

CHINA, ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES

Proceedings from the U.S.-China-Israel Trilateral Conference

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China, Israel, and the United States: The geopolitics of a trilateral relationship

Introduction

A widely discussed, if often misunderstood, policy of the Obama administration has been the “rebalance” of U.S. strategy toward Asia and the Pacific. The approach, first formulated at the start of the Obama presidency, reflected the pronounced shift eastward of the global economic center of gravity toward Asia, and in particular, toward China and India. China’s rapid political, economic, and military emergence has made many Asian countries uneasy about a long-term shift in the balance of power across a region where the United States has served as the primary security guarantor for nearly seven decades. Strategic recalculation followed, with preponderant emphasis on the rise of Chinese power. The administration had concluded that the United States was underinvested in Asia and the Pacific and needed to refocus time, effort and resources toward this emerging center of world affairs. This included appreciably heightened U.S. engagement in multilateral diplomacy and security in Southeast Asia, where U.S. involvement (compared to American power and policy in Northeast Asia) had long been far more modest.

More than five years later, the basic assumptions that led to the rebalance remain largely undiminished. U.S.-Chinese relations, by many accounts, will be the single most important factor in shaping the long term course of world affairs. Not only are countries in Northeast and Southeast Asia calibrating their policies accordingly, but so too are countries farther afield. Other regions of the world are affected, moreover, not only by the rise of China but by shifts—real and perceived—in U.S. policy; none more so than the Middle East, and Israel within it.

If the United States is under-invested in Asia and the Pacific, many assume, it must mean it is over-invested elsewhere. Indeed, the pull of Asia coincides with American weariness in the Middle East. Riddled with political disorder, horrific civil conflict and deep economic challenges, the Middle East appears to be a poor investment of time, effort and political capital. After a decade of wars in Muslim-majority countries and despite continued threats to U.S. interests, the attention of the American public on those conflicts that consumed U.S. attention has diminished appreciably, reducing the incentives of leaders to focus their efforts on this deeply troubled region.

At the same time, the shale oil revolution in oil and gas production has altered one of the principal pillars of U.S. interest in the Middle East. The United States is now positioned to be a top world energy producer, thereby redefining the long-standing core U.S. interest in securing the free flow of energy across the Middle East. Some have questioned whether a United States that becomes energy “independent”—a generally ill-defined term—might lose interest in the Middle East altogether.

Indeed, there is a widespread view in Israel and across the Middle East that the Obama administration—even with the start of the campaign against Daesh, as the “Islamic State” or ISIS is known in the region—is in the process of withdrawing from Middle Eastern affairs. Allies throughout the region viewed—and many still view—the administration’s policy as an attempt to step back and commit as few resources in the region as possible. The Obama administration, Middle Eastern critics have claimed, would prefer to manage this withdrawal rather than halt it.

China, by contrast, appears to many Israelis and others in the Middle East as a new partner of major promise. Though generally little understood in the region, China's potential as a commercial actor is self-evident. Unlike the United States—or Russia—China is heavily dependent on energy imports, including Middle Eastern supplies. Its economic footprint is rapidly growing in many parts of the world, its diplomatic imprint is ascendant and its interest in the global economic order is only expected to increase. China's military expenditure too, has grown commensurate with its economic rise. This has included substantial attention to naval capabilities, which some believe, will ultimately enable China to police maritime routes for energy resources.

As China's economic, military and diplomatic profile more closely reflects its potential and its historic role, other countries are eager to position themselves in order to benefit from China's rise. For Israel in particular, this may appear to complicate their relations with the United States, China's putative competitor. Might China fill a "vacuum" in the Middle East left—supposedly—by the United States? Would China's diplomatic, or, one day, military presence follow its commercial interest in the region?

Like other countries in the world, Israel, a close—and small—ally of the United States, looks at the dynamics of world power to chart its course. Situated in the heart of the Middle East-North Africa region, it finds itself in a delicate position. While seeking to expand relations with China, and tap into the vast and growing Chinese market, Israel continues to view its relations with the United States as a core pillar of its national security. A zero-sum competition between the United States and China, therefore, would complicate greatly the Israeli position. Israel is eager to engage China about its future role in the Middle East while hoping for continued and robust U.S. involvement in the region. Israel hopes to affect Chinese policy on issues of non-proliferation, and especially China's position on Iran's nuclear program, while simultaneously counting on the United States to continue to vigorously defend Israeli interests in the international arena.

