

Research Article

**The Politics Of China's Global Peace-Making:
Initiating Stability for Long Term Economic Expansion**

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Abstract

China's role in global peace-making initiatives raises critical questions about the underlying objectives of these efforts. Some scholars interpret this as an attempt by China to extend its political influence and pursue hegemonic ambitions globally. Others view it as China's strategy to fill the power vacuum left by the United States. However, the primary goal of China's initiatives appears to be achieving stability, which is essential for realizing its vision of becoming a prosperous nation by 2049. This article explores the key motivations driving China's active participation in global peace-making. Utilizing qualitative methods, with an emphasis on in-depth literature reviews, the study draws on two types of data sources. The first is primary data from official statements, including speeches and documents, while the second comprises secondary data from academic journals, scholarly articles, think tank reports, and mass media. The article argues that China's peace efforts align with its long-term economic expansion interests and asserts that China's substantial global investments are aimed at fostering both peace and economic prosperity.

Keywords: *China; Peace-making; War; Economic expansion*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, China has been actively involved in various peace initiatives (Legarda, 2018). China believes that establishing close cooperation with one party can compel others to follow suit (Geddes, 2023). China's peacebuilding efforts extend beyond mediation or deploying troops to conflict zones; it also actively organizes forums aimed at fostering peace. In response to the Russo-Ukrainian War, China proposed a 12-point peace plan, which included resuming peace talks, ceasing hostilities, and respecting each other's sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). However, this proposal was ultimately rejected by Ukraine. Additionally, China played a mediating role in the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, hosting both countries and promoting efforts to reduce tensions by reopening diplomatic relations, respecting each other's sovereignty, and adhering to non-interference in domestic affairs (Jash, 2023).

China's involvement in global peace initiatives is perceived as a strategic move to fill the "power vacuum" left by the United States, aligning with its ambitions to become a dominant global power by 2049. Simon Mabon, a professor specializing in Middle East political studies at Lancaster University, posits that China's success in brokering reconciliation efforts represents a victory for authoritarianism, stifling democratization and reform movements within the region (Mabon, 2023). Conversely, Jo Inge Bekkevold, a senior researcher in Chinese politics at the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies, views this as a manoeuvre by China to bolster its political influence in the Global South. Bekkevold argues that China intends to leverage this influence to further its agenda in multilateral institutions and suggests that the regions where China has mediated peace could potentially serve as future Chinese military bases (Bekkevold, 2023).

In contrast to these perspectives, this article emphasizes the economic importance behind China's peace initiatives. Applying a political economy approach, this article argues that such initiatives share a common objective: securing China's long-term economic interests. Persistent conflict and war lead to humanitarian and economic crises, which impede economic cooperation. Thus, China's efforts to establish stability through peace initiatives are aimed at facilitating optimal economic collaboration. The stability achieved through these efforts is critical for realizing China's vision of becoming a prosperous and developed nation by 2049. This vision hinges on maintaining steady economic growth and achieving a per capita income comparable to that of developed countries. Understanding China's economic conditions is

essential. The country has not fully recovered from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and is currently grappling with several complex challenges, including the threat of a significant economic slowdown, a trade and technology war with the United States (US), and the economic repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Jiang, 2023). Consequently, initiating peace emerges as a strategic necessity for China to stabilize and advance its economic interests.

Existing studies on peace efforts involving China can be divided into two main categories. The first category reviews China's methods and efforts to promote peace through economic cooperation. For instance, Yuan (2022) discusses how China's approach to peace efforts aligns with the normative structure of liberal peace by integrating its principle of non-intervention with liberal ideas. Wong (2021) examines China's peace-building initiatives in post-conflict areas such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar, highlighting that these efforts predominantly rely on economic cooperation. However, Wong notes that these peace efforts often fall short due to unresolved grassroots issues. Similarly, Kuo (2020) explores China's peace initiatives on the African continent, emphasizing that China's pragmatic approach through economic cooperation differs significantly from Western methods, specifically the initiatives led by the US.

The second category of literature focuses on China's conflict management and diplomacy in promoting global peace. Chaziza (2018) analyses China's involvement in conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), concluding that China emphasizes constructive conflict management, guided by non-intervention principles, rather than direct conflict resolution. Sun and Zoubir (2018) explore China's influence and interests in MENA through quasi-mediation diplomacy, highlighting China's potential role in mediating conflicts between nations such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Akhter and Yuan (2019) investigate China's efforts to facilitate peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, noting positive responses from both parties despite the ongoing crisis. Sun and Zhang (2021) assess China's "Peace Through Development" initiatives in the Middle East, contrasting them with Western approaches that have often been criticized for lacking universality and inclusivity.

