China that aims to strengthen their ties with it economically or politically. And, unless these two elements are fulfilled, no progress is predicted to occur in Sino-Arab Gulf ties in particular, and Sino-Arab ties in general.

On the other side, Iran is a member in the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) established in 2002—as well as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman; and since 2005, Iran is the only state among these cases that is an official observer SCO (Aarts and Rijsingen 2007:33; Andersen and Jiang 2014:34). It is forecast that Iran's status will be upgraded from an observer to full member, and China supports Tehran's ascension to full membership (Ermito, February 7th, 2016). Granting Iran full membership will have both political and economic consequences in the Gulf region as it will path the way for “Beijing... [to] arrive at the Gulf through a Persian doorway.” (Karasik, February 2016:2)

Although the SCO is widely considered a regional security arrangement that aims to fight terrorism, extremism, and separatism, there are economic goals both

China and Iran are looking to achieve through working under the umbrella of SCO (Yetiv and Lu, 2007:213). Among these goals are: building and strengthening common energy cooperation, and enhancing economic integration in Central Asia (Douglas et al. 2006:3; Tiezzi September 13th, 2014). Moreover, China is utilizing its position in the SCO to promote economic integration plans and projects as its “idea for a Silk Road Economic Belt that would include the SCO members and observer states.” (Tiezzi, September 13th, 2014)

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Project

China has promoted two promising and ambitious projects; inviting all the aforementioned states to take part: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

AIIB

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was founded in 2014, with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran expressing their willingness to be part of the China-led bank. All of the mentioned states have joined the bank and are among the 57 founding members—Kuwait remaining a prospective founding member (Al Sudairi February 9th, 2016:3; Karasik February 2016:1; Andersen and Jiang 2014: 34; Minghao February 3rd, 2016:3; Dakka January 25th, 2016:2).

Iran’s membership in AIIB is explained by the strong long-standing Sino-Iranian ties, the economic benefits the AIIB brings to Iran—which suffered from rigid economic sanctions—and the antagonistic relationship with the United States. Interestingly, the three Arab Gulf states—along with other U.S. allies such as the UK,

France, and Israel—have joined AIIB despite the opposition of the U.S., their long-standing traditional ally. The U.S. asked its allies to “think twice about signing up to a new China-led Asian development bank that Washington sees as a rival to the World Bank.” (Sobolewski and Lange, March 17th, 2015) The three Arab Gulf states measured their economic and political interest; they recognized the stronger political ties their membership would bring, and the economic growth it would generate. Membership in AIIB could provide them with political leverage and a new playable card when facing the U.S.. They could utilize their membership in this bank to strengthen their relationship with China; prompting increased involvement in their political and security questions—namely in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Simultaneously, the Arab Gulf states would be making a statement to the U.S. hinting that they would not abide by its guidelines anymore, especially in pursuing their economic and political interests. A scholar argues that, by their joining AIIB, the Arab Gulf states were not only sending a message to the United States, but they were also challenging it.²⁰¹ Economically, these states would benefit from the economic integration, trade opportunities, and infrastructure investments AIIB would bring to Asia in general, and to the Gulf region in particular.²⁰²

²⁰¹Interview, January 31st, 2016.

²⁰²Interview, May 23rd, 2016.

Table 5.3: The Membership of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran in AIIB

Countries	Membership Date	Shares: (million USD)	Voting Power
Saudi Arabia	February 19 th , 2016	2,544.6 Percentage of shares: 2.65	Number of Votes: 28,097 Percentage of votes:2.49
Kuwait [*]	-----	5,360 Percentage of shares:0.55	Percentage of votes:0.73
Oman	June 21, 2016	259.2 Percentage of shares:0.26	Number of Votes: 5,243 Percentage of votes:0.46
Iran	January 16 th , 2017	1,580.8 Percentage of shares:1.64	Number of Votes: 18,459 Percentage of votes:1.63

*Kuwait missed the 2016 deadline to ratify its entry; however, Kuwait is still considered a prospective founding Member (Feng and Mitchell, March 28th, 2017). Source: Data compiled by the author from Asian Infrastructure Investments Bank Website: <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>, <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/basic-documents/articles-of-agreement/index.html>

OBOR: Do Arab Gulf States Matter?

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the OBOR initiative during a visit to Kazakhstan (Xinhua, May 14th, 2017). This Chinese initiative is a vast project encompassing more than 60 countries, from Asia, Europe and Africa (Qian 2016:27; Albert May 11th, 2017). OBOR aims to expand economic integration and development through linking China to the rest of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe by constructing channels, corridors, railways, roads, pipelines, ports, and telecommunication infrastructure (Qian 2016:27; Albert May 11th, 2017). Moreover,

OBOR “cover[s] not only construction of the necessary transportation infrastructure but also the creation of the industrial and financial infrastructure necessary for effective development in Central Asian states, in particular. Such development is needed not only for Central Asian economies to constitute effective regional partners for China, but also to ensure long-term political stability in the region.” (Niblock, February 16th, 2016)

Figure 5.9: China’s OBOR Map.



Source: (Albert, May 11th, 2017).