Despite the taxing security challenges and the fast evolving region around it, the Israeli government has spent a great deal of time promoting Israel's relations with China. Israel's prime minister has made developing Israeli-China relations a strategic goal. Ministers and officials have been tasked with promoting all dimensions of the country's relations with China, to benefit both from the enormous commercial opportunity presented by China, and to lay the groundwork for further diplomatic cooperation. A keen Israeli eye is focused, meanwhile, on the trajectory of U.S.-China relations and its potential effects on Israel.

Much of the history of the Middle East in the latter half of the 20th century was shaped by great power competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. Necessarily, great power relations affect smaller countries in dramatic and often unexpected ways. How will U.S.-China relations evolve? How will they shape the two powers' interests and involvement in the Middle East? How can Israel and other countries adjust to meet the rise of China without risking relations with the United States? Could these countries even benefit from trilateral cooperation, with both China and the United States?

A Trilateral United State-China-Israel Conference

To explore these issues from the perspective of the trilateral United States-China-Israel relationship, and to foster a network of scholars and officials from the three countries, the Israel Institute, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University, and the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution organized a unique conference with senior American, Chinese, and Israeli officials, and academics hosted by Brookings in 2014. The conference built on previous work by the Israel Institute and the INSS, and drew on prepared papers by Israeli and Chinese participants. This report summarizes insights generated by this conference, though it represents the views of the authors alone.

Several themes stood out during the conference, with differing perspectives among participants

from the three countries. First, the U.S. rebalance to Asia continues to garner a great deal of attention, and misunderstanding, in the United States, as well as in Asia and the Middle East. Many observers, for example, speculate about the potential implications of the rebalance, and its possible ramifications for U.S.-China relations in the longer term. Some construe the rebalance primarily as presaging an inevitable security rivalry, while others believe this is either overstated or premature. Second, the current and future trajectories of both U.S. and Chinese involvement in the Middle East are in flux and are interpreted very differently by the United States, China, and Israel, especially in the light of the rebalance.

Third, Israel has a great deal of interest in China's economic and diplomatic rise, and has fostered bilateral cooperation with China to take advantage of these opportunities, even while keeping an eye on its fundamental national security interest in maintaining close relations with the United States. Fourth, and perhaps most important in shaping perceptions of longer-term U.S. and Chinese involvement in the Middle East, the future of the global energy market is undergoing dramatic changes, directly affecting the judgments of both powers on energy security in particular. Fifth, non-proliferation, including the international campaign to halt Iran's nuclear program, stands out as a particular area of mutual concern, though the perspectives on the challenge differ significantly between the three countries. Sixth, there appears to be a surprising convergence of interests in the Middle East among the three parties in the U.S.-China-Israel relationship, particularly on matters pertaining to energy security, counterterrorism and geopolitics.

The U.S. Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific

The U.S. rebalance to Asia and the Pacific encompasses several distinct policy realms.¹ Some

¹ The term "pivot" has also been used to characterize the rebalance, but in ways that proponents of the policy believe reflect two liabilities: it appeared simultaneously to evoke fears of a military response to China's rise and to strengthen perceptions of a U.S. shift away from the Middle East.

of these changes originated during the previous Bush administration, and perhaps even earlier, but under the Obama administration they were incorporated within a broad agenda encompassing military, economic and diplomatic affairs.

Militarily, the United States has enhanced joint training with regional allies, and deployed more naval and air assets to the region, including the periodic rotation of U.S. Marines to northern Australia. Economically (seen by many observers as the core component of the rebalance), the Obama administration has sought to foster stronger economic ties in the region. These have concentrated heavily on negotiations on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), a far reaching multilateral free trade agreement designed in conjunction with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). At present, the TPP negotiations do not include China, though in theory China could join at some point in the future. Diplomatically, the administration has stepped up its presence with high-level visits, including the U.S. decision to join the East Asian Summit in 2011, a forum where the United States was previously not a member.

The Obama administration has repeatedly argued that the rebalance was never aimed at China, but rather was intended to create conditions for a more enduring U.S. engagement with East Asian countries, including China. Despite these claims, critics frequently point to the rising tensions between China and its neighbors in the East and South China Seas (including several U.S. allies), China's increased maritime activities in the region, rising nationalism within China, as well as long-standing differences over Taiwan, and heightened efforts to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile development. Though there have been some areas of increased cooperation with China, others perceive a growing U.S. interest in countering China's rise.