Despite these extensive studies, the long-term economic interests underlying China's peace initiatives have not been adequately examined. Previous research has primarily focused on China's methods of economic cooperation and conflict management without delving into

the economic motivations behind these efforts. This article aims to address this gap by placing China's long-term economic interests at the forefront of the analysis of its peace initiatives over the past decade. It will specifically review and analyse China's active role in global peace efforts as an integral part of its global economic expansion, including the significant contributions of Chinese private and government-linked corporations.

As previously mentioned, China's rise has long been seen as a significant threat to the current world order. As a leader of socialist ideology, China is perceived as spreading its influence globally and replacing liberal values. Additionally, China is viewed as having ambitions to become the world's strongest military power, ultimately leading to territorial expansion. However, China's efforts to mediate various conflicts tell a different story. China has successfully mediated conflicts that were previously considered unsolvable. Leveraging its economic strength and reputation, China has managed to convince many parties. Nonetheless, these efforts are also perceived as a means for China to extend its influence in conflict regions.

Our findings suggest that China's long-term economic interests are the primary drivers behind these efforts. For China, peace and stability are essential prerequisites for achieving its economic goals. Therefore, this research is crucial as it serves as a counterpoint to previous studies that have consistently portrayed China as a nation driven solely by geopolitical interests in its actions.

Examining China's peace initiatives through the lens of its economic interests, this article seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of China's strategies and motivations. It will explore how economic factors drive China's involvement in global peace efforts and how these initiatives, in turn, support China's broader economic ambitions. This perspective offers new insights into the complex interplay between peace-building and economic interests in China's foreign policy.

Contemporary liberal mainstream literatures argue that for a country or region to achieve peace, liberalizing the economy and embracing globalization is essential. However, conflicts and wars still occur, necessitating peace efforts involving various parties, especially peace-initiating countries (Selby, 2008). Hence, this article will adopt the economics of peacebuilding approach, which has been previously utilized and studied by Kenneth Omeje (Omeje, 2018). According to Omeje (2018) peacebuilding encompasses more than merely

ending conflicts; it also involves reconstructing societies, institutions, and economies. Contrary to the conventional belief that economic development follows peace, this perspective underscores the necessity of integrating economic considerations from the beginning of the peacebuilding process. Understanding the cost-effectiveness of various peacebuilding interventions is essential for devising effective strategies. Successful peacebuilding demands sustained efforts, a holistic approach, and close attention to economic indicators. In Africa, internal conflicts frequently arise from economic imbalances and weaknesses. As with post-war reconstruction in Europe, peacebuilding in Africa must prioritize economic factors. The United Nations (UN) and other international organizations stress the importance of economic governance in peacebuilding endeavors. Without economic stability, post-conflict countries remain susceptible to recurrent violence. Thus, peace is not merely about ending conflict but also about fostering sustainable peace through economic stability and development

On the other hand, this article will specifically illustrate that Norway has previously made these efforts, driven by its economic interests. Using political economy of peacebuilding approach, they examine Norway's role in the peace process in Myanmar. Roy, along with Ware and Laoutides, explain the importance of a country's reputation in the peace process. They highlight Norway's strong reputation in peace efforts, built since the Cold War, and note its involvement in peace initiatives in Sudan, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Israel-Palestine, Guatemala, and Mali. Consequently, the Myanmar government specifically requested Norway's involvement in their peace process (Roy et al., 2021).

In pursuit of peace, Norway made substantial investments in various industries in Myanmar, including telecommunications, mining, and hydroelectric power. One notable example is Telenor, a Norwegian state-owned telecommunications company, which secured a 15-year contract in 2013 to build Myanmar's largest 4G network. This significant investment reflects Norway's strategic efforts to foster development and stability in Myanmar through economic engagement. The aspiration to expand market penetration in developing countries, integral to material interests, significantly shaped Norway's peace initiatives (Roy et al., 2021). This phenomenon illustrates how economic dynamics can influence a country's foreign policy, as seen in Norway's case. It underscores that foreign policy is driven not only by political and security factors but also by economic considerations. By intertwining economic and peacebuilding objectives, Norway demonstrates a multifaceted approach to international relations,

where economic investments play a critical role in achieving diplomatic and developmental goals.