In order to ensure the success of OBOR, China needs the input and contribution of the Gulf region—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Iran among others. The Gulf region enjoys a significant geographical location that cannot be bypassed (Liu 2016:15;

Qian 2016: 33). The Gulf is “located at the intersection of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.” (Liu, 2016:15) And is “situated along the ancient route of the Belt and Road.” (Qian, 2016:33) China is conscious to this geographical importance and realizes the economic value these states present; “these countries either export energy and resources to China, or provide transit in cross border transportation corridors, or have great influence over regional security issues.” (Ze and Chenxi, 2015:11) The four states recognize the huge opportunities OBOR brings to the enhancement of their ties with China (Liu, 2016:15). They realize the OBOR project benefits them “by raising export and transit revenues of resource-rich countries and transit countries, securing market and building infrastructure for energy and resource exploitation.” (Ze and Chenxi, 2015:40) Thus, they have their willingness to work and collaborate with China to ensure the success and accomplishment of OBOR (Qian, 2016:36-43).

It would be presumed that the Arab Gulf states would be an important component of OBOR. However, only Iran has been central so far. The official OBOR map shows that Iran, rather than Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or Oman, is the most crucial country and the key partner in this project. This map—which was issued by China’s official news agency—clearly shows that “the main communication routes do not lead to or through the [Arab] Gulf. The One Belt One Road, as currently envisaged, passes through [only] the northern part of Iran (with Tehran on the route), without any provision for an extension to the GCC states.” (Niblock, February 16th, 2016)

It is Iran that is viewed by China as crucial partner “to the success of China’s trans-continental, infrastructure-focused One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative in ways that [these states, especially] Saudi Arabia, [are] not.”²⁰³ (Dorsey, March 12th, 2017) Iran shares borders with crucial countries for OBOR’s success such as Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Tanchum 2015; Ze and Chenxi 2015). China realizes that it is Iran’s participation in OBOR that leads to “robust Sino-Iranian geopolitical cooperation [which paves the way for China to eventually] secure [its] growing economic domination in Central Asia.” (Tanchum, 2015:3)

Niblock claims that the reason why the GCC is not currently linked to OBOR is the conflicting and tense relations across the Gulf region (Niblock, February 16th, 2016). He believes the troubled and hostile relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a major obstacle facing the success of GCC integration in this project. In his words: “the creation of major transnational land communications... requires close coordination and cooperation between the governments concerned. Given the confrontational relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in particular, there is no basis for collaborative planning, collective management or even practical dialogue. The GCC stands to lose more from this than Iran.” (Niblock, February 16th, 2016)

Another scholar goes further by arguing that the Arab Gulf states are not taking OBOR seriously enough.²⁰⁴ Al Madani defines two other factors in weakening their

²⁰³Dorsey’s view depends on Micha’el Tanchum’s study published in (2015); in this study, Tanchum argues Iran’s natural gas future production, not Saudi oil, will radically reshape “Eurasian energy architecture and, as a consequence, reshape Eurasian geopolitics.” (1)

²⁰⁴Interview, May 23rd, 2016.

participation in OBOR, related to the Arab Gulf states' strategic view, and the influence of their ties with the United States (Al Madani, October 9th, 2016). He contends Arab Gulf states are still hesitant about complete participation in, and full gain from, the OBOR project because they lack a clear and assured view (Al Madani, October 9th, 2016). They do not possess a clear road map, and plan to deal with China in general, and the massive diverse Chinese economic projects (Al Madani, October 9th, 2016). He goes further by claiming Arab Gulf states are also suffering from the pressure of their long-standing ally, the U.S.; preventing them from engaging fully with China and the OBOR project (Al Madani, October 9th, 2016). Therefore, he encourages these states to refuse American domination and take serious steps regarding OBOR (Al Madani, October 9th, 2016).

After all the above, do Arab Gulf states matter in the OBOR? Till this moment, the answer is No. It is true that there are many optimistic talks between China and the Arab Gulf states regarding their potential role and their participation in this project. However, these talks are merely talks without active steps to translate them into real participation. There are no current or ongoing infrastructures projects in these states that are related to or apart of the OBOR. Also, there are talks to link the current or planned Chinese investments in Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia to be part of OBOR. But, these are still just words. On the other hand, as the map shows, Iran is central to OBOR. Building infrastructures related to OBOR is ongoing in Iran and "Chinese workers are busily modernizing one of the country's major rail routes, standardizing

gauge sizes, improving the track bed and rebuilding bridges, with the ultimate goal of connecting Tehran to Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.” (Erdbrink, July 25th, 2017)

After reviewing China’s multi-economic ties with the four Gulf states, it is crucial to investigate which side is China closer to economically, the Arab Gulf states’ side or Iran’s, and why. There are three different views regarding this question: the first view sees China closer to the Arab Gulf states, the second view argues that China is closer to both sides, and the third view sees China closer to Iran.

Who Really Matter More to China? Arab Gulf States or Iran?

Among the three Arab Gulf states on one side, and Iran on the other, which side is China ultimately closer to and builds its hopes on, and why? There are three different views on this question. The first maintains that China is economically closer to the Arab Gulf states—especially Saudi Arabia. Holders of this opinion point to the high volume of trade between Arab Gulf states and China, the dramatic increase in joint energy projects and energy commitments, and the growth of internal and external investment between the Arab Gulf states and China.²⁰⁵ This view also claims the three Arab Gulf states—especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—have a stronger financial capability to widen their economic cooperation with China than Iran has. These states have the capacity to pump money into both energy and non-energy sectors, ensuring their upper hand in the economic competition between them and Iran.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵Interview, February 24th, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016; Interview, March 13th, 2016; Interview, May 21st, 2016.

