

The Jordanian-Chinese Strategic Partnership

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Abstract

The earliest contacts between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan dates to the mid-1950, however, the civilizational contacts between the Arab and Chinese civilizations dates back to 115 BC. The objective of this paper is to highlight the strategic partnership between China (PRC) and Jordan since World War II. This research endeavor will examine bilateral ties between the two sides based on five elements; political relations, trade ties, energy cooperation, cultural relations and security coordination. In this article, the term People's Republic of China, and/or China will be used interchangeably.

Keywords: China, Jordan, strategic partnership, trade, investment, security, energy, culture

In 1955, Indonesia hosted the Bandung Conference known as the Asian-African Conference for the period from April 18-24, where 39 countries attended the forum. The main goal was to coordinate their efforts in combatting imperialism and adopting a unified approach to the emerging Cold War between the East and the West. Jordan attended the conference, so as China. The Chinese Premier Zhu En-Lai took advantage of the forum and met with every participant delegation. His goal was to assure fellow Third World countries of the future path of the Chinese Revolution and strengthen China's ties with all participants. He also was seeking diplomatic recognition given the fact that, few countries had recognized the Communist Government seated in Beijing, and all of them maintained ties with the Republic of China in Formosa. Beijing was determined to radically alter this state of affairs, and waged a massive campaign directed toward the Arab World, and Africa in particular. The fruits of such campaign are still unfolding. In the case of Jordan, the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1977, and since then their bilateral relations has devolved to Strategic partnership.

Jordan and the PRC's engagement for the period from 1950-mid 1970s was primarily political and security in nature. China classified Jordan within the camp of countries under imperial control, a conservative, despotic, monarchic, and reactionary country. Ideology was the main instrument of dealing with Jordan, given the fact that the PRC had declared its support for national liberation movements, which put Jordan in a difficult position in terms of building constructive ties with China based on national interest considerations. This explains the fact that, "when the PRC was established in 1949, all independent Arab states extended recognition to the Republic of China (Taiwan), leaving Beijing in a disadvantageous position"¹. In fact, the "ideological obstacle to establishing diplomatic ties between the two sides emerged as early as the mid-1950s, when China began articulating its

¹ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World. KPI: London, P.2

foreign policy. Within this line of thinking, the PRC's establishment divided the world to four categories, which determined the nature of policy toward these regions; the Socialist Soviet Union, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Western countries, and last category was the United States of America."² As far as Jordan is concerned, it lies within the Asian and African domain where the peoples of such countries enjoy the support of the Chinese government and people in their struggle against Western imperialism. In early 1950s, Jordan was still in the process of nation-building and power consolidation. Arab nationalism was emerging as a major force in the country, and therefore, Arab nationalists across the region and leftist were leaning toward strong ties with China, the Soviet Union and other emerging socialist countries. However, the grip of "imperialism" on Jordan was a major obstacle for the prospects of normal ties between the two countries. Not only that, but also the growing "animosity" between the two countries, which peaked in late 1960s to the mid-1970s.

The independence of Jordan in 1946, was associated with the occupation of Palestine, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Subsequently, the Palestinian national liberation movement began emerging, organizing and finally leading to the establishment of Fatah in 1958. China was well aware of the developments on the Jordanian-Palestinian scene. In fact, Chinese revolutionary leaders were observing with much caution the developments in the region for over a decade (1933-1945), primarily, the period of the escalation of World War II. and its impact on the Middle East in particular. China viewed the German advances in the region, the Japanese triumphs in the Far East, and the deterioration of the Western Front (USSR), as a threat to China and the Chinese people. Mao classified the region (Middle East), as a critical part of the world, therefore, any power controls it will most certainly influence China's security. This fear of encirclement of China remained as a major concern for the Communist leadership; Mao, Chou En-Lai, Lin Piao, and others. Jordan was at the heart of such events, and developments in the Middle East, and therefore, China's interest in Jordan in Post-WWII. Was evident in its foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Chou En-Lai, the Chinese Premier, and Foreign Affairs Minister made Asia and Africa in particular as center for China's foreign policy for two decades. He invested time, efforts and resources in the region as in no other part of the world. The PRC has made combatting "imperialism" as the primary goal of its foreign policy, and therefore, countries that are classified as "cradles" for the influence of imperialism such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, etc. enjoyed massive ideological offensive from China for two decades. Meanwhile, China stood by emerging revolutionary Arab countries, Algeria in particular. This explains the fact that, China attributed the ills of the Third World to the institution of imperialism and held the West as responsible fully for the economic "backwardness" of the Afro-Asian countries. China stated that, "the imperialists also control the international market, manipulate world prices, arbitrarily, lower prices of primary products and raise prices of manufactured goods. They buy cheap and sell dear, practicing non-equivalent exchange and causing great losses to the Afro-Asian countries."³

China's clear ideological vision has made its foreign policy goals clearer as well. Therefore, the PRC sided with national liberation movements fighting national bourgeoisie, and imperialist countries. Jordan was the home of several Palestinian and Arab national liberation movements, parties, coalitions and forces. This is why Jordan was at the Center of China's foreign policy toward the Middle East. Behbehani put neatly stating that, "until 1971, China's foreign policy priorities revolved around the support for national liberation movements based on the principle of armed struggle, at the expense of China's existing diplomatic relations with foreign countries."⁴ Such stand made it necessary for China to oppose the "spirit of compromise" characterized the Soviet foreign policy toward the West, simultaneously intensified its ideological attacks on traditional imperialist countries (Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal), and newly emerging imperialist countries, especially the United States of

² Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P.3

³ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P.7

⁴ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P.9

America. As far as Jordan is concerned, the country owes its existence and continuity to Britain and the US since 1921, a century ago.