Similarly, China has adopted a strategy of actively engaging in peace initiatives that align with its economic interests. In recent years, China has built a strong reputation as an agent and initiator of peace in the international order. From 2002 to 2011, for instance, China participated in peace efforts through various roles, including “shuttle diplomacy,” “document diplomacy,” and special “envoy diplomacy,” in countries such as Israel-Palestine, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Nepal. China recognizes that prolonged conflict or war leads to humanitarian and economic crises, which can destabilize regions and hinder economic growth. By promoting peace and stability, China aims to facilitate optimal economic cooperation, thereby supporting its broader economic expansion under the leadership of Xi Jinping. This strategic alignment of peace initiatives with economic interests highlights China’s comprehensive approach to its foreign policy and international relations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article examines how China’s peace-making initiatives are intrinsically linked to its long-term economic interests. The study utilizes a literature review with a focus on case studies related to China’s peace initiatives. Specifically, it reviews peace efforts, particularly since the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) over the past decade. Initiated in 2013 by the Xi Jinping administration, the BRI exemplifies how these global peace initiatives align with the country’s economic interests. Data for this study will be analysed using qualitative methods, following a structured process including data collection from case studies, data reduction, data analysis, and conclusion drawing.

The findings of this study are interpreted through the lens of the political economy approach. This approach posits that government policies are not neutral but are inherently value-laden, shaped by the economic interests and preferences of various competing political and economic actors (Jessop, 2003; Al-Fadhat, 2019). In the context of China, its foreign policy over the past decade demonstrates a pronounced focus on global economic expansion. This expansion manifests through increased trade, investment, foreign aid, and even debt (Al-Fadhat, 2022). To facilitate this growth, China has been developing policies that encompass economic

sectors, multilateral forums, cultural cooperation, and security and equality, as discussed in this article (Wilson, 2019).

The adoption of qualitative methods aims to produce comprehensive descriptions, often referred to as “thick descriptions” (Lamont & Boduszynski, 2020). The data will be categorized into two main types: primary data from the Chinese government, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and secondary data from journal articles, books, reports from research institutions or think tanks such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Middle East Institute, as well as online media sources like *The Diplomat*, *The Conversation*, and *The Atlantic*. This data will focus on the extent of China’s engagement in peace efforts in various countries, the specifics of agreements between involved parties, and the economic cooperation value between China and the countries engaged in peace talks or receiving aid. Through this comprehensive process, the study provides an analysis of China’s interests in peace initiatives, offering a valuable reference for scholarly research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

China’s Economic Expansion Policy

After being appointed president in 2012, Xi Jinping articulated his vision and ideas for China’s future. Xi’s ambition to make China great again is strategically aligned with the 100th anniversary of the re-founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 2049 (Kachiga, 2019). He posited that achieving this greatness hinged on meeting two primary conditions. The first condition is the construction of a “moderately prosperous society,” which entails raising the per capita income to US \$10,000 by 2021, a target set in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The second condition is the transformation of China from a developing nation into a “fully developed, rich, and powerful country” (Allison, 2017). Xi’s benchmarks reflect a long-term strategy aimed at elevating China’s global standing and economic prowess.

China’s economic landscape has been shaped by a remarkable 40-year period of growth. From 1978 to 2019, the nation experienced an average annual economic growth rate of 9.5%. This unprecedented expansion was not a spontaneous occurrence but rather the result of

deliberate policy decisions. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese government initiated the “open-door policy,” which significantly reformed the economy by welcoming foreign investors (Huan, 1986). This policy framework laid the foundation for sustained economic development, which continued through Xi Jinping’s administration.

Xi Jinping’s vision for China’s future involves navigating these economic challenges while striving to achieve his outlined goals. The notion of transitioning from a developing to a fully developed nation requires enormous economic expansion strategy. Nevertheless, Xi's grand vision will be difficult to achieve if he cannot address the economic issues that have persisted since 2008. This period marked a critical juncture in China’s economic history, highlighting the challenges of “overproduction,” particularly in sectors such as cement, concrete, and steel (Michels, 2016). The crisis underscored the limitations and vulnerabilities within China’s economic model, necessitating a re-evaluation of future growth strategies.