²⁰⁶Interview, March 13th, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016.

The second view argues that China is economically close to both sides.²⁰⁷ China's economic needs force it to keep its economic ties open and continually strong with both sides; it needs both sides to sustain its economic rise. China recognizes what each side can provide and understands how to take advantage of this knowledge for its own interests. China realizes it needs oil from Arab Gulf states as well as cheap Iranian oil; alongside both the financial ability of Arab Gulf states and their investments, and Iran's huge potential market. China desires economic involvement, integration, and cooperation with both sides; therefore, it invests in both of them. Both sides realize this fact and reciprocate China's policy. The two sides have shown China they are also seeking closer economic ties: both joining the AIIB, establishing joint economic forums, expressing their willingness to participate or participating in OBOR, and working to attract China to gain from its economic rise.

The third view, and the one that this dissertation advocates, contends that China is closer to Iran, and that the latter is the real economic gem in the Gulf region. Iran represents a prominent economic partner, with a huge potential market and energy resources in the long term.²⁰⁸ Iran's market has 80 million consumers with no Western or American competition; while in the Arab Gulf States, China has to compete over the market with the EU, the U.S., and other Asian competitors such as India and Japan.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷Interview, February 28th, 2016; Interview, May 3rd, 2016; Interview, July 17th, 2016; Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, August 14th, 2016; Interview, May 20th, 2016; Interview, January 31st, 2016; Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, March 2nd, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016; Interview, May 22nd, 2016; Interview, October 5th, 2016. There were two different interviews in May 22 and two different interviews in May 23, 2016.

²⁰⁸Interview, April 5th, 2016; Interview, August 15th, 2016; Interview, March 10th, 2016; Interview, February 22nd, 2016; Interview, March 1st, 2016; Interview, March 31st, 2016; Interview, May 29th, 2016.

²⁰⁹Interview, May 23rd, 2016.

Ironically, the “China’s Arab Policy Paper” that was published in 2016 supports this view. Although, the paper aimed to explain China’s policy toward the Arab world, but in reality, it did not include much detail and was evidently vague. The China’s Arab Policy Paper is “full of platitudes... [and] did not contain one specific policy position.” (Scobell, 2018:13) Moreover, the paper offered an important indicator about who China is looking for as a promising economic partner. Surprisingly, it was Iran, not any of the Arab countries.²¹⁰ This paper reveals China will continue to improve the trade structure and push for the sustained steady development of two-way trade with Arab countries, in order to raise the trade volume to \$600 billion by the end of the decade (‘China’s Arab Policy Paper’ 2016:3; Wang May 9th, 2017). In parallel, China and Iran have “mapped out a wide-ranging 25-year plan to broaden relations and expand trade.” (Motevalli, 2016) According to this plan, both countries are determined to increase the trade volume among them to reach \$600 billion over the next decade (or US\$60 billion a year) (Motevalli, 2016). This volume of trade “is equal to the trade volume between China and the whole Arab world.”²¹¹

Finally, this view emphasizes China’s preparation to retain the economic advantage in Iran after the sanctions are lifted. Many scholars and experts believe the economic sanctions on Iran have made China “the only grocery in the block;” China stood with Iran throughout the sanctions and worked extensively to lift them.²¹² As a result, Iran will welcome China and allow it to be one of its biggest investors—

²¹⁰Interview, February 22nd, 2016; Interview, March 1st, 2016.

²¹¹Interview, February 22nd, 2016.

²¹²Interview, May 23rd, 2016.

especially in infrastructure and energy.²¹³ For all the aforementioned reasons, China is thoroughly deepening its economic ties with Iran, and avoiding any jeopardy to these ties put forward by its relationship with the Arab Gulf States. China's ties with Iran are fundamental to the extent that they prevent China from taking the side of the Arab Gulf states or getting closer to them.²¹⁴

There is no doubt that the Arab Gulf states are economically important in China's strategic agenda based on their role in meeting its energy demands. However, Iran is, for many reasons, more important and closer to China than any of the Arab Gulf states. Unlike the Arab Gulf states, the scope of Sino-Iranian economic ties has more potential in energy and non-energy aspects, especially with the absence of Western competition. Sino-Iranian trade ties are expected to reach their highest level by the end of this decade, exceeding China's trade volume with the whole Arab World. China is Iran's chief arms supplier. It is also China's central partner in OBOR. And Iran is China's vital companion in active and powerful economic, political, and security organizations in Central Asia, such as the SCO.

²¹³Interview, May 23rd, 2016; Interview, January 31st, 2016; Interview, August 15th, 2016. For more details, read "China and Iran: An Emerging Partnership Post-Sanctions," By John Garver, (February 8th, 2016).

²¹⁴Interview, May 11th, 2016.

Chapter Six: Findings and Conclusion

This dissertation has four main findings. Finding one: China is rising only economically in the Arab Gulf region and its rise can be described as an “infant energy-oriented economic rise.” Finding two: China’s rise represents a “limited opportunity” for the Arab Gulf states. Finding three: the Arab Gulf states, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman, are pursuing a “dual hedging” strategy against the United States and China. Finding four: Iran and not the Arab Gulf states is China’s promising ally and strategic economic and military partner in the Gulf region. The following section explains each one of these findings.

