



REGIONS AND POWERS ACROSS REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEXES - RUSSIAN FEDERATION, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the potential shifts in the power dynamics within regional security complexes surrounding the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as China), and the Middle East. The change in security perspectives by the major powers within these complexes not only indicates a transformation in strategic thinking but also signals a potential paradigm shift in the global security environment, affecting international relations in the present and future. Consequently, a key question arises: Can we interpret the shifts in security thinking in these regions as a possibility for the creation of flexible regional security complexes, primarily driven by the strategic influence and decisions of the powers in these complexes, as defined by B. Buzan and O. Wæver in their 2006 publication?

Keywords: regional security complex theory, Russian Federation, China, Middle East, security cooperation

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The foundational ideas surrounding regional security complexes (RSCs) were first developed by B. Buzan, followed by O. Wæver, and subsequently expanded by a group of experts now known as the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. (2006) The basic premises of regional security complex theory were formulated by the Copenhagen School of Security in the post-Cold War period, as one of the possible perspectives to analyze new regional security contexts within the broader view of international security and security studies. Today, this theory is widely recognized globally, and its further development is in line with the evolving field of security studies. However, the shifts in the contemporary security reality indicate a possible deviation from the traditional influence of powers within their respective security regions. Today, we must respond to the possibility of creating flexible cooperations within security areas between individual RSCs, based on decisions made by the powers at their core.

1 SELECTED REGIONS AND POWERS IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY

The theory of regional security complexes represents one of the fundamental premises for defining the behavior of states within these complexes. It plays a crucial role in defining the position of powers within these complexes and their potential cooperation or lack thereof with other global powers.

In the case of the Russian Federation, as early as 2022, during the study of the Eastern security complex, we were able to demonstrate that the security complex formed around Russia, following the end of the Cold War, underwent certain developments and changes—both internally and, more importantly, regarding the flexibility and shifting of the boundaries of the complex, thus also shifting the buffer zone of the examined power. (Durfina, 2022, p. 67–68).

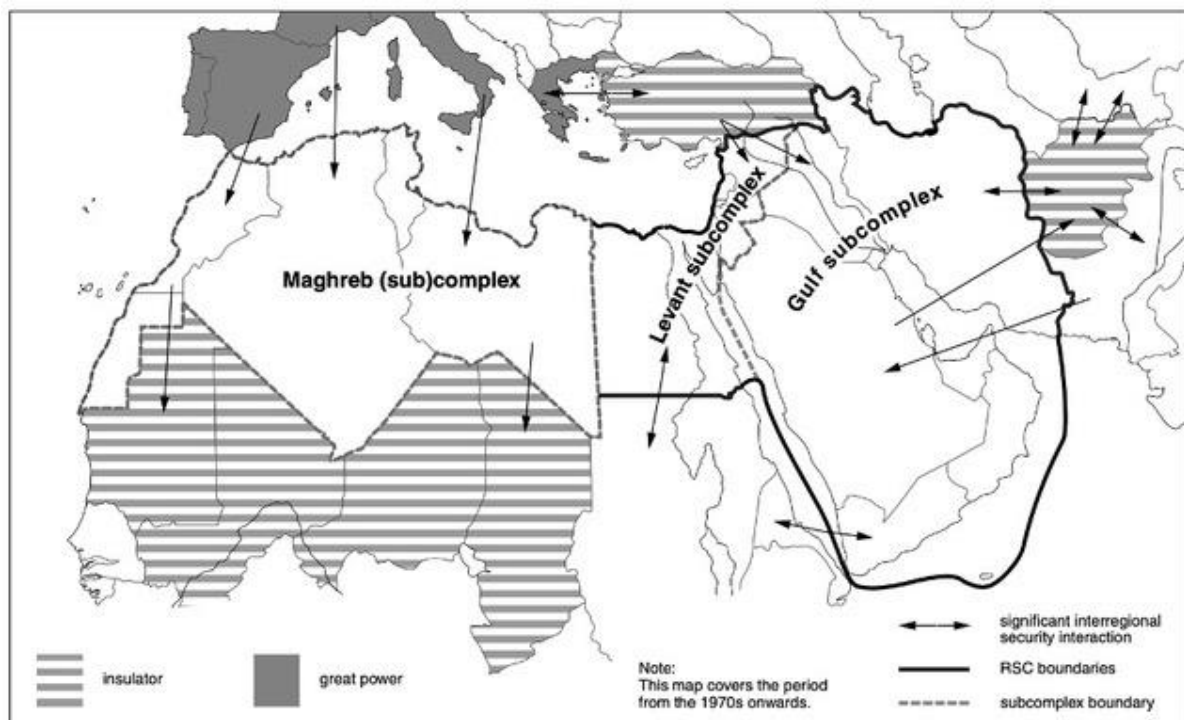
Similarly, it was confirmed that "the Eastern RSC could be defined not on the strict deterrence of all EU Member States, but rather on the concept of a flexible transfer of borders of the security complex formed around the Russian Federation." (Ďurfina, 2022, p 68). In light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the current sanction mechanisms from the European Union, Russia has, especially in recent years, shifted its attention towards military (security) cooperation with China. From Moscow's perspective, the partnership with China is a strategic imperative to maintain its status as a great power. China's support has helped Russia withstand some of the negative effects of Western sanctions, particularly through Chinese purchases in the energy sector.