Chinese reactions to the changes in U.S. policy have been, unsurprisingly, equally skeptical. Some in China interpreted the strategy not as a rebalance of U.S. investments, but rather as a "balancing" of China, thereby seeking to contain the historic rise

of China militarily and economically. A debate in China has emerged, between “optimists”, who view the U.S. policy as largely convergent with Chinese interests, and “pessimists”, who view it as aimed to contain China. Proponents of the former view believe that prevailing sentiment in both countries favors heightened cooperation. Over time, this will enable increased U.S. acceptance of China as a major power and, ultimately, acceptance as a co-equal great power. Proponents of the latter view believe that the United States is not prepared to accord China such status, setting off a heightened security rivalry within the region. These pronounced differences place the management of power relations between the U.S. and China as a preeminent issue in global politics, posing the question of whether coexistence and co-leadership are realistic possibilities.

From a Chinese perspective, some view the gap in military capabilities between the United States and China as a continuing source of instability in U.S.-China relations. In this view, defining the terms of future cooperation between the two countries requires addressing this imbalance, and creating “shared leadership” between the two countries. Furthermore, according to this view, the Chinese would like to see their country elevated to an equal partnership with the United States and a U.S. willingness to accept this change as a principal manifestation of the long-term U.S. commitment to bilateral cooperation. The United States, according to this approach, must accept China as a truly global power, economically and politically in order not only to co-exist but to “co-lead” in the world in areas of convergent interests.

A recent bilateral agreement on greenhouse emission targets suggests a major opportunity for constructive cooperation, but U.S. notions of cooperation are often different from those in China. Policy debates in Washington often suggests far less acceptance of China as a fully arrived power in East Asia, which many see as coming at the expense of close U.S. allies. In this perspective, China sees the need for a natural sphere of influence along its periphery, whereas the United States holds firm to its system of alliances.

The future of U.S. involvement in Asia and its relationship to China are thus of paramount global importance. But the rebalance also entails a flip-side. If the United States is to invest more of a finite resource—time, money, and bandwidth—in Asia and the Pacific, it will necessarily expend fewer resources elsewhere.

The Future of U.S. and Chinese Involvement in the Middle East

Despite repeated denials by the U.S. administration, there is a widespread belief in the Middle East that the Obama administration is intent on scaling back U.S. involvement in, or even beginning to disengage from the region. Against the backdrop of a decade of protracted intervention in regional conflicts, there seems no doubt that the administration has sought to downscale its overt military presence in the region. But critics worry about the consequences of this diminished interest, and conclude that the United States has severely under-invested in maintaining its alliances and commitments across the region.

In particular, all sides of the domestic debates across the Middle East blame the United States for much of the upheaval of the Arab Awakening. Opponents of the old regimes in the Middle East blamed the United States for supporting these leaders—and “stability”—at all costs, while supporters of the regimes blamed the United States for forsaking them at the moment of truth and for, supposedly, backing the Islamist parties that took center stage in the wake of the revolutions.

From the Obama administration’s point of view, the events that engulfed the region were far beyond U.S. control. The U.S. could not, and did not, wish to get bogged down trying to fix problems it had neither created nor controlled. From the administration’s perspective, criticisms directed against it stemmed from an erroneous perception of U.S. omnipotence that ascribed every event in the Middle East either to U.S. action or to its failure to act; the disappointment from the U.S. stepping back could therefore have the positive effect of dispelling the myth of U.S. omnipotence and empower local citizenry into action.

However, the perception of U.S. disengagement is

palpable in the region and adversely affects U.S. relations with its traditional allies. The United States' reluctance to get involved in early stages of the civil war in Syria, or to strike the Assad regime after it used chemical weapons, strengthened this perception significantly and gave the impression of a severe power vacuum after decades of U.S. (and in some cases Soviet) hegemony.

In confronting Iran's nuclear program in particular—a cause very dear to the Israelis and Saudis, among others—the perception of U.S. reluctance to act in the Middle East can adversely affect the credibility of the U.S. threat to use force if all else fails which, in turn, can undermine its diplomatic hand.