Hence, addressing the issue of overproduction and ensuring sustainable growth are crucial components of this vision. Furthermore, the emphasis on increasing per capita income and achieving a moderately prosperous society reflects a commitment to improving the standard of living for the Chinese populace. As China approaches the centennial milestones of both the CCP and the PRC, Xi’s strategic goals serve as a roadmap for the nation’s continued evolution on the global stage. Through careful policy implementation and adaptive strategies, Xi aims to steer China towards a future characterized by economic stability, global influence, and national pride.

China’s economic expansion through global investment holds significant importance, particularly in the context of two major initiatives launched by China: the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which commenced operations in early 2016. The BRI, since its inception in 2013, has seen Chinese investment globally surpass the USD 1 trillion mark, reaching USD 1.053 trillion by 2023. This substantial investment is divided into two categories: construction contract investment, amounting to USD 634 billion, and non-financial investment, totalling USD 419 billion (Nedopil, 2024; Setiawati, 2023).

The BRI occupies a crucial position in China’s global economic expansion strategy. Over the past decade, this initiative has facilitated more than 3,000 investment projects across 155 countries. Among these 155 countries, China has experienced a trade deficit with only 20,

indicating that the nations participating in the BRI serve as primary markets for Chinese products and investments (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

This remarkable growth trajectory has prompted various institutions to project China's economic future over the next 10 to 30 years. A notable report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2017, titled "The Long View: How Will the Global Economic Order Change by 2050?" predicts that China will surpass the US as the world's leading economic power. PwC's analysis is based on China's export and investment patterns, which contribute significantly to its GDP (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017). Similarly, the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) in 2022 projected that China would become the world's largest economic power by 2030. This prediction is based on the expectation that China's economic growth rate will be 5.7% until 2025, gradually declining to 4.7% by 2030 (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2022).

However, the feasibility of these projections is increasingly questionable. A comprehensive understanding of China's current economic conditions reveals several challenges. The geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China has engendered a profoundly critical and adverse situation, particularly for China. The trade war initiated in 2018 has markedly decelerated China's economic growth, reducing it from 6.6% in 2018 to 6.1% in 2019. This scenario further deteriorated in 2020, as the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a dramatic slowdown in China's economic expansion, culminating in a mere 2.3% growth. Additionally, the United States has imposed stringent restrictions on semiconductor exports, crucial components for China's economic and technological advancement (Huda & Al-Fadhat, 2022). Additionally, the economic repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict have further complicated China's economic landscape. Specific issues include the threat of slowing economic growth, rising unemployment rates, and the need to reorganize the BRI project (Jiang, 2023).

This highly complex geopolitical situation has compelled China to uphold its principle of 'peaceful development'. This approach is implemented through China's peace initiatives in various regions represent a strategic approach that can support and guarantee its long-term economic growth. The pursuit of peace and stability is essential for fostering a conducive environment for sustained economic development. Furthermore, these initiatives can enhance China's diplomatic relationships and strengthen its influence on the global stage.

The Changes of China's Foreign Economic Policy

China has established itself as a significant global player in conflict resolution, aligning its efforts with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles, which emphasize mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, form the cornerstone of China's foreign policy. This commitment to peace and economic cooperation is evident in China's involvement in resolving nine interstate conflicts from 2013 to 2018 (Legarda, 2018).

In addition to these principles, China has also worked to build international institutions focused on economic cooperation. Notable examples include the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) established in 2001, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) formed in 2001, the BRI launched in 2013, and the AIIB founded in 2016 (Gozali, 2023). These institutions demonstrate China's strategy of promoting peace through economic collaboration and multilateral engagement.

However, in recent years, China has gradually shifted its policy stance. While it continues to prioritize bilateral and multilateral efforts, China is increasingly offering alternative conflict resolution mechanisms through new initiatives, most notably the Global Security Initiative (GSI). Introduced by President Xi Jinping in April 2022, the GSI aims to address global security challenges through political dialogue and regional cooperation, without necessarily relying on international law. The initiative was further developed with the release of a concept paper in February 2023 (Raditio, 2023).

The GSI emphasizes two main objectives. First, it seeks political settlements through discussion, adhering to the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and avoiding invasion. This approach reflects China's broader commitment to maintaining stability and respecting national sovereignty. Second, the GSI aims to strengthen communication through regional forums such as the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, the China-Arab Countries Cooperation Forum, and the China and Community of Latin American and Caribbean Countries Forum. By participating in these forums, China fosters dialogue and cooperation, sending high-level representatives to ensure regular meetings and policy coordination (Raditio, 2023).