From the perspective of the RSCT, China is part of the Northeast security complex, alongside Japan and Korea, and is also considered a great power within the extended East Asia regional supercomplex. Globally, during the Cold War, this complex was defined by the triangular "game of containment" between the US, USSR, and China. This interplay among the most significant powers of the time profoundly influenced both domestic and regional security strategies in the region. At the interregional level, China's geopolitical position within security complexes paved the way for the creation of a so-called supercomplex, where a looser connection was formed based on the influence of a great power (China) on interregional security dynamics. However, at the regional level, South, Northeast, and Southeast Asia were significantly separated in terms of security. As we previously demonstrated, the Northeast region was deeply penetrated by rivalry between the superpowers. Today, it is clear that the Asia super complex is significantly influenced by developments in China, though the impact of Japan and India in the region should not be underestimated. Additionally, the region is undoubtedly influenced by the actions of North Korea against other players in the region and the world.

As we have already confirmed in the case of the Russian Federation in the context of the security complex theory, it is evident that China also significantly influences the development of the Asian super complex and defines the security relations among other countries within the complex. (Ďurfina, 2024) Externally, it fundamentally shapes China's position in terms of its cooperation with Russia as well as with the Middle East. Moreover, it can be stated that China plays a crucial role in facilitating further connections and cooperation between Russia and select countries in the Middle East.

When examining the regional security complex in the Middle East, it is important to note that this region is highly unstable. Authors Buzan and Wæver confirm that it is extremely difficult to define when exactly the Middle Eastern RSC began to form. (2006) This is primarily due to the challenging task of pinpointing the period when the states transitioned from colonial status to developing their independence. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia were never colonial countries. In other countries, it is difficult to determine when the transition from colony to independent state occurred, as seen in countries like Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Oman. This period was also marked by numerous rivalries and conflicts, such as between Iraq and Egypt, territorial disputes between Lebanon and Greater Syria, and other so-called inter-Arab rivalries. Similar to developments in South Asia, the Middle Eastern RSC was born out of conflict. While it is not the focus of this article to define the current Middle Eastern RSC, particularly the Gulf and Levant sub complex, from the perspective of its origin, we will focus primarily on the period during and after the Cold War to better understand the current state of the region and its potential connections to Russia and China. It is important to acknowledge that during the Cold War, the Middle East was considered the "third front" after Europe and Asia, where the global powers focused their attention. The Middle East experienced cross-cutting influences, making it challenging to identify a clear pattern of influence from the great powers in the region. (Buzan - Wæver, 2006)

In European countries, it was primarily the British, French, Italians, and Germans who dominated specific countries. Subsequently, the Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the main players in Middle Eastern regional security, driven by their interests in the oil industry. This region was also characterized by its position at the boundary between the spheres of influence of communism and Western ideology. In terms of complexity, we can confirm that the regional security dynamics of the Middle Eastern RSC were deeply rooted in the local politics and history of individual countries. As we have already discussed, while global-level influence was strong, unlike in Southeast Asia, ideological rivalry did not manage to shape regional patterns in this region as strongly. Since most conflicts at the time did not primarily stem from Cold War issues, it is not surprising that this region essentially remained unchanged even after the Cold War ended.



Picture 1 Regional security complex - Middle East
Source: Buzan - Wæver, 2006, p. 189

1.1 A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION: THE SECOND GULF WAR

In our opinion, the Second Gulf War had a significant influence on the power distribution within the region. For this reason, the post-Cold War era can be defined starting from the Second Gulf War in 1990–1991. This war, and especially its subsequent effects, changed the basic structure of the Middle Eastern RSC and its individual subcomplexes. The main consequences of this conflict include, most notably, the military weakening of Iraq in relation to its neighbors, leading to a shift in the power distribution in the Gulf subcomplex, though without major changes in the structure of rivalry in the Gulf. Likewise, the position of Western powers, especially the United States, strengthened within the GCC states.