China's foreign policy toward Jordan was also associated with its ties with the Palestinian national liberation organizations, and the developments on the Palestinian-Israeli scene. This integral relationship between the birth, existence and continuity of the Jordanian state within the framework of imperialism, and post-World War I. and WWII. settlements made Jordan at the center of the PRC's anti-imperialism policy in the Arab world. Among the most, China systematically criticized Jordan's "treatment" to the Palestinian organizations in the country combatting Israeli occupation. In fact, "China denounced in the strongest terms the Jordanian monarchy and government in their suppression of the Palestinians during Black September, and China's military supplies to Fattah reached their highest point during Black September."⁵ The Sino-Jordanian relations in this period of time were dominated by several major issues. This section will touch on some of these defining issues that shaped Sino-Jordanian relations.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The Bandung Conference was a defining moment in Chou En-Lai's understanding of the Palestinian Question. Initially, China's perspective on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict was similar to that of the Soviet Union, and other members of the Socialist block, i.e., the conflict between the two sides "could be solved through peaceful means and nonintervention by outside forces (USA)."⁶ Furthermore, China began understanding the depth of Palestinian issue, and how it can be utilized in its foreign policy to further its goals in the region at that time, mainly securing diplomatic recognition from the Arab countries. Chou En-Lai quickly sensed its importance, and therefore, engaged with the Arab Bloc in the conference, meeting President Naser of Egypt, and Ahmed Al-Shurkairy a representative of the Palestinian cause within the Syrian delegations. Shurkairy stated that, in taking advantage of a meeting between the Syrian delegation to Chou En-lai, he "explained the history of Palestinian problem to Chou; in return Chou promised in the future that he would support both Arab aims in general and the Arab position on the Palestinian question in particular."⁷ The Chinese premier supported the inclusion of the Palestinian cause on the conference agenda, though as a human rights issue, rather than a self-determination and a national liberation issue. The conference stressed the right of the Palestinian refugees for return. Chou En-Lai went farther demanding "territorial revisions and recognition of the right of the Arab refugees."⁸ I.e., Palestine's independence and the right of the refugees to return to their homeland. Naser and Arab delegates found in China a close ally if compared with the disappointment they had with India in particular visa vie the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Chou En-Lai went even further a month later, in May 1955, at a meeting for the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China stating that, "there was a parallel between the problems of Palestine and Formosa, neither could be solved peacefully unless intervention by outside forces was excluded."⁹ It's important to state here that China had scored high among the Arab street and public opinion over the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, Chou En-Lai assured participants at the Bandung Conference that China had no intention in "carrying out subversive actions nor would it attempt to propagate communism in other countries"¹⁰ Also, assuring Muslims countries especially Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq of safeguarding religious freedoms of Muslims and followers of other religions in China. Issues related to China's mistreatment of Muslims was the most sensitive issue between Beijing and other Muslim capitals and continued as such for several decades after, especially Riyadh.

⁵ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 100

⁶ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 20

⁷ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 21

⁸ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 22

⁹ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 22

¹⁰ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 22

The Arab-Israeli conflict was the core of China's policy toward the Middle East for two decades. China's views on the conflict and its perspective on Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine and other parties developed accordingly. Toward the early 1960s, "China views on Israel as a bridge for Western Imperialism was most evident during the Suez Canal Crisis, in October-November of 1956."¹¹ China condemned Israel as one of the aggressors of the 1956 Tripartite Aggression against Egypt. A year later in 1957, at the Cairo Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization's Conference, China reiterated its position on supporting the Arab cause, and the Palestinian cause in particular. Here, we find China has fully developed and advocated its anti-imperialism as an instrument of its foreign policy toward the region.

The Palestine Question and the plight of the Palestinian refugees received substantial interest from the Chinese leadership and the Chinese press. In a major speech Chou En-Lai declared in a state banquet in Cairo that, the Chinese government and people supported that Arab people "in their struggle against imperialism and the old and new colonialism, and supported the Arab people of Palestine in their struggle to restore their due rights."¹² Clearly, China has associated the Palestinian question, and the Arab-Israeli conflict within the new imperialism and colonialism narrative, a major aspect of its foreign policy in this period of time. Beijing stood by Algeria as well, and therefore, drew also a parallel between the French imperial experience in North Africa, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In a joint communique with the Algerian side in 1962, Chou En-Lai declared that, "the Chinese and Algerian Governments reaffirm their support without reservation for the people of Palestine for the restoration of their legitimate rights."¹³ Its important here to highlight the fact that, while the Palestinian Question was a major international and regional issue, to the newly emerging Kingdom of Jordan, it was the central issue for the emerging state. Jordan was the country influenced the most by the developments on the Palestinian scene over the past century.