GSI was established in alignment with the Global Development Initiative (GDI), which was launched in September 2021. Both initiatives share the fundamental premise that “security is a prerequisite for development, and development is a guarantee for security,” embodying the concept of “peace through development.” The GDI was specifically designed to address challenges and issues faced by China and developing countries, particularly economic disparities exacerbated by crises in food and energy security. Consequently, fostering cooperation based on mutual commitment and technological advancement is deemed essential to achieving collective benefits.

To complement these initiatives, China subsequently introduced the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). The GCI underscores the principle of non-imposition of one nation’s values upon another, advocating for mutual respect, equality, dialogue, and inclusiveness among nations. This approach emphasizes the importance of respecting the diverse cultural and social values that different nations hold, ensuring that no single nation’s values dominate or suppress those of others. Through this initiative, Xi Jinping aims to foster a global environment conducive to creative transformation and collective modernization. The GCI envisions a transition from traditional phases of development to a more integrated and modernized global society (Ellis, 2023).

Some scholars view these initiatives as an antithesis to the “rules-based order” promoted by the US (Schuman, 2022). Collectively, these three initiatives aspire to offer an alternative framework for global governance and position China as a pivotal player in fostering global prosperity. This alignment is reflected in China’s increasing financial assistance to conflict-prone and post-conflict regions. Between 2013 and 2018, China provided foreign aid, grants, interest-free loans, and soft loans amounting to US\$42 billion, with 45% of this aid directed to African countries and 37% to Asian countries (Gering, 2023).

Recent data from 2022 indicate that China extended interest-free loans to 17 African countries and allocated US\$10 billion in IMF aid to Africa. This substantial financial support underscores China’s commitment to fostering economic development and stability within the African continent. By providing these loans, China aims to enhance its economic ties with African nations, thereby promoting mutual growth and cooperation. Beyond providing loans, China has also been instrumental in establishing the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund. In 2015, China contributed US\$3 billion to this initiative, demonstrating its long-term

commitment to supporting developing countries. Furthermore, in 2022, China granted an additional US\$1 billion to the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund under the auspices of the GDI. These contributions reflect China's strategic efforts to enhance global development partnerships and facilitate sustainable growth across the Global South while ensuring its long-term influence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

The global peace initiative spearheaded by China presents a distinct contrast to the standards set by the United Nations (UN). According to the UN, the ideal approach to peacebuilding emphasizes principles of impartiality, inclusivity, consent, and national ownership. In contrast, China's approach primarily involves engaging high-level actors or countries, thereby rendering its efforts more exclusive (Legarda, 2018). China's lack of historical entanglements further facilitates its active involvement in peace initiatives. For instance, in the Middle East, China's position is more favourably received compared to that of the US, which is perceived as having a contentious past due to its direct involvement in various conflicts, such as the Arab-Israeli War, the Gulf Wars, the invasion of Afghanistan, and actions against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Hobson, 2005; Ruebner, 2016). This historical context enhances China's bargaining power and acceptability among conflict-affected nations.

In the context of the conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as Russia and Ukraine, China has adopted a neutral stance. Consistent with its principle of "non-intervention," China focuses on peaceful mediation efforts. It has proposed peace initiatives and expressed a willingness to act as a facilitator and mediator. This approach underscores China's aspiration to play a proactive role in international affairs while maintaining amicable relations with all parties involved in these conflicts.

Understanding China's Position and Interests in the Saudi Arabia-Iran Conflict

The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two of the most influential powers in the Middle East, has significantly altered the region's stability over the past few decades. The discord between these nations, rooted in religious differences, political ideologies, and geopolitical tensions, has incited proxy wars in various countries, including Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia acknowledge that their prolonged dispute has

impeded economic growth, exacerbated humanitarian crises, and disrupted long-term strategic interests. Hence, since 2021, both nations have implicitly sought to restore diplomatic relations, with Iraq's then Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi (2020-2022) serving as a facilitator. According to Saeed Azimi, a political journalist in Tehran, the two countries held five meetings in Iraq by 2022 (Azimi, 2023). However, the evolving dynamics between them have hindered the peace process.

