

## THE 10TH MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE CHINA-ARAB STATES COOPERATION FORUM (CASCF): A TESTAMENT IN SINO-ARAB RELATIONS

By  
**Arhama Siddiq**  
Research Fellow

*Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA), ISSI*

Edited by  
**Amina Khan**

June 12, 2024

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



In the past decade, China has significantly expanded its diplomatic and commercial footprint in the Middle East. Chinese investment in the Middle East mostly concentrates in the sectors of energy, infrastructure and agriculture. There is also a mutual interest in incorporating China's multi-billion dollar project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) into national revitalization initiatives such as Saudi Vision 2030, and Kuwait's Vision 2035.<sup>1</sup> The Middle East's strategic location at the intersection of Asia, Africa, and Europe as well as waters of the Mediterranean, Red, Arabian, Caspian, and Black—makes it crucial for implementation of the BRI. Furthermore, the area is bordered by the vital sea lanes of the Dardanelles, Bab El-Mandeb Strait, Bosphorus, and Strait of Hormuz.<sup>2</sup>

The year 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the creation of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF). The 10th ministerial meeting of the CASCF took place in Beijing on May 30, 2024 and concluded with the ratification of the 'Beijing Declaration' and the 'Action Implementation Plan'. The 'Action Implementation Plan' will run through 2024-2026. The meeting was attended by leaders from China, Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, the Secretary-General of the

<sup>1</sup> "The Role of China in the Middle East & Africa", Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, November 26, 2020. [https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report\\_Webinar\\_Nov\\_26\\_2020.pdf](https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report_Webinar_Nov_26_2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> "The rise of the Middle Kingdom in the Middle East: China's Belt and Road Initiative," Middle East Monitor, August 7, 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200807-the-rise-of-the-middle-kingdom-in-the-middle-east-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>

League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, and other senior officials from Arab states. During the CASCF, China also ratified a number of bilateral and multilateral cooperation arrangements with participating countries as well as the Arab League's General Secretariat.<sup>3</sup>

The 'Beijing Declaration' reviews the significant agreements and milestones in the implementation of the commitments made during the inaugural China-Arab States Summit in Riyadh in 2022, where President Xi Jinping announced "eight major cooperation initiatives".<sup>4</sup> It also discussed the practicality of forming a China-Arab community. At the 2024 meeting, the Chinese President recommended "five cooperation frameworks"<sup>5</sup> to establish a more dynamic framework that includes innovation, investment, financial collaboration, energy cooperation, economic and trade linkages, and cultural exchange. Furthermore, China intends to enhance its strategic connections with the Arab world by prioritizing energy, technology, and R&D, as well as creating 10 research centers in fields such as health, Artificial Intelligence, and agriculture.

China and the Arab states also issued a Joint Statement on the ongoing conflict in Gaza. In his keynote speech, President Xi stated that China strongly supports the formation of an independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 boundaries and East Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>6</sup> He also announced that China would provide 500 million yuan (\$69 million) in humanitarian relief to Gaza and \$3 million to the UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency). Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi echoed these sentiments and, mirroring a sentiment of the world community, said China strongly favors full United Nations membership for Palestine as well. In this regard, he said that China is also willing to do more to further Palestinian reconciliation.<sup>7</sup>

The CASCF was set up in January 2004, during the then Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Cairo, with the goal of strengthening connections and collaboration between China and Arab states. In September 2004, the forum had its first meeting at the Arab League's headquarters in Cairo. The CASCF is China's primary avenue for multilateral cooperation with the Arab world. It consists of Arab

---

<sup>3</sup> "China, Arab states adopt series of outcome documents," Xinhua, May 30, 2024.  
<https://english.news.cn/20240530/4d4399645def4419a831757ca51bed84/c.html>

<sup>4</sup> "China-Arab community with a shared future provides a vivid annotation for peace, devt: Global Times editorial," Global Times, May 30, 2024.  
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202405/1313374.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> "Xi says China ready to work with Arab side to put in place 'five cooperation frameworks'," China Daily, May 30, 2024.  
<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202405/30/WS665805e3a31082fc043ca024.html#:~:text=The%20five%20frameworks%20consist%20of,people%2Dto%2Dpeople%20exchanges.>