Jordan was pleased like other Arab countries in reference to the Chinese views on the Palestinian Question. However, Jordanian-Chinese relations took a totally different turn, for the period from early 1950s-mid 1970s. Additionally, the Arab world watched with some caution the growing Chinese-Israeli relations in the mid-1950s after the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Burma. The later played a major role in facilitating some contacts with Chou En-Lai, and other Chinese leaders. It's important to state here that China was in a critical situation in terms of its relations with the Arab side, and the Israeli side as well. "Israel was the first Middle Eastern government to grant China formal recognition at a time when most of the Arab regimes in the Middle East were under Western influences and the main Arab League members, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon had decided to recognize Taiwan as China's legal government."¹⁴

The Chinese-Jordanian relations developed along the lines of regional issues rather than bilateral-relations based. The cause of Palestine was rallied by major Arab countries, and the Palestinian national movement began emerging. Palestine became the central theme in Arab nationalism, around which Arab masses rallied in hope of liberating Palestine and other occupied Arab lands from the Israeli and Western colonial grip. The Palestinian movement in fact emerged in the Gulf region, in Kuwait in particular where some Palestinian nationalists lived and worked, especially Yassir Arafat. The emergence of the Palestinian national movement was a step welcomed enthusiastically by China, viewed with very much caution in Jordan, a conservative monarchy that sought peace with Israel, and peace with Arab nationalism. The Palestinian leadership concentrated its efforts on adopting the Chinese model of national liberation, people's war. Khalil Al-Wazir was the engineer of the movement, who visited China in early 1960s for this very purpose. China welcome him, and quickly recognized the emerging movement and granted it full diplomatic recognition by 1965, upon the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). In applying the people's war, the PLO

¹¹ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 24

¹² Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 26

¹³ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 26

¹⁴ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 28

and other Palestinian organizations established a foothold in Jordan, where the government had not yet consolidated its power and authority over the entire territory of the West Bank, and the Transjordan region. King Abdulla I. had managed to establish a union between East Jordan, and the West Bank under the banner of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. While traditional Palestinian families welcomed the union with Amman, emerging leftist, nationalist and socialist movements rejected it. Arab nationalism led by Egypt also was critical of the Jordanian step, which was interpreted as liquidation of the Palestinian question, in its early stages. As far as China is concerned, Chou En-Lai reversed the warming trend of Israeli-Chinese relations and declared clearly in 1964 that, China is ready “to extend every possible aid to the Arabs, including volunteers, munitions and money in their struggle for Palestine, and reasserted that China would never recognize Israel.”¹⁵

In the 1960s, the PLO and other Palestinian organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), etc. established permanent military camps in Jordan, and waged a combat attacks against Israel through the Jordanian territory. The government of King Hussein, a young monarch was unable to establish order, therefore, clashes with the Palestinians were immanent. However, the view among the Arab countries prior to 1967 was that, Arab countries led by Egypt would be able to defeat Israel militarily in a conventional war. However, the catastrophe of the 1967 proved otherwise, leading to discrediting Arab nationalism, and the role of the Arab countries in any future efforts to liberate Palestine. This view strengthened the leftist and Chinese views that, people’s war is the best method for national liberation as in the cases of China, North Vietnam North Korea, and Algeria. Therefore, the Palestinian national liberation movement concentrated its efforts within this direction, combat against Israel carried out by well-trained organizations. It’s in the post-1967 War that, Jordanian-Chinese relations escalated, when Beijing criticized Jordan, and the efforts of its government to curb Palestinian movements incursions on the sovereignty of the country, and the growing confrontation between the two sides that broke out in 1969. While the Chinese attacks on Jordan were ideological in nature in the 1950s, they were security in nature in the post-1967 War, where China had sided fully with the Palestinian resistance movement against the government of Jordan. The objective of the movement was overthrowing of the “conservative’ government of King Hussein and replacing it with a “progressive” pro-Palestinian government. Developments between the Palestinians and the Jordanian army led to the so-called Black September.

The year 1969 witnessed a tremendous level of tension between the Jordanian army and the Palestinian guerrillas. In 1970s, the Palestinians viewed the government of Jordan as weak, and that in any future confrontation between the two sides the Jordanian army will not side with the king against the Palestinians, a miscalculation led to the onslaught of the Palestinian movement in Jordan, on the hands of the Jordanian army. When clashes began in the summer of 1970, the people’s daily commented stating that, “a grave incident of bloodshed broke out recently when the pro-American Jordanian reactionary forces, under the machination of the US Central Intelligence Agency, unleashed an armed attack on the Palestinian guerrillas and the Palestinian residents in the vicinity of Amman.”¹⁶ Chinese press ignored the fact that, the Jordanian army was provoked by the Palestinians. China supplied arms to Fatah in particular. In fact, “Fatah was dependent on Chinese arms and therefore, China had a military role in the coming civil war in Jordan.”¹⁷ Beijing supplied arms to the Palestinians through Syrian posts, other countries such as North Vietnam and North Korea followed suit. Not only that, but Beijing held Jordan as an aggressor in the confrontations accusing the “US imperialism and its collaborators have instigated the reactionary forces of Jordan to carry armed provocations against the Palestinian guerrilla in a vain attempt to disrupt the unity of the Arab countries and the Arab people so as to realize their scheme of making Arab fight Arab.”¹⁸ By September 1970 clashes between the two sides peaked during which, the Jordanian army waged an intensive attack on the camps of the