On the other hand, this conflict opened the door to the beginnings of a peace process between, on the one hand, Israel and the Palestinians, and on the other hand, Jordan and Syria. Additionally, Hussein's actions impacted the pan-Arabism project, which, on the one hand,

helped to reinforce the penetration of Western state structures into the region, but at the same time, it also strengthened the development of radical Islamist politics. These effects were further compounded by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had supported its allies in the region militarily and politically. Consequently, the global influence in the Middle Eastern RSC did not diminish; instead, it transitioned from a bipolar superpower rivalry to a global influence dominated by a unipolar system, with the United States at its helm. This dominance contributed to the suppression of interstate conflictual security dynamics, although not intra-state dynamics within both core subcomplexes. The defeat of Iraq in 1991 changed the nature of global-level intervention as well as the local power distribution in the Gulf. The 1990s can be defined by four major developments that influenced security dynamics in the Persian Gulf, and these effects persisted, to some extent, into the 21st century.

After the war, there were uprisings in Kurdistan and southern Iraq, both of which were militarily suppressed by Hussein. Turkey and the U.S. became involved in Kurdish politics, and while a quasi-autonomous enclave was established in northern Iraq, this did not threaten Hussein's control over the rest of the country. The war also triggered a series of bloody but unsuccessful coup attempts and assassination attempts on Hussein and his family, significantly supported by the United States.

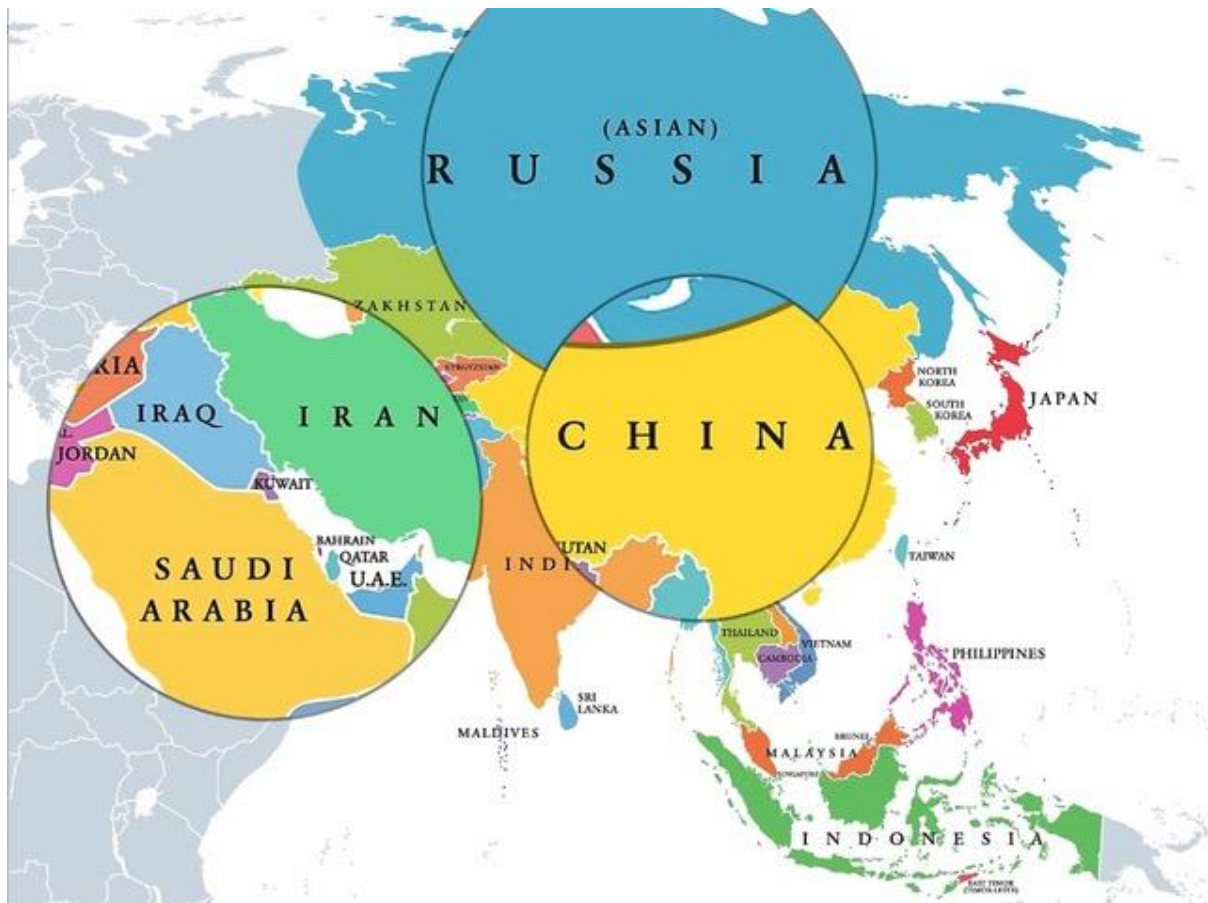
Following the liberation of Kuwait by coalition forces, but leaving Saddam Hussein in power in Iraq, the era of "dual containment" by the U.S. against both Iraq and Iran began. This dual containment policy became deeply rooted in U.S. domestic politics. According to Sick, the mutual hostility between Iraq and Iran, on one side, and Israel, on the other, helped link two fundamental sub complexes within the Middle East – the Gulf sub complex and the Levant sub complex. (Sick, 1998, p. 6–10, p. 22) It is also important to note that the war significantly weakened Iraq's military capabilities to attack its neighbours, while Iran undoubtedly benefited from the strengthening of its position. Iran significantly bolstered its military capabilities by purchasing arms, primarily from China and the then Soviet Union, and later from the Russian Federation. At the same time, Iran began developing its missile and WMD programs. Iran clearly remained opposed to U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf, despite the fact that the U.S. kept Iraq weak, thereby aiding Iran's position in the region. We must also acknowledge that the Second Gulf War placed the GCC states in a position of protectorate relative to the West, particularly the United States. According to research from 1991, despite the fact that the Gulf states briefly attempted to align with Egypt and Syria, they concluded that bilateral ties with Western powers would provide a less disruptive form of security dynamics and organization than any security structure offered by their Arab allies. (Strategic Survey, 1991-2, p. 101)