Administration officials repeatedly stress that (irrespective of the perception of U.S. intentions) the United States is not disengaging from the Middle East, and the administration never meant to signal its withdrawal from the region. The United States retains the capacity to be deeply involved in both East Asia and the Middle East, as it has been for much of the past sixty years. Indeed, the recent military engagement with Daesh underscores this point: Even if many Americans hoped to minimize U.S. involvement, turmoil in the region has once again pulled the United States back in.

Fundamentally, core U.S. interests remain tied to the region, including non-proliferation, Israel's security, counterterrorism and, not least, the free flow of energy. But, as will be discussed below, the free flow of energy appears to some to now be less vital to the United States, though this appearance can be deceiving.

“Burden Sharing”

That said, there are increasing calls in the United States for various forms of “burden sharing” in global affairs. What critics of the United States see as malicious hegemony, most in America see as a burden borne disproportionately by the United States. A public good—global security and the security of shipping lanes—was provided by America, at great financial cost, but enjoyed by all. In this

view, the allies of the United States, in Europe and East Asia in particular, did not need to invest heavily in defense precisely because the United States was prepared to do so in their place. In the current domestic political environment in the United States, one of fiscal tightening and weariness of foreign engagement, increasing numbers of Americans feel that others should also share these responsibilities.

Who might share this burden and help fill the perceived power vacuum in the Middle East? Some, naturally, point to China as a potential burden sharer in the long term. China depends heavily on the secure supply of energy, but incurs none of the costs of securing it. Chinese observers, however, finds these calls for burden sharing unclear at best. Are Americans speaking of financial support or do they truly hope that a heavily reinforced Chinese navy will operate in the Middle East on a large scale?

At present, China has no overseas bases, nor does it yet possess a navy capable of fulfilling such a task far from its shores. China also lacks the capabilities to deploy ground troops in an expeditionary mode. China has been investing in enhanced fighting capabilities, and a great deal of attention has naturally focused on China's dramatic increases in military expenditure in recent years. Some Chinese analysts, however, insist these reports are exaggerated. Much of the increased spending, they stress, has been on compensation and professionalization of the People's Liberation Army, rather than on new fighting capacity.

Even if China were to acquire the capabilities to share or ultimately supplant the U.S. security role in the Middle East, it is far from clear that China has the will to do so. Chinese policymakers and experts consistently refer to foreign interference—by the U.S. in particular—as a source of the upheavals in the Middle East. Foreign involvement, not a lack of it, is a major problem from the Chinese perspective. The Chinese extol the need for non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries and view stability as a primary goal.

Indeed, mainstream Chinese perspectives on the

Arab Awakening reflect a preference for stability and question U.S. decision making as regional upheaval spread and extant power structures collapsed. In the upheavals of the Middle East, Chinese preferences were decidedly on the side of stability and the old regimes. The Chinese viewed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak favorably—as did the Israelis—and were dismayed that the United States ended up siding with popular calls for his removal.

For China, its immediate goals in the Middle East focus decidedly on trade, including energy, not geopolitics. While some countries may try to leverage these trade relationships to increase Chinese involvement, China will likely try to resist the temptation. Rather than trying to emulate the United States, China may seek to avoid what it sees as a trap that ensnared the United States, and other powers before it. The Middle East, from China's perspective, may be a testing ground for world powers, but it has also been the bane of great powers, pulling them in and demanding great resources and disproportionate attention. Chinese experts envision an entirely different—and far more hands-off—approach to the Middle East for many years to come.

Instead of large-scale security engagement, the Chinese appear more interested in a gradual and partial engagement, including participation in anti-piracy policing, a role they already play alongside other maritime powers. Those who envision China fully replacing the United States' role in the Middle East as guarantor of regional security, as the United States once replaced Great Britain, may have a very long wait ahead.

The Israeli Perspective and Bilateral Ties with China

According to those who perceive the Obama administration's policy as a U.S. withdrawal from the region, Israel, and the Middle East more generally, are the supposed "abandoned parties." For decades, countries throughout the Middle East were used as pawns and proxies in great power struggles, and they, in turn, used their proxy position to garner support from the great powers. Great Britain and

France, and later the United States and the Soviet Union, in particular, jockeyed for influence in the region, playing an active role in war and in peace, to bolster their standing and help their allies.