<sup>6</sup> "Xi: World must work for two-state solution," China Daily, May 31, 2024.  
<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202405/31/WS66590105a31082fc043ca19b.html>

<sup>7</sup> "Remarks by H.E. Wang Yi at the 10th Ministerial Conference of The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum," Consulate General of the People's Republic of China, May 30, 2024.  
[http://lahore.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zgzw/202405/t20240530\\_11366243.htm](http://lahore.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zgzw/202405/t20240530_11366243.htm)

League members and meets every two years, to discuss regional issues as well as examine opportunities for future collaboration.

The 2020 and 2022 agreements on energy security, infrastructure growth, innovation exchange, and sustainable development were agreed upon. Chinese media declared the 2022 Middle East tour a tremendous success, describing it as "the highest-level diplomatic action with the Arab world since the founding of the People's Republic of China."<sup>8</sup> Over the last two decades, the Forum's procedures have evolved gradually, allowing for the ongoing development of the scope of China-Arab collaboration, with remarkable successes. The CASCF has developed as an important forum for collective discourse and practical cooperation between China and the Arab states.

Presently, China has signed comprehensive strategic agreements with 14 Arab countries and the Arab League. Driven by robust economic complementarities, China and Arab countries naturally align as economic and trade partners within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>9</sup> The advancement of the BRI in the Middle East heralds breakthroughs in China's relationship with these countries. China and Arab states are pivotal to each other as the latter constitutes China's main overseas crude oil suppliers and for years, China has been the largest trading partner for Arab countries. Bilateral trade between the two sides has witnessed remarkable growth, rising from \$36.7 billion in 2004 to \$431.4 billion in 2022.<sup>10</sup> Collaboration between both parties has expanded beyond conventional economic and trade spheres to encompass high-tech domains such as medical and healthcare, satellite communications, and other emerging fields.

During the Forum, President Xi Jinping, together with leaders from Arab countries, also laid out a vision for bilateral relations and pledged to make concerted efforts to build a China-Arab community with the underlying premise of it being a mutually beneficial partnership. China's good offices in the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023 alleviated the concerns of not only the parties involved, but the region as whole in the context of peace and security. This mediation underscored China's position as a facilitator of stability and security, a proponent of growth and prosperity, and an advocate of Middle Eastern unity and self-reliance, demonstrating China's status as a significant power. Moreover, in April 2024, representatives from the Palestinian National

---

<sup>8</sup> "What to Expect from the Latest China-Arab Forum," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 29, 2024.

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/what-expect-latest-china-arab-forum>

<sup>9</sup> "China-Arab states cooperation accelerates building of community with shared future," Xinhua, May 31, 2024.

<https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/0R3020I4.html>

<sup>10</sup> "CASCF: Encouraging collaboration between China and the Arab world," CGTN, June 3, 2024.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-06-03/CASCF-Encouraging-collaboration-between-China-and-the-Arab-world-1u85s53zsfS/p.html>

Liberation Movement (Fatah) and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hammas) were invited to Beijing to discuss ways to promote intra-Palestinian peace. This year, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE also joined BRICS, an emerging-market cooperation structure founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. In addition, 17 Arab nations have joined China's first international financial organization, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).<sup>11</sup>

Collaboration between China and Arab countries also serves as a model for cooperation between the Arab world and the 'Global South', and underscores their mutual complementarity. This partnership is also critical in balancing global influence as well as establishing developmental criteria that benefit all parties. The next China-Arab States Summit will take place in China in 2026, which is expected to be another watershed moment in Sino-Arab ties.

---

<sup>11</sup> "China-Arab states cooperation accelerates building of community with shared future," Xinhua, May 31, 2024.  
<https://english.news.cn/20240531/df630935f8af49b3badce16317f5ac89/c.html>