After the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait significantly increased their military purchases, not only from the United States but also from France and Great Britain. In this context, Saudi Arabia subsequently agreed with the U.S. on a policy of dual containment against both Iran and Iraq. However, it is essential to note that subsequent developments in global security, particularly the terrorist attacks of 2001, opened an entirely new debate about the sustainability of Western cooperation with undemocratic regimes in the Persian Gulf. The ensuing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq created new dividing lines not only between the West and certain countries in the Gulf and Levant sub complexes but also highlighted shifts in the effort to build a new security reality in the Gulf and Levant sub complexes.

2 REGIONS AND POWERS - A NEW SECURITY DYNAMIC?

As we confirmed earlier in this article, the question of cooperation between China and Russia is based on strong historical foundations, which were significantly stabilized during the

Cold War when China was largely an ally of the Soviet Union in containing the United States in Asia and formed one of the pillars of communist ideology against the capitalist West.



Picture 2 Selected Regions and Powers
Source: modified by author

As we have previously presented, a key link between China and Russia is undoubtedly China's support in purchasing energy resources, especially after the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the sanctions imposed on Russia by the West. It is important to add, however, that the Russia-China partnership is equally critical for Beijing itself. Without other significant alliances, support from Moscow is one of the key dynamics that effectively creates a counterbalance to the power of the United States. Of course, Beijing sees significant advantages in its partnership with Moscow, as it can substantially benefit from cheap energy resources, advanced military technologies, and other strategic resources. Strategic cooperation and coordination of steps in the military partnership suggest that increasing this cooperation could also include certain forms of joint military operations.

It should be noted that cooperation in this area does not necessarily mean full interoperability of military forces. One aspect that would aid the development of cooperation in this field would be deeper integration, which could result in more complex and frequent joint military exercises. As demonstrated by joint exercises in July this year, this is not merely a hypothesis or a matter of the distant future. It is also important to add that the development of military cooperation could lead to considerations of operating combined forces in new geographic areas, through new operational concepts that these powers might develop together. Further strengthening of cooperation in the security field can be seen not only in defense agreements but also in the enhancement of other forms of military cooperation. The question

remains, of course, whether direct military confrontation with the United States is possible. At the moment, we observe that the probable costs and impacts of a direct military confrontation with the U.S. reduce the interest in entering such an operation, whether independently or in coalition. To a large extent, this possibility remains unlikely, especially from the perspective of Beijing's power strategy. This suggests that the West's efforts to sever ties between China and Russia are more likely to motivate the strengthening of relations between Putin and Xi, rather than their dissolution. These relations are a fundamental strategic position for both countries, and their importance for both nations transcend the partnership between the leaders of these powers.