¹⁵ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 39

¹⁶ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 83

¹⁷ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 83

¹⁸ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 84

Palestinian organizations across the country. The “result was that the Palestinian side suffered heavy casualties, the Palestinian Resistance Movement (PRM) moved totally to the defensive, and under Nasir’s personal mediation, an agreement was reached between Arafat and Hussein for a cease-fire on 27 September at a gathering of Arab heads of State in Cairo. The following day Nasir died, thus temporarily weakening the PRM’s political status as it lost a valuable supporter.”¹⁹

China’s siding with the Palestinians in the civil war, eliminated any prospects of constructive ties between the two sides. Observers noted that, China described the military conformation as “the Jordanian government’s massacre of Palestinians an important consequence of Black September was China’s forthright condemnation of the Jordanian monarch”²⁰, King Hussein. Bilateral ties between the two-side remained tense, however, King Hussein, the master of survival realized the growing importance of China in international relations, especially the admission of China to the US Security Council as a permanent member, a year later in 1971. Jordan abstained, rather than opposed China’s admission. Furthermore, political developments on the Chinese side also influenced bilateral ties between the two sides especially within the framework of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and its impact on China’s foreign policy. Moreover, the departure of the revolutionary leadership of Mao, Chou En-Lai and Lin Piao in 1976, and the takeover of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, marked a new phase of Sino-Jordanian relations, and a new phase in China’s international relations since then.

Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy concentrated on utilizing China’s foreign policy to reform its economy, restructuring it totally and initiating an economic and industrial revolution, an experiment he succeeded in, beyond the expectation of any observer. Therefore, China abandoned its policy of supporting national liberation movements aiming at overthrowing exiting governments. China became a status quo-oriented country rather than revolutionary. Beijing became also more aware of the role of the so called “conservative” countries and their role in resisting foreign intervention as in the case of the Oil Embargo initiated by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 1973. This explains the fact that, Sino-Jordanian ties began improving, along the lines of improvement with other Arab monarchies in the Gulf region. Therefore, China supported the stability of Jordan, supported the peace plans developed in the 1980s, leading to the Oslo, Madrid and Washington agreements in the 1990s. Beijing had also realized the central role that King Hussein personally had played in advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East, his charismatic leadership and the support and respect he had garnered around the world. China’s new foreign policy outlook was warmly welcomed by Jordan. Therefore, on April 14, 1977, Jordan recognized the PRC, launching a new era of partnership that materialized two decades later into a strategic partnership. Jordan’s diplomatic recognition of the PRC also influenced its allied in the region especially Oman which had nearly an identical experience with China and its intervention in the Omani civil war. China became more and more suspicious of the goals of national liberation movements including the Palestinians. As Shichor put it “perhaps the Chinese do not seem very enthusiastic about the possible Palestinian State and apparently prefer a different settlement of the Palestinian problem.”²¹ China provided support to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict along the lines of the UN resolutions 338, 242, which is supported by the overwhelming majority of the international community. China and Jordan supported the US-UN-European peace processes during the 1990s and acknowledged the central role of Jordan and King Hussein personally in advancing peace and stability in the region. In 1999, the legend, passed away, and his son Abdullah II. took over. Bilateral relations between the two sides prospered as the king visited China seven times over the past twenty years. Their bilateral agenda covers an ambitious portfolio of political, economic, energy, trade and security cooperation.

¹⁹ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 85

²⁰ Behbehani, Hashim, 1981, *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World*. KPI: London, P. 86

²¹ Shichor, Yitzhak, 1979. *The Middle East in China’s Foreign Policy: 1949-1977*. Cambridge University Press: London, P. 181

Sino-Jordanian Economic Relations

The Chinese-Jordanian economic cooperation was hampered by political difficulties that overshadowed bilateral ties between the two countries for two decades, 1950-1970s. Additionally, China's international trade in the revolutionary era was "political" and ideological in nature in the sense that, trade ties with countries were conducted within the framework of political and ideological considerations rather than pure trade or profit oriented ties. However, since the early 1980s, trade improved between the two sides. However, some trade was also conducted for this purpose with Jordan despite the fact that, Amman maintained diplomatic ties with Taiwan rather than Beijing. Shichor reported that, "despite the fact that Jordan maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan, imports from the PRC by far exceeded those from the island. Chinese exports in 1976 reached almost \$14 million"²²

China pursued a massive economic engagement policy with the entire world in the Reform Era. The Middle East was at the heart of such strategy, and Jordan was part of that trend due to economic, and geostrategic considerations. This explains the fact that, bilateral trade between the two sides increased drastically as the table below illustrates the volume of trade between the two sides from the period from 2001-2017. The Jordanian-Chinese trade portfolio includes every sector of the economy; agriculture, industry, technology, transportation, mining, tourism, water, and third-party trade relations. China is Jordan's second trading partner with a volume of trade of \$3, 082.79 billion in 2017.

Table 2.3: China-Middle East Trade Volume in \$ million from 2001-2010

2018		2009	2070.65
2017	308279	2008	1949.31
2016	316599	2007	1181.36
2015	371192	2006	10309.8
2014	362774	2005	910.68
2013	360443	2004	710.76
2012	325574	2003	524.81
2011	2053.61	2002	358.03
2010	2053.61	2001	274.29

Source: 2010 China Statistics Yearbook, By National Bureau of China Statistics at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2017/indexee.htm> downloaded on May, 14, 2019.