Finding 1

China is only rising economically in the Arab Gulf region. This rise can be described as an “infant energy-oriented economic rise.”

This dissertation finds that in the Arab Gulf region, China is rising economically only. China is not rising in military, security, or political terms. Also, China’s economic rise is primarily in the energy sector making it even an “infant and energy oriented economic rise.”

The main reason that China is rising economically is that both the Arab Gulf states and China share mutual interests in the energy sector, which both sides are working to develop and upgrade. China needs the Arab Gulf’s oil to continue its rise, and the Arab Gulf states need China to buy their sole resource and improve their economic situation. In other words, China provides these states with security of energy demand, and they provide China with the security of energy supply.

Striving for similar economic goals, using the language of economic interests and profits, seeking to take advantage of one another, and working to snatch all possible economic opportunities that each can provide to secure their internal economic balance—and consequently their internal political balance and authority—have paved the way for China’s economic rise and for current and future good economic relationships with Arab Gulf states. These mutual economic needs and the desire to maximize economic gains for internal stability and survival have driven the Arab Gulf states to form closer economic ties with rising China and facilitated the way for China to rise economically in the region. These findings support the dissertation’s hypothesis #1 and hypothesis #2.

1. Arab Gulf states’ concerns for their internal stability and survival drive them to form closer ties with rising China.
2. Increasing economic benefits and profits motivate the Arab Gulf states to form closer ties with rising China.

Although China rises economically in the Arab Gulf region, it does not rise politically or militarily and is not expected to do so in the next few decades. This is explained by China’s position on the region’s security issues, represented by its strong support of Iran and Syria. China does not hesitate to show its strong support for Iran and its nuclear program; it participates strongly in improving Iran’s military and nuclear capacities and utilizes its position in the UN Security Council to block international sanctions on Iran or any military interference. This undoubtedly proves that China sees Iran as its winning card and its most promising ally and agent in the region. Therefore, China is not willing to compromise or sacrifice its ties with Iran to

satisfy the Arab Gulf states' security needs. As a result, Saudi and Kuwaiti leaders realize that China is closer economically, politically, and strategically to Iran than to them, making China a source of indirect threats and dangers to their external survival and stability.

The same has happened with Syria, Iran's strongest ally in the region, since 2011 and the uprisings in Syria. China has been siding with Assad's regime by preventing any international military action through the UN Security Council and cooperating with Russia and Iran to provide help to Assad to secure his survival. These Chinese positions made the Saudis and Kuwaitis perceive China as the protector of their enemies, Iran and Syria, which increased their fears and doubt of China and its role in their region.

In addition, Saudi Arabia, the most influential power in the region, is well aware of China's growing influence over Pakistan and the negative impact of this influence on Saudi-Pakistani ties and the region's security. These fears, in addition to China's low military capacity compared to the U.S. military capacity, prevent these states from embracing a Chinese military entry in the region. This finding supports and approves the dissertation's hypothesis #3.

3. The Arab Gulf states' concerns regarding strong Sino-Iranian ties restrain them from embracing China militarily in the region.

Finding 2

China's rise represents a "limited opportunity" for the Arab Gulf states.

The Arab Gulf states always look to their relationships with any rising and external power through the lens of their internal and external security needs and

demands. Security is the ultimate touchstone for the Arab Gulf states and the main element for any prospective relationship. At the same time, China always seeks to secure its economic rise by building ties to bring more economic advantages. Gaining economic benefits is China's main motivation and drive for any relationship outside its close periphery. Finding #1 shows that Arab Gulf states' internal economic needs are aligned with China's economic motivations toward them. However, the security needs of the Arab Gulf states, mainly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and China's strategic motivations toward the region are not aligned.

All three countries examined in this dissertation's cases have an "economic interdependency" relationship with China, but they do not depend on it politically or militarily. The Arab Gulf states do not share any security agenda with China as they do with the West. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have deep doubts about China's role in their security issues and problems. With China's negative stances regarding their security issues, Saudi and Kuwaiti leaders do not see China as the next safeguard; and they realize that China will not give them physical and military aid when they need it.

As for Oman, it has no reason to perceive China as its future security ally. The Omani-US security ties have not been negatively impacted neither by the events of 9/11 nor by the U.S. security policies changes regarding the region. Also, unlike Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Oman is not alarmed neither by the strong and improved Sino-Iranian ties nor by China's stances regarding the region's security issues, namely Iran's nuclear program and the Syrian crisis. Consequently, Oman does not perceive China as a source of threat to its external survival and stability. More comes later.

However, China's rise brings about economic benefits to the Arab Gulf states, but it lacks any military and security benefits. As long as China does not provide these states with security benefits, China's rise is not only an infant rise but also a limited opportunity. And this rise will continue to remain so as long as both sides do not share similar security motivations.

But, there is one condition if fulfilled, could make China's rise a bigger opportunity for Arab Gulf region. If China becomes less committed to Iran and Syria and reduces its political support for these two countries, all ties with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait will improve, including the security and military ones. In other words, China's rise would become a bigger opportunity that includes political and security aspects. However, this condition seems unlikely to be met under current circumstances, especially given that Iran and Syria promise China bigger opportunities including economic, political, strategic, and security benefits.