A glimmer of hope for peace surfaced with Xi Jinping's visit to Riyadh in December 2022. Initially intended to address economic issues, the visit saw the Saudi government openly request China to mediate, a proposal welcomed by Iran (Azimi, 2023). China has successfully played the role of facilitator and mediator very effectively. As a mediator, China undertakes the role of host in negotiations, aiming to demonstrate a neutral stance, and carefully drafts agreements that consider the interests of both parties.

This success is highlighted by several key developments. First, the reopening of both countries' embassies, which took place in June and August 2023, respectively. Additionally, both countries have revived their economic cooperation, evidenced by the export of steel from Iran to Saudi Arabia worth \$14 million in April 2023, just a month later. Furthermore, China advocates for non-interference in each country's internal affairs. Specifically, Iran demands that Saudi Arabia cease its support for Iranian opposition groups such as the Mujahedin-e Khalq and Al-Ahvaziya, as well as the militant group Jaish al-Adl. Furthermore, Iran insists that Saudi Arabia recognize the Houthis as the legitimate authority in Yemen and withdraw from the country (Azimi, 2023). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has successfully requested Iran to halt its support for the Houthi rebel group targeting Saudi Arabia.

China's role as a facilitator and mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran represents a significant diplomatic and economic victory. From an economic standpoint, China aims to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil from the Gulf region, which supplies 40% of its annual crude oil needs (Rutledge, 2022). This uninterrupted flow is crucial for maintaining the stability of China's energy supply, given its rapid industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, by positioning itself as a key player in Gulf affairs, China strengthens its influence in a region traditionally dominated by Western powers.

Additionally, China plans to use the Yuan for transactions with Gulf countries and more broadly in the Middle East, a proposal that has received positive feedback. This strategic move is part of China's broader objective to internationalize its currency and reduce dependency on the US dollar. According to the China BRI Report, China's investment strategies target post-war countries through peace negotiation processes. For instance, Iraq received \$10.5 billion in construction investments from BRI projects in 2021 (Wang, 2022). Similarly, a 2022 report indicated that China and Syria signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) worth \$100 million, making Syria the largest recipient of BRI investment that year (Nedopil, 2022). These investments not only aid in the reconstruction of war-torn regions but also secure China's economic interests and foster long-term political alliances.

From a geographical perspective, the Middle East is a pivotal sea transportation corridor that significantly connects the East and West, particularly through key maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, the Suez Canal in Egypt, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Red Sea. This strategic importance aligns with China's BRI, which seeks to enhance economic integration across regions. Diplomatically, this demonstrates the favourable reception of the GSI introduced by China in 2022 within the international community. According to Wu Bingbing, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Peking University, China aims to foster stability through a strategy of "positive balancing," wherein establishing close cooperation with one nation encourages other nations to engage similarly (Geddes, 2023).

Peace is integral in stimulating economic growth and fortifying China's long-term strategic interests in Saudi Arabia and Iran. The diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia have evolved over time through numerous meetings, communications, and cooperation forums, culminating in a significant partnership in 2017 when Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) ascended to leadership in Saudi Arabia. Both nations share a common vision regarding economic development, security, and regional stability, and they advocate for an improved global order through the BRI and Vision 2030 initiatives. Economically, the bilateral trade value reached \$106 billion in 2022, reflecting a 30% increase, largely driven by oil and gas transactions. China emerged as the largest importer of Saudi crude oil, with imported totalling \$64 billion for nearly 87.5 million metric tons in 2022, surpassing previous import levels from Russia (Statista, 2024).

One of the most critical aspects of Sino-Saudi collaboration is energy security. To this end, Saudi Aramco and China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (Sinopec) signed MoU for the construction of a new oil refinery, expansion of the petrochemical industry, and development of both upstream and downstream sectors, with investments estimated at \$35 billion. Chinese companies are also heavily involved in strategic infrastructure projects within Saudi Arabia, including an 18-kilometer Light Rail Transit (LRT) system in Mecca and a 28-kilometer railway tunnel in Neom, a futuristic city. Additionally, China has vested interests in the digital economy and technoscientific advancements in Saudi Arabia. According to a report by the Carnegie Endowment, the two countries have embarked on 20 technoscientific projects since 2007, with 75% of these projects initiated after Saudi Arabia's inclusion in the BRI in 2017. These projects span smart cities, drones, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and electric vehicles, with 60% being undertaken by state-owned enterprises while the rest carried out by private companies (Alsudairi, Hai, & Alahmad, 2023).