Putin and President Xi have met countless times since Xi took power in 2013. As early as 2015, both countries announced their intentions to further strengthen relations between their armies. China's 2015 Defense White Paper clearly states that it will support military relations and cooperation with the Russian Federation in multiple areas and at multiple levels. (China's..., 2015) Similarly, Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy identifies China as a key player in maintaining global and regional stability. (Russian..., 2015) Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu himself confirmed in 2015 that cooperation in joint military exercises is the most important aspect of Russia-China defense cooperation, which prepares both countries for modern challenges and threats in the international environment. Subsequently, the 2017 agreement between Russia and China aimed to create a three-year plan and a legal framework for closer military cooperation. (Wu, 2017) What must be noted, however, is that Russian officials did not speak directly about a military alliance but about a strategic partnership or strategic alliance. Neither of these powers needs or requests formal security guarantees or mutual nuclear deterrence guarantees. This is the result of the logical fact that both countries have reformed, developed, and used their armed forces for their political goals without Moscow relying on Beijing, or vice versa – Russia in Ukraine or Syria, and China in the East and South China Seas. After Russia's military actions in Ukraine in 2014, Moscow increasingly promoted the expansion of military cooperation with China and was also the initiator of the 2017 bilateral military cooperation plan. In this increased cooperation, Beijing did not lag Moscow's enthusiasm, especially when the Trump administration began its so-called "trade war" with China. Relations between both countries and the U.S. deteriorated, likely contributing to Putin and Xi's decision to expand cooperation in military and technical areas into more strategic realms. During this time, there was talk of joint military planning and reportedly greater interoperability between Russian and Chinese military units. Nevertheless, Russian officials at the time were still cautious about officially declaring this relationship a military alliance, although it was openly stated that these two countries were allies in the international environment. In 2018, Dmitry Peskov declared that China's participation in the Russian strategic command exercise Vostok-2018 represented the expansion of interaction between the two allies in all spheres. (Blank, 2018) However, Russian officials at that time focused more on emphasizing how much the U.S. disrespected Russia and China, rather than building definitive security guarantees or practically sharing some military burdens in future conflicts. In the following years, even Putin cautiously presented the vision of some sort of military alliance between Russia and China, admitting only that it was theoretically possible.

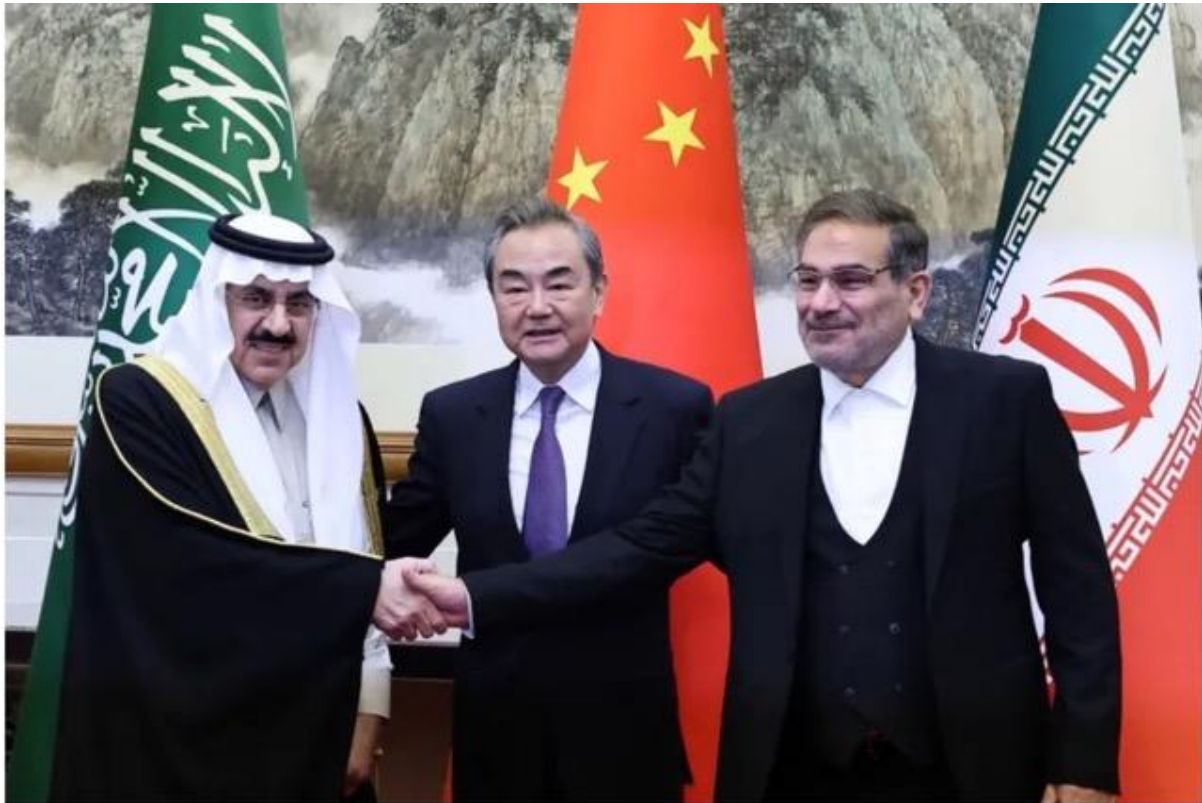
Regarding the examination of relations between China and Russia, on one side, and the Middle East on the other, we must confirm that China and Russia have had largely different relationships with this region at least since the mid-20th century. During these years, their regional influence was divided into military and energy spheres from Russia's perspective and into economic engagement from China's perspective. Despite the frequent claim that the Soviet Union introduced China to the Middle East, we believe the opposite is true. As early as 1955, during the Bandung Conference, Egyptian President Nasser asked China for military equipment