Also, perhaps a profound economic interdependence, and vital shared interests regarding the protection of energy supplies would as well move China to adopt an approach that serves the Arab Gulf's political and security interests, knowing that China always moves closer to those who offer more for its interests.

Finding 3 Dual Hedging Against: the U.S. and China

The Arab Gulf states, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman, are pursuing a "dual hedging" strategy against the United States and China. They are maintaining, and even increasing, their economic and commercial ties with China to secure their internal economic and political balance on the one hand, while on the other they are increasing military ties with the United States, as well as bolstering their own forces to secure their external survival and balance. Meanwhile, these countries are utilizing their ties with China to hedge against the possibility of a decrease in security support from the United States.

U.S.

The three countries studied here keep their strategic options open as they realize that it is the only tactic that secures them and ensures their internal and external survival. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman are looking to two external powers in their region and utilizing their ties with these powers to secure themselves internally and externally in the first place, playing the two powers against each other, and simultaneously hedging against both.

Since 2001, in order to limit U.S. power and influence on Arab Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait sought strongly to improve their economic and commercial ties with China. As explained in Finding #1 these states including Oman find that strong economic ties with China in the first place secure their internal economic and political balance on the one hand. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait found that these strong ties were vital tools to show the U.S. that there is a rising economic competitor and power in their region that has the potential to rise in the security aspect as well.

Improving economic ties with China has included the increase of energy trade, the establishment of one-to-one or collective economic and strategic forums and dialogues with China, and limited arms trade: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia purchased few Chinese weapons.²¹⁵ Recently, all the three countries defied pressure from the United States by joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to take advantage of AIIB

²¹⁵As explained before, the arms trade between the Arab Gulf states and China is limited and constrained by US influence and China's low military capacity.

economic privileges and the opportunities it promises, and at the same time Saudi Arabia and Kuwait keep signaling to the U.S. that they are no longer its blind followers.

Also, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait not only tried to utilize their economic ties with China to hedge against the U.S., they also used their political ties, namely the exchange of high political visits with China, to signal to the U.S. that they are looking to Asia and China for deeper political partnership and cooperation. As explained before, in 2006 the former Saudi King Abdullah made his first visit as a King to China to give the U.S. a strong signal that Saudi Arabia no longer saw the U.S. as its trusted ally.

It is highly important to clarify that Saudi Arabia has not only hedged against the U.S., but also played a vital and influential role towards the smaller Arab Gulf states, mainly Kuwait, to form and apply the same strategy. Kuwait was frustrated by U.S. security policy changes, especially its complete withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and the dramatic consequences of this withdrawal on Kuwait's external survival; Kuwait was disappointed by the U.S. support for the Arab Spring protest waves, especially in Bahrain, Egypt, and Syria; Kuwait feared the US-Iran nuclear deal in 2015 and its impact on empowering Iran. However, despite all this, Kuwait was not considering hedging against the United States. Kuwait is a small state surrounded by three big countries: Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Only under an external protection umbrella could Kuwait secure itself. Since 1990, U.S. protection has ensured Kuwait's external stability and security.

However, Kuwait found itself in a critical situation. On the one hand, Kuwait was frustrated by the U.S. security policy changes regarding the region, but could not upset its ties with its protector. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait's big brother in the region, started to hedge against the U.S., which put pressure on Kuwait to follow suit. If Saudi Arabia had not hedged against the U.S., Kuwait would have never taken that step.

As for Oman, it has always realized that its survival in an unstable and inflamed region depended heavily on its ability to maneuver between regional states and external powers. Oman sought to benefit from the U.S. security and military power and also from China's economic power. Unlike Kuwait and the other smaller Arab Gulf states, Oman sought to a balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Oman's ability to maneuver and play the two external powers against each other and the two regional powers at the same time has been its insurance card.

It can be stated that Oman is the only Arab Gulf state that hedges against each state and external power in the region. Since the 1970s, Oman has been hedging against the U.S. by keeping its other options open. Oman has strengthened its ties with the West in general and the U.S. in particular to safeguard itself from any regional or external threat. However, the strong Omani-US security ties have not prevented Oman from upgrading its ties with regional powers that U.S. perceives as threat to the U.S. and its interests, namely Iran. Omani-Iranian strategic, economic and political ties keep growing and improving. Also, Oman utilizes these strong ties with Iran to hedge against Saudi Arabia and its influence in the region. Oman fears Saudi Arabia's hegemony in

the region; to protect its identity, its sovereignty and its independence, Oman has kept its strategic option open with Iran. It is important to note that hedging against Saudi Arabia does not mean that Oman wants Iran to control the region. Oman wants neither of the regional powers in the region—Saudi Arabia or Iran—to control it. However, from the Omani perspective, the Saudis' escalation in the region, their ability to influence the other smaller Arab Gulf states and their political clashes with other Arab Gulf states, such as Qatar, are factors that push Oman to perceive Saudi hegemony at this time as more dangerous than that of Iran.

Despite its strong security ties with the United States, and its troubled history with China, Oman has kept its options open and welcomed economic cooperation with China since the establishment of their formal relations in 1978. It also sought to improve and upgrade these ties. Also, Oman has protected these relationships from being negatively impacted by any regional crises or security issues, namely Iran and Syria.