The year 2013 was a landmark year for bilateral relations. It's the year in which the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced his Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the year that the Chinese President and the King of Jordan inaugurated the first session of the Jordan-China Business Forum. In addition to bilateral framework, trade between Jordan and China are also promoted by multilateral forums such as the China-Arab States Economic and Trade Forum, the China-Arab Cooperation Forum, and the China-Arab States Expo, organized in Ningxia, northwestern China biennially. Jordan is active in taking part in the expo. King Abdullah of Jordan repeatedly states that, "we are deeply interested in China's success. We look to your country as a model of development".²³ It's important to state here that, Jordan used to aspire to the economic development model of Singapore and Taiwan in particular. However, Jordan currently views China as the model of economic transformation and development as the King of Jordan had repeatedly stated. The distinguished aspect of the Chinese model is Beijing's willingness and attitude toward technology transfer. Jordan economy is in urgent need for modernization, technology transfer, and investments.²⁴

The Chinese auto industry has made a presence in Jordan, Chery in particular. Chery Jordan Company Ltd. offers competitive prices to the Jordanian market if compared with Japanese, Korean,

²² Shichor, Yitzhak, 1979. *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy: 1949-1977*. Cambridge University Press: London, P. 177

²³ Xinhua Press Agency, October 30, 2007. Jordan King Hopes China to Play Important Role in Middle East Peace Process at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/30/content_6975820.htm

²⁴ Olimat, *China and the Middle East*

European or American made cars. Chery opened its mega showroom in Mecca Street Amman, where the company markets its models of QQ3, QQ6, RIICH2, Cowin, Karry3, A5, Tiggo3, EStar, and Cross Eatar.²⁵ Chery Auto aims at establishing assembly lines in Jordan, Egypt, Sudan and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Chery's assembly line in Jordan is expected to cost \$30 million dollars and employ 17,000 Jordanian, which will most certainly assist in providing job opportunities, and reduce unemployment rate in the country.

Jordan is the home of several branches of Chinese corporations, most notably clothing corporations. The Jerash Garments and Fashion Manufacturing Company has become the first Arab company listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange in New York. The company produces brands for leading American and European trade marks such as Walmart, Sears, Costco, Colombia, Timberland, the North Face, Lee, Wrangler, Tommy Hilfiger, Speedo and Calvin Klein.²⁶ JGFMC produces over 500,000 pieces monthly and exported products over \$62 million dollars to the US and Europe.

Another sector necessary for promoting bilateral trade is the banking sector. This includes opening of branches of financial institutions and providing liquidity for merchants from the two countries to conduct business. Most recently, the Arab Bank, the largest financial institutions in Jordan "has gained Chinese regulatory approval to open its first branch in China as part of a push to expand in Asian markets."²⁷ Jordan also joined the China led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) as a founding member on May 9, 2015. Jordan aims at receiving funding and investments for "projects in the infrastructure and productive sectors like water, transportation and energy...soft loans."²⁸ The information sector and telecommunications is top on the agenda of the two sides. Most recently, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Jordan signed an agreement with Huawei "to establish three academies in Jordan to enhance skills of young Jordanians in the field of technology."²⁹ The agreement was signed during the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa, 2019 organized at the Dead Sea Resort in Jordan. As for trading with third party, Jordan's strategic location and Free Zones spread from the South to the North provide Chinese corporations with a unique opportunity to conduct business with Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. The reconstruction of Syria and Iraq represent a huge business opportunity for Chinese corporations aiming at a share in the rebuilding of highways, water, energy, ports, airports, oil and gas installations in the two countries, the aviation, transportation, and telecommunications sectors as well. In fact, the outlook seems promising with the end to the war in Syria, is in sight. Jordan itself is also optimistic as it has suffered dearly from the instability in both Iraq and Syria which led to closing the markets of the two countries to Jordanian industries and manufacturers.

Finally, Jordan is an active member of the Belt & Road Initiative aimed at reviving the ancient Silk Road trade between China and the World, the Middle East in particular. BRI was announced by the Chinese President, Xi Jinping during his state visit to Kazakhstan in 2013. Beijing views it as a comprehensive framework for cooperation with the world. Jordan aims at securing substantial level of investments and economic cooperation with China to boost its ailing economy. Jordan is also part to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, an initiative aiming also to revive ancient maritime trade and naval ties connected China with Asian, African and European ports.

²⁵ Guddaf Manufacturing, Amman-Jordan, Chery industries at: http://ghodaf.jo/?page_id=22

²⁶ Fashion, May 13, 2018. Jordanian Apparel Firm Jerash Garments Plans US Listing at: <https://us.fashionnetwork.com/news/Jordanian-apparel-firm-Jerash-Garments-plans-US-listing,977058.html#.XNaSs44zaUk>

²⁷ " Reuters, July 17, 2018. Jordan's Arab Bank Gains License to Open Branch in China at: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/jordan-banks-china/jordans-arab-bank-gains-licence-to-open-branch-in-china-idUKL8N1UD4XZ>

²⁸ Jordan Times, May 9, 2015, Kingdom Officially Joins Asian Bank as a Founding Member at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/kingdom-officially-joins-asian-bank-founding-member>

²⁹ Xinhua, April 7, 2019. Jordan-China Huawei Sign A Deal to Establish 3 Academies at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/07/c_137957712.htm