to confront Israel over its military involvement in the Gaza Strip, which was under the control of the Egyptian military at the time. The Chinese premier stated that China relied on the Soviet Union for military support and suggested mediating a meeting between the two countries. This ultimately led to the development of military trade between Czechoslovakia and Egypt, marking the beginning of Egyptian-Soviet military cooperation. This cooperation foretold the possibility of expanding Soviet influence in Egypt, the Middle East, and Africa. According to statistics, in 1985, trade between China and Middle Eastern countries amounted to approximately \$1.7 billion, indicating that China had no significant financial stake in the region. (Dahshan, 2024) In this context, it is clear that China and Russia were not competing significantly in the Middle East. In the Afghanistan war, China essentially supported fighters against the Soviet presence, and after the June 1967 war, the Soviet Union lost its influence due to Israel's victory over Egypt and Syria. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat severed ties with Moscow and, in 1979, signed the Egypt-Israel peace treaty with full U.S. support. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian influence in the region effectively ended for many years.

Currently, it can be assumed that Moscow perceives its direct position in the region as significantly developing. The effort to increase its influence has been gradually implemented through the strengthening of several naval and air bases and direct involvement in the Syrian war. This involvement in the conflict was accompanied by a reaffirmation of Moscow's commitment to its allies in the region. This step, especially in light of the Arab Spring, resonated strongly among Arab leaders. This was largely a reflection of the fact that the U.S. did not support its ally, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, during this period. As a result, Moscow was able to establish, for the first time, close ties with the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, through joint coordination in controlling oil markets within the mechanisms of OPEC+.

The relationship between Russia and the United Arab Emirates also experienced significant growth, primarily through unprecedented increases in trade and investment, with joint coordination from Qatar ensuring that neither party disrupted the other's share of traditional gas export markets. For the first time since the 1970s, we have seen the return of Moscow to these security sub complexes, including the resumption of arms supplies to the Egyptian army, the implementation of economic projects in the Suez Canal economic zone, and the construction of Egypt's first nuclear reactor in Dabaa on the Mediterranean coast, led by the Russian Federation.

China, in turn, can now be considered the main trading partner for all Arab countries, surpassing even the U.S. in the traditional sphere of influence in the Persian Gulf region. China has become the largest buyer of Arab oil and has established equally good relations with all conflicting parties, such as the Palestinians and Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Particularly significant in this context is China's mediation in restoring relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which had been severed since 2016. This clearly highlights China's position and strength in mediation and in easing tensions even between hostile countries within the Middle East region.



Picture 3 Mediation of diplomatic relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran
Source: China Daily via Reuters

Experts argue that the current relations between China and Russia on one side, and the Middle East on the other, are essentially based on a covert alliance, relying on the foundations of cooperation and strategic partnership between these two powers (Dahshan, 2024). It can also be added that China is strategically cooperating with both Russia and Middle Eastern countries with the aim of creating a multipolar international system, which inevitably impacts the global security arrangement. It is clear that Moscow has historical experience and strategic tools that allow it to play an active and multifaceted role in the region. Beijing, on the other hand, lacks this experience, but through the presentation and implementation of its soft power, China can significantly create space for its economic interests.