Even discounting exaggerations on the U.S. "withdrawal" from the region, the U.S. reluctance to get involved militarily—now qualified by the campaign against Daesh—is cause for grave concern among Israelis and other U.S. allies. With no end in sight to the turmoil in the region, and with an apparent power vacuum, Israel is trying to adjust to a region that will remain highly volatile in the years to come. At the same time, Israelis, across the political spectrum, hope to see a reengagement of the United States in the future.

The possibility of China replacing the United States in the region seems as distant to most Israelis as it does to most Chinese experts. The express Chinese reluctance to go down such a path strengthens this skepticism further. But the growing Chinese profile in the region gives Israel a strong interest in continued peaceful relations between the United States and China on the global level. The more the United States and China cooperate, the easier it is for Israel to develop its strategically important bilateral relationship with China without endangering the still far more important relationship with the United States.

In the meantime, the Israeli government has been focusing heavily on promoting bilateral relations with China. Israeli officials, from the prime minister on down, have focused substantially on this issue in recent years. So far, direct trade and investment between Israel and China have been limited and concentrated in a small number of firms, primarily in IT—in particular Intel, which has large-scale operations in Israel—and in minerals and agricultural products—in particular Adama, formerly Makhteshim-Agan, which was partially purchased by ChemChina in 2011.

The two economies, despite their dramatically different scales, have important complementarities. Whereas the Chinese economy is rich in manpower,

land and manufacturing, Israel has very little of any of these. The Israeli economy, on the other hand, has an abundance of technological expertise and innovation in agriculture, water treatment and healthcare. From the Israeli perspective, therefore, China offers an enticing market for export.

In 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited China, the culmination of a long process of bilateral contacts and of internal efforts by the Israeli government. A Chinese-Israeli bilateral committee was set up, headed on the Israeli side by the prime minister's chief economic advisor (who attended the conference hosted by Brookings), and focusing especially on issues with added value in technology and expertise that bypass strategically sensitive issues, including clean technology, water treatment, healthcare and bio fuels. The Israelis are further hoping to gain market expertise through involvement in the Chinese economy, in areas including transportation infrastructure, and in particular, high speed rail systems and ports.

U.S. and Chinese Energy Interests in the Middle East

More than any other issue, the free flow of energy in the Middle East represents a common interest of the United States and China. But the degree of interest in Middle East energy appears to be diverging. While China is heavily dependent on imports from the region, the United States is taking a lead in energy production through shale technology, making it a net energy exporter.

However, being a net exporter of energy and “energy independence” are two different things. While the United States will likely produce more than it consumes, the oil market—and to a lesser degree natural gas—behaves like a market: Prices are mostly set globally and affect all parties to a similar degree. As a result, while the United States will benefit greatly from freedom from price shocks, it will not become truly autarkic.

Moreover, as U.S. officials repeatedly stress, the interests of the United States are intimately tied to

the economic well-being of the rest of the world. Price shocks, or stable but high energy prices, will necessarily hurt the United States' trading partners and, in turn, have a negative impact in the United States as well. The change in the U.S. energy outlook, though very significant, does not fundamentally invalidate the U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Furthermore, Chinese observers are closely watching the effect of falling oil prices on the commercial viability of shale oil and gas development. With a decline in the price of oil, there is a real possibility that production in the United States will slow, offsetting the changes in the U.S. energy outlook. By comparison, the Chinese outlook seems clearer. China remains heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil, perhaps for as much as 50% of Chinese energy needs. This has spurred Chinese efforts to diversify and to make its energy importation more efficient.

To deal with this sensitivity, China has been aggressively pursuing a diversification policy, including crude oil imports from Angola and other countries in Africa as well as its closer neighbors in Central Asia. Russia also exports crude oil to China and has, recently, signed long-term deals for natural gas sales to China. To take advantage of domestic coal resources, China has also pursued oil-from-coal technology.

All of these developments do not change China's fundamental reliance on energy imports, nor Chinese exposure to the Middle Eastern energy market. The sanctions on Iran, in the context of the Iranian nuclear program, are a case in point. The sanctions have had little direct effect on the United States, which has not traded directly with Iran for many years. But they have had a real effect on China. To a degree, the growing abundance of unconventional energy supplies in North America has counterbalanced the effects of sanctions on Iran, and helped the United States convince China to cooperate on the sanctions. The recent drop in the price of oil has only strengthened this effect and likely allowed for Chinese flexibility in extending the sanctions regime into 2015.