Jordanian-Chinese Energy Cooperation

The US International Energy Information Administration (EIA) list Jordan as a country with poor and insufficient energy resources. Jordan imports over 90% of crude oil and natural gas from abroad, a heavy burden on the national budget estimated at 40%. The EIA stated that, “Jordan’s oil reserves are estimated at just 1 million barrels and its proved natural gas reserves at slightly more than 200 billion cubic feet (Bcf). Oil shale resources have potential to increase Jordan’s reserves significantly, and the country plans to build the first oil shale-fired electricity generation facility in the Middle East after 2017.”³⁰ Astoundingly, the country is surrounded by oil and gas producing giants especially Saudi Arabia and Iraq, while Syria produces sufficient and commercial quantities of both oil and gas. In order to meet its needs, Jordan has been pursuing several strategies, on national and regional levels. Here would come the role of China and Chinese corporations in developing the energy sector in the country. Jordan is currently constructing its first nuclear reactor, in contacts with Iraq over the construction of Basra-Aqaba Oil Pipeline, and in the process of developing oil-shale facilities. Most recently, Jordan has signed a \$14 billion deal to import natural gas from Israel. The pipeline is under construction, and basically, Israeli-American corporations are extracting natural gas from the East Mediterranean Basin, a disputed area between Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and the shores of Palestine. This deal has generated a high-level popular resentment, and opposition in the country. Jordan is also seeking to develop the solar energy sector and seeks Chinese expertise in this field. In fact, Chinese corporations have accumulated tremendous level of expertise in this field, and Jordan wants to utilize some of it in developing its energy sector.

The Jordan nuclear energy sector enjoys the support of the International Atomic Energy Administration, Chinese support, Korean, American, French, and British. In fact, China has contributed financially to the project providing grants, expertise and products. Jordan aims at producing 40% of its electricity needs from its nuclear facilities. Its increasing demand for electricity is associated with the process of urbanization, population increase, manufacturing sector and its future needs for water desalination facilities. Jordan’s water resources are insufficient to meet its needs; therefore, its future needs of water can only be met through desalination, which means more and more demand for electricity in the country.

Jordan and China signed their first nuclear energy agreement in 2010. It’s important to state here that Beijing supports the peaceful use of nuclear energy on principle. Jordan has shown no interest in a strategic or military nuclear program. The country itself is not in a geostrategic situation to develop such sector. This explains the fact that, its nuclear program similar to the United Arab Emirates enjoys regional and international support. The Sino-Jordanian nuclear cooperation program aims at joint “nuclear cooperation, under which the two sides will conduct cooperation in areas such as basic and applied research, nuclear plant designing, mineral exploration, processing, and mining uranium.... Though Jordan is deprived of conventional energy resources, it has relatively rich uranium deposits. Official estimates put the kingdom's proven uranium and phosphate reserves to around 2 percent of the world's total, which is enough to fuel Jordan's nuclear ambition.”³¹ An important aspect of the nuclear energy production is the availability of uranium deposits in Jordan extracted from its phosphate reserves. Jordan has a substantial reservoir and production of phosphate most of which is currently exported to India, and some European countries. The Jordanian Atomic Energy Commission concluded an “advanced negotiations with China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) to build a 220 MWe HTR-PM high temperature gas-cooled reactor for operation from 2025.”³²

Jordan is estimated as the fourth country in oil shale, where Chinese corporations have also made extraordinary expertise in this field making them, the best option for Jordan to develop this

³⁰ Energy Information Administration, Jordan’s Energy Outlook at: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=JOR>

³¹ Olimat, Muhamad, 2014. *China and the Middle East Since WWII: A Bilateral Approach*, Lexington Books, P. 114.

³² World Nuclear Energy Organization, *Nuclear Power in Jordan*, 2018 at: <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-g-n/jordan.aspx>

sector. In fact, Chinese corporations have been leading in countries such as Tunis and Morocco which have similar energy outlook as in the case of Jordan. The oil shale “is a fine-grained sedimentary rock which is very rich in organic sedimentary material called “kerogen.” The shale is heated to separate the kerogen from the rock and the resultant liquid is converted to superior quality jet fuel, diesel fuel, kerosene, and other high value products.”³³ Additionally, Chinese corporations such as Foshan Geco Renewable Energy Co., Ltd, Scatec Solar Solutions, Midsummer AB, Dalian Linton NC Machine Co., Ltd, Tigo Energy, JinkSolar, etc. have built worldwide expertise in the area of solar energy. Jordan itself has garnered popular momentum for the use of solar energy, given the fact that, Jordan enjoys 300 days/365 annually, a top-level source of energy around the year. This explains the fact that, solar farms are spreading across the country. Jordan’s aim is “to produce 20% of its power consumption from green energy resources by 2020.”³⁴ Within this line of thinking, Trina Solar, a China based “a global leader in photovoltaic solutions, has signed an EPC contract with Fresh Fruits Company, a food storage firm in Amman, for a 2 MW rooftop solar power plant on the company’s stores and warehouses.”³⁵ Jordan’s ultimate aim is to increase its solar energy from 7% of its energy production to 20% by 2020. Finally, much of the Jordanian desert and territory is not explored for traditional energy sources, namely crude oil. Chinese corporations have also built a world known reputation in exploring for oil in different terrain, in deserts, at seas, or oceans. The Jordanian topography is identical to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria. It’s a territorial extension to oil and gas producing countries, and therefore, Chinese technology will most certainly assist Jordan in its future survey and exploration for energy resources in its territory.