There is no serious competition between the two powers in this case, and it is possible that they will expand their influence and strive to achieve a balance of roles, both globally and especially in the region. Russia seeks to strengthen its military-technical relations, ensuring that Syria remains the cornerstone of their influence, while also coordinating energy markets with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and Algeria. At the same time, it seeks support or at least positive neutrality regarding its conflict with the West. It is essential to note that Moscow is striving to break the Western isolation that followed the start of its invasion of Ukraine, and the Middle East region is particularly critical for this effort. On the other hand, Beijing focuses on the efficiency and security of its maritime routes, uninterrupted oil flows, and infrastructure projects. Ambitious projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative undoubtedly fall within this context.

From a security perspective, it can be confirmed that Russia is trying to engage China in relations with Syria through reconstruction projects in Syria, especially in the oil sector, where China was the largest investor in the past. Of course, China is highly sensitive to stability in the region and is primarily focused on achieving peace between Palestine and Israel and

maintaining and expanding good relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the rest of the Gulf states. Equally important for exploring the possible connection between China, Russia, and the Middle East is the analysis of Russia-China relations with Iran. These relationships are undoubtedly marked by certain complex factors. Both countries share common interests and concerns, especially regarding the improvement of relations with the Gulf states. At the same time, they cannot clearly position themselves as supporters of any party hostile to the state of Israel. On the contrary, Iran undoubtedly holds both economic and strong geopolitical significance for both powers. China assists Iran economically, creating what is known as Tehran's "air bridge," as it is also affected by Western sanctions. Russia, in turn, supports Iran through military-technical means and is a key diplomatic ally.

Comparing these two aspects, it is evident that Russia does not have the economic means to significantly support Tehran. However, it is absolutely clear that Moscow prefers China's economic influence in the region over that of the United States. Furthermore, the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 further strengthened the positions of China and Russia in Iran. (US Withdrawal..., 2018) As a result, Russia and China can cooperate very successfully in various areas and achieve significant progress. Compared to the situation just a few years ago, we must acknowledge that the positions of these powers, including in relation to Iran, have been significantly strengthened. Not only does Russia have no fear of China's growing influence in Iran, but it may also motivate Moscow to engage even more in projects, which is also key to strengthening multipolarity, not only in this region but globally.

In conclusion, we can confirm that Russia's focus in the Middle East centres on three key sectors:

1. The Energy Sector: This is the core of Russia's partnership with the countries of the region and can be considered the main pillar of their economic development, especially in light of ongoing Western sanctions. Russian oil companies are engaged in exploration activities in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait.
2. The Military Sector: Russia is the second-largest arms exporter in the world and relies heavily on arms sales as a major source of national income. The Middle East, after Asia, is the second-largest market for Russian arms systems. (Beheiry, 2015)
3. The Space Sector: This involves cooperation between Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates in launching satellites for telecommunications and navigation.

From Russia's perspective, we cannot overlook Moscow's priority in the fight against terrorism in relation to the Middle East. China's strategic approach in the Middle East is no different from that of the United States, as this region is the main source of energy security for the coming decades. However, China strategically avoids any hostility in the region by keeping its military out of both studied sub complexes. It is important to note that predictions for oil imports from the Middle East to China are expected to reach up to 75% by 2030, primarily from Saudi Arabia. (Beheiry, 2015) The increased demand for gas has led China to sign several additional agreements with Gulf countries, especially Qatar. China is also working with Tehran on the construction of gas pipelines across the Caspian Sea and Kazakhstan, which would supply it with gas. Russia, in turn, is the largest exporter of natural gas, which is once again linked to supplies to China and, significantly, today to India as well.

3 BUILDING FLEXIBLE SECURITY COMPLEXES

Russian-Chinese relations will undoubtedly continue to strengthen. The same will be true of Russian-Chinese influence in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf region. China's pragmatic policy will likely continue to secure oil and its economic position in the Middle East,

with these areas being of strategic importance to Beijing. For China, it will be essential to maintain a non-interventionist stance in regional conflicts and remain a diplomatic mediator wherever possible. China will likely continue to engage in the Arab-Israeli conflict resolution process, keeping the same distance from both sides in the conflict. It appears that Beijing will also continue to support Iran in its strategic direction, even though it disagrees with some aspects of Iran's regional strategy, given Iran's importance as a market and supplier of oil. In this context, it will also remain important for China to counteract American influence in the region. China will need to stabilize Saudi-Iranian relations as much as possible, which places China in a critical diplomatic position between the two countries but also in a strong position as a potential future mediator in similar cases.