On the other hand, the bilateral relations between China and Iran have been primarily shaped by mutual energy needs, aimed at fostering economic growth in China (Harold & Nader, 2012). Iran's economy is heavily dependent on oil exports, with China being a major importer. In 2023, Iran's oil production reached 2.99 million barrels per day, reflecting an increase of 440,000 barrels compared to the previous year. This notable rise in production coincided with a significant growth in crude oil exports, which surged by approximately 50% to a five-year peak of about 1.29 million barrels per day. An overwhelming majority of these exports, approximately 90%, were destined for China, underscoring the critical role of the Chinese market in Iran's oil export strategy (Hanafusa, Fukutomi & Koga, 2024). Following Iran's accession to the BRI in 2018, Chinese investments and construction projects in Iran have surged. Notably, between 2018 and 2022, China invested \$2.2 billion in Iran, according to the Global Investment Tracker (China Global Investment Tracker, 2023).

In 2021, China committed to a \$400 billion investment plan over 25 years in Iran, highlighting two main sectors of development: oil, gas, and petrochemicals, and telecommunications, banking, and ports (Myers, 2021). This extensive investment underscores China's strategic objective of securing a stable and affordable oil supply from Iran. China's substantial financial engagement is also influenced by concerns regarding Iran's support for the Houthi rebels, who have previously targeted Saudi oil facilities, notably in 2019 and 2021,

causing significant disruptions in global oil prices, with a 5% increase following the 2019 attack (Jones et al., 2021).

Given China's status as the world's second-largest oil importer, maintaining regional stability and mitigating any disruptions to oil supplies are of paramount importance for Beijing. Any instability in key oil-producing regions, particularly the Middle East, poses significant risks to China's energy security and economic stability. Therefore, Beijing has strategically engaged in diplomatic efforts to ensure a steady flow of oil, underscoring its broader geopolitical interests in the region. One significant aspect of China's diplomatic strategy has been its efforts to influence Iran regarding its support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen. By exerting diplomatic pressure on Tehran, China aims to reduce the Houthi group's capacity to destabilize the region, thereby safeguarding vital oil supply routes. This diplomatic intervention appears to have yielded some success. Following China's peace initiatives, there has been a noticeable shift in the Houthi group's behaviour, marked by a reduction in aggressive activities. These efforts highlight China's role as a key player in promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, aligning with its broader objective of securing energy resources critical for its economic growth.

Understanding China's Position and Interests in Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a profound impact on global economic stability, with significant repercussions for China. This conflict has contributed to a surge in global inflation, which reached 8.0% in 2022, a level that cannot be ignored. Additionally, this conflict has exacerbated China's economic challenges, which were already severe due to the Trade War with the US and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, China's inflation rate climbed to 1.9%, up from 0.9% in the previous year. At the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, China openly supported Russia's assertion that NATO's expansionist policies were the primary catalyst for the invasion. However, China's stance gradually shifted, as evidenced by the peace proposal it presented on February 24, 2023, exactly one year after the conflict began. This proposal comprised 12 points, including the continuation of peace talks, cessation of hostilities, and mutual respect for sovereignty. Despite these efforts, the proposal was ultimately rejected by Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

Prior to submitting the peace proposal, Chinese Prime Minister Wang Yi embarked on a diplomatic tour of Europe, visiting France and Italy and attending the Munich Security Conference alongside US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. To conclude his trip, Wang visited Hungary and Russia, where he was received by Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and President Vladimir Putin. Wang's visit was seen as "shuttle diplomacy" aimed at convincing all parties that China's peace proposal was motivated solely by a commitment to achieving peace (Gabuev, 2023). China's actions underscore its position as the only permanent member of the UN Security Council actively pursuing peace for all involved parties.

China's involvement in the negotiations between Ukraine and Russia can be viewed as an effort to protect its long-term economic interests. Both countries are integral to China's BRI projects, and Russia, in particular, is a key partner in ensuring China's energy security. The ongoing conflict has disrupted these plans and threatened China's economic stability (Bo, 2023). Thus, China has a vested interest in promoting peace as the optimal solution for all parties. The Russo-Ukrainian war has had a detrimental impact on China's economy, leading to increased energy and food prices, with global oil prices surpassing \$100 per barrel. As the world's second-largest oil importer, even a minor rise in oil prices can significantly disrupt China's economic growth and expansion.