Sino-Jordanian Cultural Relations

The Chinese-Arab central relations and civilizational contacts are deeply rooted in the history of both peoples. Furthermore, in modern times and in the post-WWII. period, culture became a major element in China’s foreign policy, toward the Middle East and Africa. It’s Chou En-Lai, the first Premier and Foreign Affairs Minister of the PRC who underlined cultural relations as a main instrument of advancing China’s international relations. At Bandung, En-Lai assured the Muslim countries including Jordan and Saudi Arabia of the status of Muslims in China, and both sides were reminded with the depth of such ties. He listened to the concerns made by the Saudi and Jordanian delegations in terms of mistreatment of Muslim communities in China on the hands of the Communist regime. En-Lai promised to improve the situation of Muslims and resume the Hajj. In fact, religious and cultural aspects were determining factors in the establishment of Saudi-Chinese, and to some extent Jordanian-Chinese diplomatic relations, given the fact that, both kingdoms enjoy tremendous level of religious and historical legitimacy.

Chou En-Lai dispatched in 1956 a Muslim Hajj delegation led by Hajji Burhan Shahidi, known as Pao Erhan, who was at that time the Chairman of the China Islamic Association. The delegation performed Hajj and toured the region with the objective of highlighting the peaceful situation of Muslims in China, in addition to securing diplomatic recognition to the PRC. While the delegation was received warmly by the monarchs of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, both refrained from establishing diplomatic relations until 1977, and 1990 respectively. However, cultural ties between Jordan and China developed and improved tremendously since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1977.

The cultural interaction between the two countries are wide and diverse. It includes the areas of education, science, tourism, music concerts, celebrating new year’s, cultural weeks, etc. Jordan’s

³³ Olimat, Muhamad, 2014. *China and the Middle East Since WWII: A Bilateral Approach*, Lexington Books, P. 114.

³⁴ Euronews, January 20, 2019. Jordan Switch to Renewable Energy With Solar Power, at <https://www.euronews.com/2019/01/18/jordan-s-switch-to-renewable-energy-with-solar-power>

³⁵ Al Bawaba, February 12, 2014. Sun is Shining on China-Jordan Solar Deal at: <https://www.albawaba.com/business/jordan-solar-558185>

territory has witnessed the birth and demise of civilizations over the past 7000 years, which makes it a world destination for tourists aiming at experiencing the Nabiteans, Greek, Roman and Islamic civilizations. Petra, Jerash, Um Qyes, etc. are world renowned cities attracting millions of visitors annually. Jordan aims at attracting more Chinese tourists, while China also aims at boosting its tourism industry by attracting Muslim tourists. In this regard, China has been developing its Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region as a showcase to the situation of Muslims in China, especially the capital city of Yinchuan.

Jordan supported the hosting of China to the 2008 Olympic Games, and the 2010 Shanghai International Expo. In the expo. Jordan's pavilion was visited by hundreds of thousands of guests. The pavilion won the Bronze Award for the best and most creative pavilion. Education is another area of bilateral cooperation. Hundreds of Chinese students study Arabic language, Islamic studies and history across the country, while hundreds of Jordanian students currently are studying at China's finest universities and colleges. In Jordan as in the case of other countries, Mandarin attracts tremendous attention. Both sides have responded to such interests. Most universities in Jordan offer Mandarin as a foreign language, while China has opened toe Confucius Institutes in Jordan. The two branches offer Chines language instructions, business courses, host folklore bands, music concerts, celebrate Chinese New Year and disseminate Chinese culture.

Sino-Jordanian Security Cooperation

The security dimension of the Jordanian-Chinese relations has always been at the core of their bilateral relations since the early 1950s. In terms of territorial integrity and sovereignty, Jordan recognized the Republic of China and rejected the One China Principle. Simultaneously, the PRC's systematic attack on Jordan and undermining its seventy and territorial integrity was evident in China's direct intervention in the civil war, and internal Jordanian politics for the period from mid-1950 to mid-1970s. Hardly ever had the Chinese press mentioned Jordan positively apart from the 1967 War.

However, while Beijing had consistently supported the Arab views on the Arab-Israeli conflict, it had made no significant contributions to alter the balance of power in the Middle East. Probably the most security challenge faced the Kingdom of Jordan was the civil war, in which China became an integral part. China provided the Palestinian guerrillas with all weapons needed to engage with the Jordanian armed forces. It was the ferocity of the Jordanian armed forces that made the difference and but an end to the Palestinian ambitions of overthrowing the monarchy of Jordan. This explains the fact that, Sino-Jordanian relations never recovered from this catastrophe under the rule of King Hussein (1952-1999). It was only under his successor, who sought to improve Sino-Jordanian relations.

As for the other conflicts engulfed the region over the past seventy years, the two sides have had different views on wars and conflict occurred in the region, and the Greater Middle East at large. Jordan and China sided fully with the Afghan resistance movement against the Soviet invasion in 1978. In fact, China was one of the very first countries to provide weapons and diplomatic support for the forces battling the Soviet Union. In terms of the Iranian Revolution, Beijing received the news of the collapse of the Shah's regime with caution. However, the revolutionary forces did not hold China strictly within the "enemy" camp, given the fact that, it was only recently at that time that the two countries had established diplomatic relations, in 1971. Secondly, Tehran needed China in the immanent confrontation looming with Saddam Hussein, which eventually led the eight years of war. When hostilities breakout in September 1980, Beijing was hoping to limit the confrontation. However, the war dragged on, and China became part of it. China sold weapons to both countries, with the aim of creating a balance of power leads to frustrating the two sides, and eventually ends the war. The Americans and Europeans had similar views on the balance of war, but with the aim of an Attrition War that drains both and leads to their collapse.