From the perspective of the Russian Federation, the Middle East and especially the Gulf region is a market for arms exports, on which its economy is highly dependent. The export of military materials is currently significant for Moscow not only in terms of national security but also in terms of activating its military industry. Reports confirm that the Gulf states and Levant sub complex countries doubled their arms imports between 2013 and 2015, placing Russia in a significant position in the military industry as an exporter to the Middle East. (Almaqbal - Mikhaylichenko, 2019)

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Middle East began to play an increasingly important role for Moscow, not only for its foreign and security policy but also for its economy. The fact that hundreds of thousands of Russians who fled the war or mobilization moved to the region means that the influence of the Middle East is increasingly felt within Russia itself. Militarily, Russia significantly activated its presence in the region after many years when it entered the Syrian civil war on the side of the Syrian government. By 2022, however, the Middle East was just one of many vectors of Russian foreign policy focus. The war in Ukraine changed everything. Western isolation forced Putin to seek alternative partners in various areas, with Middle Eastern countries becoming second only to China in importance for Moscow just one year after the invasion of Ukraine. Trade turnover with Turkey doubled to more than \$60 billion in 2022, once again highlighting Turkey's significance as a partner in various sectors, from air transport to imports of advanced technology. It is also important to note that Turkey is a NATO member state, and its cooperation with Russia is neither restricted nor heavily criticized by Western powers. Similarly, trade turnover with the United Arab Emirates increased by 68% in 2022, reaching \$9 billion. (Almaqbal - Mikhaylichenko, 2019) The UAE is crucial, especially in terms of microchips, as well as being one of the main destinations for Russian citizens either emigrating or simply traveling abroad. Russia also coordinates its oil export strategy and approaches to Middle Eastern conflicts with Saudi Arabia. It is essential to note that Russian forces have not yet left Syria, where Russia maintains a military base, and thus remains a direct participant in resolving the long-standing Syrian conflict. Given this, Russian media has been covering Middle Eastern conflicts more extensively, including the current conflict between Hamas and Israel. This suggests that Moscow cannot remain on the side-lines and is increasingly connecting with Islamic countries in the Middle East. Russia is also conducting a two-year experiment with Islamic banking. While the economic significance is undeniable, it also carries significant symbolic importance. As Russian officials increasingly engage with the Middle East, it is likely that this influence will also be felt in Russian government institutions in the future. With the European path closed, Moscow is exploring other alternatives. The authoritarian modernization in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar could be viewed in Russia as an experience worth emulating, not to mention Iran's experience as the region's most significant military ally in circumventing Western sanctions. Given that Putin has clearly expressed his views on traditional family values and religion in his recent speeches and interviews, it is possible that the Middle East will also have something to offer in this regard. It

is important to note that the Muslim population in Russia is increasing, further contributing to the infusion of Middle Eastern practices into Russian society. In our view, the exploration and subsequent education of Russians in the Middle East will be an important part of Russia's future foreign agenda and strategy. Therefore, this issue should not be underestimated, especially in terms of shaping a new international system and security system in the coming years and decades.

CONCLUSION

As we have confirmed, Russian-Chinese relations have strengthened even further following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Economic interconnectedness has been seamlessly accompanied by military cooperation, which now likely includes elements of so-called military coordination. The recent joint military exercises suggest this, significantly supported by statements from the leaders of Beijing and Moscow. The role of Russia and China in relation to the Gulf region can thus be described as a crucial strategy of these powers to build a global international system based on both economic and military cooperation among powers. From the perspective of Russia, China, and significant players in the Middle East, the era of unilateralism is seen as over, as it led to chaos and the spread of terrorism. Their clear strategy is to achieve balance and pursue their interests within an international order based on multipolarity.

The issue of so-called flexible linkages of regional security complexes formed around the Russian Federation, China, and the Gulf and Levant sub complexes remains crucial for further study within security studies. What was considered impossible just ten years ago is becoming a reality, significantly influencing global security dynamics. China's role as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran is just the beginning, though it is already a clear confirmation of the transformation of security and diplomatic relations within the international system. However, it is essential to note that neither Russia, China, nor individual powers in the Middle East are currently pursuing a policy aimed at creating a single centre of unipolarity. On the contrary, their advancing cooperation in economic, social, and military spheres points to the expansion of the idea of multipolarism as the foundation of global security and economic relations.

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