The relationship between China and Russia is characterized by significant complexity, encompassing various economic dimensions. Economically, China stands as Russia's principal trading partner, with the overall trade percentage reaching 18% (Russia Briefing, 2023). Conversely, Russia ranks as the tenth economic partner for China, contributing to 3% of China's total trade. A substantial portion of China's imports from Russia comprises energy and mineral products, accounting for 70%. In 2022, Russia emerged as China's second-largest oil supplier, with total imports amounting to 86 million tons. Additionally, China imports coal from Russia, totalling 67 million tons per year, with projections indicating an increase to 85 million tons annually by 2023. Russia also represents a significant market for Chinese products, including electronic goods, automobiles, and various consumer items.

China heavily relies on Russian natural gas imports, with Russia being the second-largest natural gas supplier to China. Through the Power of Siberia 1 pipeline, China imported 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2021. Projections suggest that this pipeline will supply

38 billion cubic meters by 2025 when operating at full capacity. To bolster its energy security, China has invested in the construction of the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline under the BRI project. This project is slated to commence between 2024 and 2030, and upon completion, it is expected to provide China with an additional 150 billion cubic meters of natural gas (Jiang, 2023).

Two major infrastructure projects further exemplify the cooperation between the two nations. The construction of the 794-kilometer Moscow-Kazan Toll Road, initiated in 2021, is expected to be fully operational by 2024, with one of the primary contractors being a Chinese firm. Additionally, the “Nizhneleninskoye-Tongjiang Railway Bridge” project, initiated in 2013, was financed through a joint investment fund between Russia and China, covering 75% of the total project cost (Chen & Nekhay, 2022). According to data from the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, China is involved in 79 large-scale projects in Russia, with an investment value of up to \$170 billion. These investments target sectors such as energy, transportation infrastructure, and agriculture. Notably, China is investing in the Vladivostok region to establish a special economic zone spanning 6.9 million square kilometres, with total investments reaching \$13 billion in 2022 (Russia Briefing, 2023).

In contrast, while Ukraine is not a strategic partner for China, the country plays a critical role in ensuring China's food security, particularly regarding grain imports such as corn and wheat. China relies on Ukraine for approximately 20% of its grain needs, significantly impacting its food supply stability. The importation of Ukrainian grain is essential for mitigating potential shortages and maintaining a steady supply of staple foods. This reliance underscores the importance of Ukraine in China's broader agricultural strategy, despite the absence of a formal strategic partnership (Jiang, 2023).

Furthermore, China's economic interests in Ukraine are substantial, with investment projects valued at \$6.6 billion spanning various sectors, including infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, and agriculture. Notable projects include the construction of the ports of Yuzhny and Chernomorsk, which are pivotal for enhancing trade routes, and the development of a new railway line in the Kyiv Metro, which aims to improve urban transportation. These investments illustrate China's commitment to fostering economic ties with Ukraine and highlight the multifaceted nature of their bilateral relationship (Jiang, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This article has explored how China's involvement in peace-making across the region over the past decade reflects its deep commitment to balancing peace and economic development. China's role is not limited to acting as a facilitator, mediator, or provider of military power in conflict areas. Instead, the country has taken further steps by initiating concepts such as the Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). These initiatives underscore China's desire to achieve comprehensive peace. While some perceive China's peace initiatives as a means to spread political influence and strengthen military power, it is crucial to note that this article suggests that China imposes no obligations on the states it mediates to support its future political agenda. Thus, China's peace efforts appear to focus primarily on securing its long-term economic interests namely global economic expansion.

An analysis of the Saudi-Iran and Russia-Ukraine cases clearly reveals that China's involvement in these peace efforts is intricately linked to its strategic economic agenda, particularly the economic expansion of post-conflict countries. The four countries discussed in these case studies—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, and Ukraine—are integral to China's Belt and Road Initiative which first initiated in 2013. Notably, three of these nations are among China's main economic partners. This interconnectedness underscores China's recognition that prolonged conflict or war results in humanitarian and economic crises, hindering regional stability and economic growth.

Consequently, China's efforts to establish and promote political stability through negotiation processes and peace initiatives aim to create favourable conditions for long-term economic cooperation between China and its strategic trade partners. By fostering stability, China seeks to mitigate the adverse effects of conflict, ensuring that post-conflict countries can contribute to and benefit from the BRI. This strategy aligns with China's broader objectives of securing economic interests and enhancing regional development, reinforcing the notion that peace and economic prosperity are mutually reinforcing goals.

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