Jordan sides with Iraq as in the case of the overwhelming majority of the Arab countries with the exception of Libya, Algeria and Syria. Arab countries especially Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan

provided weapons, ammunition, purchased weapons for Iraq, opened up their ports for Iraqi supplies, and provided volunteers. When the war ended in 1988, Iraq came out of the war in a much better position if compared with Iran. Iraq had an intact armed force, superior air force, and strong leadership. However, the Iraqi leadership of Saddam Hussein had squandered its gains in less than two years when Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Beijing opposed the invasion and urged Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Iraq, while Jordan under popular support sided with Iraq. Beijing's support to Kuwait was based on several factors, some of which had to deal with the warm ties between the two countries since the early 1960s. Kuwait strongly supported the admission of China to the United Nations and mobilized for it. Trade and financial support including loans to the Chinese government during the difficult times China went through were also part of scene that dictated total opposition to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The Kuwait Crisis resulted in a total defeat to Iraq in a catastrophic war led by the US, which formed an international coalition to evict Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. The aftermath of the Kuwait War was catastrophic on both countries, Kuwait and Iraq. The war brought an endless cycle of violence crises on Iraq in particular.

Jordan and China supported the Food for Oil program designed by the United Nations to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Iraq in the 1990s. Chinese corporations were beneficiaries of the program, supplying different types of goods and services to Iraq, so did Jordanian corporations. During the 1990s, Iraq was also subject to a set of United Nations and American sanctions due to scrutiny of its nuclear program. Beijing urged Baghdad of compliance. On principle, China opposed the economic regime sanctions on Iraq and attempted to lift the sanctions. However, the catastrophic terrorist attacks occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001 had drastically influenced intentional politics as never before since World War II. In response to such attacks the United States declared it War on Terror. Jordan and China supported the war, though China in particular had its own War on Terror to wage. China utilized the war to root out organization opposition Chinese rule in Xinjiang. For this purpose, China needed the support of Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries to discredit the East Turkistan organizations.

China supported Jordan in the aftermath of the catastrophic terrorist attacks befall Jordan on November 5, 2005. In fact, three Chinese nationals were killed in the attack. A month later, the king of Jordan visited China to offer condolences, and coordinate closely with the Chinese government on security matters. Beijing sought more security resources to protect its businesses and community in Jordan. Something, the government of Jordan provided.

China and Jordan opposed the American invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003 on several grounds. The two countries viewed it as an aimless, and groundless war that would lead to destabilizing Iraq and the region for decades to come. The American mismanagement of the invasion and post-invasion period proved catastrophic. The war led to government collapse, and breakdown of order in the entire country. The American occupying force was unable to manage the country, and militia, violence and terrorism became the order of the day. It took the US seven years to provide basic stability leading to its premature withdrawal in 2010. The post US-withdrawal period is characterized by instability, violence and terrorism. It has taken the Iraqi government nine years to establish basic order across the country. This period began with the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, sectarianism, and the formation of Shi'i militia that rivals the standard Iraqi army.

Arab Spring was another security threat faced Jordan and China. This explains the fact that, both countries opposed it on several grounds. Beijing and Amman viewed it as destabilizing to the region, threatening to the security, sovereignty of the Arab countries, and disruptive to international trade. The changes that swept the region from North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula were the most destabilizing revolutionary wave since the wars of independence in the 1950s. China feared the revolutionary spirit and its impact on China's Muslim regions, especially Xinjiang. However, both countries managed to minimize its impact, and move forward beyond the narrative of Arab Spring. Finally, in terms of arms sales, Chinese military industry has established itself in the international arms

sales markets, making China the 5th supplier worldwide.³⁶ Beijing aims to supply the Jordanian armed forces, and other armies with military hardware. However, the Jordanian army is American and European equipped, but that does not mean that Jordan is fully closed to the idea of military cooperation with China. In fact, Beijing has been making some advances into the gulf weapons markets, as well as selling weapons to other Arab countries such as Syria, Iraq and Libya.

Conclusion

The Sino-Jordanian relations have witnessed radical improvements since the 1990s, leading to strategic partnership between the two countries less than two decades later. Their political ties are conducted at the highest level. The King of Jordan visited China seven times over the past twenty years. Similarly, high ranking officials exchanged visits between the two countries. The two countries have also expanded their bilateral trade, which include every aspect of the economy. Their volume of trade is estimated at \$3, 082.79 billion in 2017. Chinese industries, goods and services are dominant in the Jordanian market. Jordan is attracting Chinese investments, technology transfer. Jordanian Free Zones are the home of hundred of Chinese corporations including auto industry, clothing and fashion, telecommunications, home supplies, and heavy machinery. Chinese corporations are also involved in the energy sector in Jordan, in the solar sector, oil shale industry, and nuclear energy. The two countries have concluded close security cooperation in the area of combating extremism and terrorism. Finally, Jordan and China have made cultural relations as part of their foreign policy goals. Jordan welcome thousands of Chinese tourists annually, and Amman is the home of two Confucius Institutes.

³⁶ SIPR Year Book, 2018: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Oxford University Press, UK. P. 192