Iran's Nuclear Program and Non-proliferation

In the short-and-medium term, the most pressing issue involving the United States, Israel, and China is the international campaign to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities. The Israeli government considers halting the Iranian program as its primary strategic goal. As well for the United States, the P5+1 negotiations with Iran are among the highest orders of business. China, as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, is a party to the international negotiations; as a major energy importer it plays a vital role in the U.S.-led sanctions regime which brought Iran to the negotiating table.

Overall, the Chinese appear to view the diplomatic process as, primarily, one between the United States and Iran, with the other five parties to the talks supporting the process. Nonetheless, the decrease in Chinese oil imports from Iran reflects the notable cooperation among outside powers with regard to the Iranian nuclear program. Israelis and Americans note the Chinese goodwill and the common stand among the P5+1. This is especially significant because of the price China has to pay for implementing the sanctions. While China's pace of reduction of Iranian oil imports was gradual, it was crucial to the success of the sanctions regime.

However, the underlying interests and priorities of Israel and China with regard to the Iranian program are different. While Israelis stress what they see as an existential threat from a potentially nuclear Iran, China is clearly not threatened in the same way. Rather, for China, the main interest is regional stability in the Middle East; stopping Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities is a means in service of that interest. Israel has made clear that unless a satisfactory diplomatic resolution is found, it would not hesitate to use all means to stop the Iranian program—code for a unilateral military strike on Iran. This message, conveyed by Israeli emissaries in Beijing, may have helped convince the Chinese of the need for tough sanctions and diplomacy.

Aside from the potential for overt hostilities between

Israel—or even the United States—and Iran, in the event that the talks fail, China also shares the Israeli and American fear of a nuclear proliferation cascade in the Middle East, in which other countries such as Saudi Arabia or Turkey might respond to the development of Iranian military nuclear capabilities and buy, or try to develop, nuclear weapons potential. While estimates of the probability that such proliferation will occur differ among the Chinese, the Israelis, and Americans, the destabilizing nature of such a possibility is clear to all.

It is important to note, as well, that the possibility of regional nuclear proliferation cascade depends in no small part on perceptions of U.S. leadership within the region. All the main potential proliferators against Iran are U.S. allies; a sense of U.S. leadership would be crucial to stave off such an eventuality, should the need arise.

When considering Iran's nuclear program and China's role in confronting it, an interesting comparison arises with North Korea. Israelis often refer to the North Korean example as an ominous precedent: A rogue state with nuclear ambitions that continuously evades international non-proliferation, breaks its commitments to the United States, and eventually tests a nuclear device. North Korea also played a role in proliferation in the Middle East, though their expertise is no longer essential for Iranian nuclear development. China voices growing disquiet over North Korean weapons development, which impinges directly on Chinese vital interests. But China also fears the possibility of growing instability on its doorstep. It has therefore remained unwilling to greatly increase pressure on its recalcitrant neighbor. China clearly does not welcome the emergence of another nuclear-armed state on its border, but its reluctance to act in a more overt manner against North Korea suggests potential limits to its opposition to Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities.

Conclusion: Prospects for Cooperation

In the discussions during the trilateral conference one surprising theme emerged: Of all the regions

in the world, the interests of all three states are far more closely aligned in the Middle East than one might assume. Far from seeking to replace the United States in the Middle East, China appears content to step back, remaining interested mostly in upholding stability and the free flow of energy from the region, which also remains a pillar of U.S. interests now and in the future.

In the crucial realm of non-proliferation China's preference for stability largely, though not perfectly, coincides with U.S. and Israeli approaches. On counterterrorism as well, a central concern for the United States and Israel, China shares a strong interest. Concerned with unrest in the Xinjiang, Chinese experts are keen to learn from Israeli experts on dealing with radical groups in the context of counterterrorism.

Developing the relations in this triangle, however, are highly sensitive to the evolution of U.S-China relations in other areas, and especially in the Asia-Pacific. There is, at present, a good deal of strategic suspicion between the two powers. Following what Chinese refer to as a "century of humiliation", managing the rise of China and the future of great power relations represents perhaps the most important global challenge for U.S and Chinese leaders in coming years.

For Israel, these issues will shape international security as a whole, and the ability of Israel, a small and close ally of the United States, to adjust its foreign policy to the rise of a second great power, which arguably represents the most consequential development in global affairs in future decades.

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