It can be stated that Oman simply detaches its economic needs from its security needs when dealing with China, and distances itself from any escalation or confrontation with the U.S. as a result of the U.S. security policy changes regarding the region. This Omani strategy maintains its security and military ties with the U.S. on the one hand and sustains and strengthens its economic and political ties with China on the other. The outcome of this strategy is securing Oman internally and externally.

China

Between 2001 and 2011, China was considered by the Saudis and Kuwaitis a potential political, military, security and economic partner, even a potential alternative to the United States. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were keen to deepen and strengthen their economic ties with China in the hope of extending them to military and security ties as well. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait utilize their ties with China to show the U.S. that they are no longer its puppies or lackeys and can no longer accept or tolerate its commanding and harsh language or its interference in their internal affairs.

However, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have deep doubts about China's motivations and intentions in the region and are aware that China's involvement in the region through its strong ties with Iran and Syria threatens their stability and survival. And they realize that their security issues are not on China's security agenda. As a result, these states sought to limit China's role in security and military aspects, and shifted to strengthening their military capabilities, either by self-developing, or by strengthening their security ties with other external powers such as the traditional allies comprising the United States and the West to contain the threats posed by China. It is important to mention that not only did these states move to strengthen their military and security ties with the U.S., they also tried to pressure China economically as a reaction to China's behavior in their region regarding Iran and Syria. Under the umbrella of GCC, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait approved the suspension of the GCC-China strategic dialogue for two years since 2011; they have also approved the suspension of Free Trade Agreement that still awaits being finalized and signed.

Contrary to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Oman has not sought any Chinese security involvement in the region, especially regarding Iran and the Assad regime, or even tried to pressure China as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait did to weaken China's ties with Iran and Syria. Oman does not consider China's robust ties with Iran or its position regarding the Syrian crisis as a threat. Oman is very pragmatic when it comes to its relationships with China, thus, it looks at China as vital economic partner and power and cooperates with it on this basis. To protect its economic interests with China, Oman refuses the approach adopted by Saudi and Kuwait towards China, and rather prefers separating security matters from existing economic cooperation with China. As previously mentioned, Oman pursues a hedging strategy against all regional countries and external powers including US, Saudi Arabia, and China. Oman is keen to upgrade its economic and political ties with China, but hedges against China by its strong security ties with the United States.

Generally, all the cases engage and integrate China economically in their region in order to take advantage of its economic rise; all three countries are keen to do business with it, especially that they have mutual economic needs with China. Nevertheless, in military and security terms they remain cautious and uncertain. Therefore, it is predictable that in the next few decades, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would only look to establish and strengthen an economic strategic partnership with China rather than deepen their political and security ties and would no longer be keen to give a dynamic

role to China in their political and security problems.²¹⁶ And Oman will continue to avoid disturbed and troubled ties with the U.S., China, or any regional power by hedging against all.

Finding 4

Iran is China's promising ally and strategic and economic and military partner in the Gulf region, not the Arab Gulf states.

Although China views the Arab Gulf states as key players in satisfying its energy needs, it is Iran which is perceived by China as an influential partner in economic, security, and strategic aspects. Iran plays a vital role in China's economic map including energy trade, arms trade, and OBOR initiative—as Chapter 5 shows. Iran is a reliable oil resource, and China's biggest arms buyer in the Gulf region. Iran is China's strategic partner in the OBOR.

Strategically, it is Iran which would provide China with a foothold in the Gulf region when the United States leaves it; in other words, Iran is China's gate to the region and through it China could expand its influence and power. Also, it is Iran which China is working with in the SCO to expand and upgrade their economic, security and strategic cooperation.

Finally, it is Iran which is seen by China as a vital partner to constrain and limit the threat of radical Sunni Islam. As it has been explained before, contrary to China's

²¹⁶As for China, its fear of radical Islam and its negative impact on its internal stability make the prospect of a solid security cooperation between China and these states too difficult. China worries that deep security involvement with these states would open the door for a wave of radical Islam on its soil and make it a target of more radical Islamist groups.

view of Iran, China perceives the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, as a source of threat to its internal stability. While China works and cooperates with Iran to limit the impact of Sunni Wahhabi Islam in Central Asia. China's fear of Sunni Wahhabi radical Islam and its negative impact on its internal stability makes the prospect of solid security cooperation and involvement between China and the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, too difficult. China worries that deep security involvement with the Arab Gulf states would open the door for a wave of Sunni Wahhabi radical Islam on its soil which would make it a target for radical Sunni Islamist groups. Thus, China prefers not to increase security ties with the Arab Gulf states or enhance security cooperation with them.

The Importance of the Dissertation's Findings

What do these findings tell us about the big picture regarding China's rise and states' responses to it, in particular, and toward any rising power in general? These findings show us two important aspects: the first is related to China's rise and its different types by region. The second is related to states' responses to a rising power, mainly, hedging strategy, its motives and its dynamic nature.

Rising Differently in the Arab Gulf Region

This dissertation shows us that not only is China rising in the Arab Gulf region, but also its rise in this region appears different than it does in other parts of world. In other words, China's rise varies from one region to another. The region's geographic, economic, political, strategic, and security importance, and the potential threats it poses for China, play the vital role in defining the type and the form of China's rise. Some

regions are crucial to China not only economically, but also politically and strategically. In such regions, China seeks to rise and enhance its economic, military, and strategic power. While in other regions, China seeks to rise only economically in order to meet and satisfy its economic needs, especially its energy demands. And in such regions, China seeks to increase its economic gain without reinforcing its political, military, or strategic power. Nor does it seek to shift the region's balance of power in its favor.

For example, when comparing China's rise in Asia-Pacific to its rise in the Arab Gulf region, it is found that China seeks to rise only economically in the Arab Gulf region in order to satisfy its economic needs and feed its energy thirst. In this region, China seeks to upgrade its economic ties with the Arab Gulf states, to ensure its economic rise, with no interest in utilizing these ties to increase its strategic or military power in the region. As Chapter 4 shows, China is not interested in strengthening its security cooperation with these states, nor in changing its security stances regarding Iran and Syria in their favor. China needs these states only to feed its energy hunger, no more, no less. And, increasing its strategic, security, military connections in their region is not a Chinese priority.

However, as some literature in Chapter 2 shows, in Asia-Pacific, China's immediate neighborhood, China aggressively does the opposite. China seeks to utilize and translate its economic rise into strategic and military rise. It actively works to increase its hard power including its economic and military power on one hand, and its soft power, especially its ability to influence the Asian states to act in its favor and serve its

interest, on the other. China's goal in Asia-Pacific is creating a regional order that does not challenge China or impact negatively its interests. Importantly, in Asia-Pacific, more than any other region in the world, China seeks to free the region from the American domination and works to weaken or neutralize the U.S. relationships, especially the security ones, with the region's states. China perceives the strong American military and security presence in the Asia-Pacific as a direct threat to its stability and a strong challenge to its interests. But, this is not the case in the Arab Gulf region. As has been explained before, China does not seek to weaken the Arab Gulf ties with the U.S., nor does it seek to challenge the American power in the region. On the contrary, China strongly prefers to see the U.S. busy protecting the region which would allow China to enjoy the benefits of the U.S protection umbrella. The U.S. strong security power in the Arab Gulf region and its protection of the region allow China to be a free-rider on one hand, and to protect its economic interests, especially with regard to the protection of energy supply routes, on the other. Chapter 4 explains the elements that limit China's rise in the Arab Gulf region and make its rise appear different than it does in any other region in the world. These elements are:

- The geographic factor. The Arab Gulf region is an out-sphere region beyond China's immediate borders; a region where China has no direct security, military, political, and strategic interests, contrary to the Asia-Pacific which is a vital region that carries direct impact on China's internal and external stability and survival.

- The region's historical alliance with the United States. The strong historical military and security presence of the U.S. in the Arab Gulf region plays a role in shaping the type and the form of China's rise in the region. For decades, the Arab Gulf region has been dominated by the United States which shared strong security ties with its countries. This region, in particular, has been a key arena for the U.S. and its interests. This region was—and still is—a battlefield for the United States, in which it practices its political, military, and security power to protect its interests in the region, and its allies' interests, especially Israel's. As Chapter 4 explains, this long and strong historical military presence and security role that U.S. played for decades limited China's desire and ability to be involved in the region's security issues.
- China's interests' priorities in the Gulf region. Another crucial factor that limits China's rise in the Arab Gulf region on one hand and shapes its rise on the other, is China's interests' priorities. As Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 show, in the Gulf region, China has prioritized its political, security, economic, and strategic interests. Strategically, China has picked the Iranian and the Syrian side over the Arab Gulf states' side. China's strategic, economic, political, and military interests with Iran and Syria are greater than those with the Arab Gulf states, as Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 show. Thus, China has committed and recommitted itself again and again to Iran and its ally Syria, especially through its vetoes in the UNSC. Although the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, have tried to influence China to change its positions, but they

failed. Moreover, not only does China see its interests with the Arab Gulf states less than those with Iran, it also perceives the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabi Islam as source of threat to its internal stability. As Chapter 4 explains, one of the reasons that made China refuse to be entangled in the region's security issues or seek strong security engagement with the Arab Gulf states is its fear that such security engagement would open the door for the radical Sunni Wahhabi thoughts to be widely spread in China. As has been explained in Chapter 4, being exposed to such thoughts is one of the biggest fears that China works to limit and prevent.

The geographic factor, potential economic gains, strategic elements, security circumstances, and China's interests' priorities are key factors that shape China's rise. These factors either limit or motivate China to rise strongly in all aspects including: economic, security, military and strategic aspects. The variation of these aspects from one region to another makes China rise variously in different parts of the world.

Double Hedging

With a dragon that only rises economically in their region and is not interested in or capable of expanding its rise, and with an eagle that changed its security policy toward them in a way that they could not trust as they did before, the Arab Gulf states find themselves in a situation that they have to double hedge against the U.S. and China at the same time to secure themselves. The double hedging strategy applied by these states shows us that states hedge in complex and ongoing ways. States hedge against several powers, and several types and levels of threats at the same time. States hedge constantly

to consider all possibilities that impact negatively their stability and survival. They not only hedge against direct threats to their survival or sovereignty, but also against indirect threats and any move by other powers that would endanger them. They hedge against changes in their historical alliances that undermine their security. They hedge against unwanted pressure from their ally to change their way of ruling. They hedge against strong economic cooperation and increased security engagement between rising power and rivals in their region.

States are in ongoing and dynamic process that aims to minimize risks they face from both, dominating and rising powers, on one hand, and increase gains and benefits from the same powers on the other. The only way to gain from both powers, take what they need from them, and limit their potential direct and indirect threats without committing themselves to any of them is not by balancing against, or bandwagoning with, but by hedging against both. States utilize their ties with each power to hedge against the other. They seek to increase their security ties with their traditional ally, and at the same time upgrade their ties with the rising power in order to see that it plays a greater political and security role in their region. Positioning themselves in a middle ground, keeping their strategic options open, playing each power against the other to counter their direct and indirect threats, signaling to each power that they have a potential alternative, and seeking more gains including security and economic benefits from both, are states' survival lifeline.

Conclusion

To conclude, all the three cases are applying the dual hedging strategy as they simultaneously hedge against both Beijing and Washington. They keep their options open, thus, they increase their much-needed ties with each power to secure themselves and play one power against the other. On one hand, they strongly seek the protection of the U.S. to secure their external balance, and to hedge against China's threats imposed on them by China's negative stance regarding security matters. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are hedging against China and its strong support to Iran and Syria by increasing their security ties with the United States and developing their self-military capabilities. On the other hand, they strongly seek to increase their economic ties with China to secure their internal economic and political balance and to hedge against the United States' possible withdrawal, decreased security commitment to the region, and interference in their internal issues.

After 2001 Saudi Arabia realized that its key to survival is keeping its options open and focusing on the benefits that each power is able and willing to offer. Saudi Arabia's influence made Kuwait show its disapproval of U.S. security changes in the region and turn to China as a promising alternative. Under the same influence, Kuwait started to hedge against China in 2011. In any regional security issue that involves Iran, the U.S. or China, Kuwait prefers to work in accordance with previous arrangement with Saudi Arabia.

Oman understands that to survive it has to deal with two powers in the region: security and military power which is the U.S., and economic power which is China. Each of

these two powers has a role and comes with benefits that Oman craves to take advantage of. Since 1970s, Oman has kept its options open and played between these two powers to maximize its economic interests and minimize any security threat to its internal and regional stability and survival. Oman is predicted to persist in its hedging strategy against all. As for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, security arrangements, agreements, and disagreements with the U.S. and China have the first and last word to determine if these two states will continue applying this strategy.

As for China and Iran, Sino-Iranian ties are expected to increase in all aspects, and their strategic and security cooperation is expected to grow and expand far beyond China's cooperation with the Arab Gulf states. China is not only betting on Iran economically but also strategically.

Areas for Future Studies

This dissertation's findings suggest three productive research areas for future studies. First: Arab Gulf leaders' decisions regarding their ties with any external power or new rising power in their region—including China—are based on their personal views, rather than on calculations made by experts. There is a huge gap between the academic/expertise and ruler circles in these states. Based on all the interviews that were conducted for this dissertation, Arab Gulf leaders lack core expertise in strategic thinking on China; because of lacking specialists in strategic thinking on one hand, and regarding China on the other, these states are applying dual hedging against the U.S. and China without having full understanding of the instruments of dual hedging strategy. Moreover, in the Saudi and Kuwaiti cases, it seems that they “hedge case by case” not systematically. So, it is most likely that dual hedging strategy will change if China's position toward the region's security issues changes. In other words, if China takes the Arab Gulf states' side, especially the Saudi side, these two states will stop hedging against China, and China will be a possible security partner or ally. Future studies on this subject would provide valuable insights on how Arab Gulf states shape and form their strategic responses regarding any rising power in their region; why these states lack the ability to form systematic strategic responses toward any rising power in their region; how these states change their strategic response based on a single internal, regional, and international circumstance change; and why these states lack core expertise on China.

Second, this dissertation suggests that similarities in regime types between the Arab Gulf states and China do not play a significant role in forming their strategic responses to China's rise. Although both China and the Arab Gulf states are controlling and censorship regimes, they both prefer not to interfere in other states internal politics or highlight issues such as democracy and human rights. These similarities do not bring these states closer in the political, military, and security terms. They may make their relationships more comfortable, but they do not upgrade China to be a replacement to the United States or even a possible alternative; only economic and security elements do. But, when there are corresponding interests, similarities in regime types and ideology can play a significant role as 'supportive elements' between the two parties, making the ties stronger. For example, the EU-GCC ties were being upgraded to a strategic partnership, but the EU's demands of democracy and human rights blocked this partnership. In Sino-Arab Gulf relationships, these issues will not be included or mentioned. More research on this issue would offer vital insights on the role of ideology in shaping ties with and forming strategic responses by Arab Gulf states toward any rising power in the region.

Third, although it analyzes the role of China's perception of radical Islam, its threats to China's internal and external stability and security, and its impact on Sino-Arab Gulf ties, this dissertation urges for more future studies on this issue, especially with the rise of many radical Islamic groups since 2001 and the 2011 events. Investigating this matter would provide valuable insights on these groups as non-state actors and their impact on jeopardizing the region's states ties with any rising power and affecting their

strategic responses toward it. This dissertation believes that these radical groups do not represent pure Islam and are not related to it. They are only using Islam as a cover to serve and achieve their interests and those of whoever supports and funds them.

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