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*Analytical Review Article*

**STRATEGIC RIVALRIES: CHINA VS. US IN MIDDLE  
EAST GEOPOLITICS**

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**Abstract**

The intensifying strategic rivalry between China and the United States has significantly reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. This review analyzes the competing political, economic, and security strategies employed by both powers to expand influence in the region. The findings suggest that this rivalry is redefining alliances, altering regional power balances, and contributing to both cooperation and competition. The study concludes that while multipolar engagement offers opportunities for regional development, it also introduces new risks of strategic tension and fragmentation.

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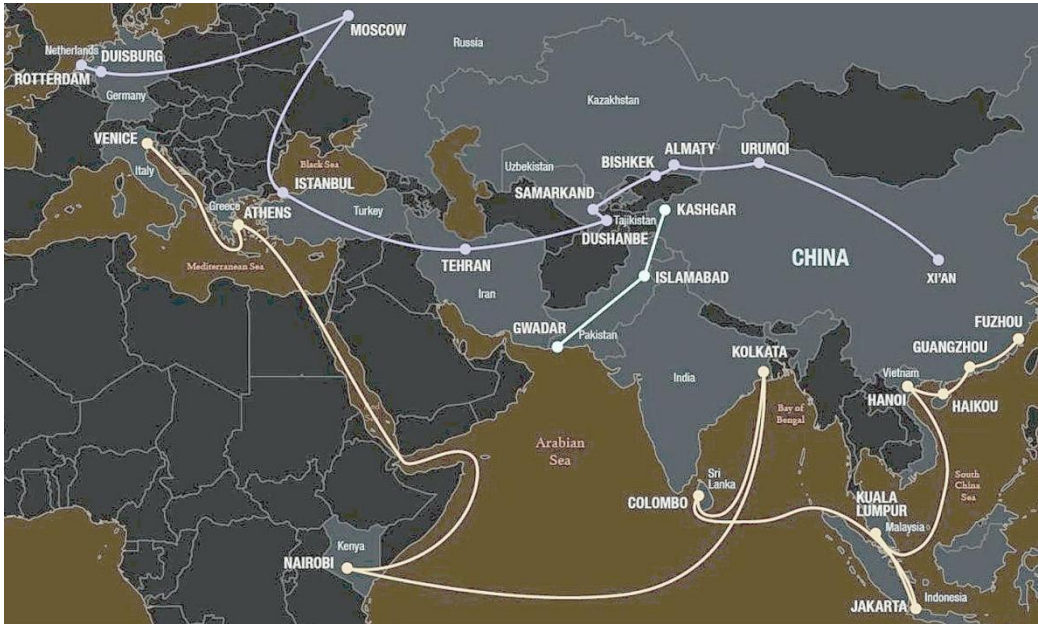
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Introduction

The Middle East holds immense strategic importance due to its vast energy resources and critical trade routes. For decades, the United States has maintained strong political and military influence in the region. However, China’s growing economic presence has introduced a new dimension of competition. This rivalry is increasingly defined by economic partnerships, diplomatic engagement, and control over energy flows, rather than direct military confrontation.



Strategic Importance of the Middle East

The Middle East is central to global geopolitics because it contains a significant share of the world’s oil and gas reserves and includes key maritime chokepoints. Control and access to these resources are essential for global economic stability.

Table 1: Strategic Importance of the Region

| Factor                | Significance                  | Global Impact                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Energy Resources      | Major oil and gas reserves    | Supports global economy         |
| Trade Routes          | Key shipping lanes            | Ensures supply chain continuity |
| Geopolitical Location | Connects Asia, Europe, Africa | Strategic influence             |
| Political Influence   | Regional alliances            | Shapes global balance           |

These factors make the region a focal point for major power competition.

U.S. Strategy in the Middle East

The United States has historically relied on a combination of military presence, alliances, and political influence to maintain its position in the Middle East. Its strategy focuses on ensuring energy security, protecting trade routes, and maintaining regional stability.

Table 2: U.S. Strategic Approach

| Dimension    | Strategy                     | Objective           |
|--------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Security     | Military bases and alliances | Regional stability  |
| Energy       | Securing oil supply routes   | Market stability    |
| Diplomacy    | Bilateral partnerships       | Political influence |
| Institutions | Global leadership            | Rule-based order    |

In recent years, however, the U.S. has gradually shifted toward reducing direct military involvement while maintaining strategic partnerships.

China’s Expanding Role

China has expanded its presence in the Middle East primarily through economic and diplomatic means. Its strategy emphasizes infrastructure investment, trade partnerships, and long-term energy agreements.

China’s approach includes:

- Investing in ports, railways, and industrial zones
- Securing long-term oil and gas supply contracts
- Promoting economic cooperation through global initiatives

This strategy allows China to increase its influence while avoiding direct military confrontation, focusing on economic integration and connectivity.

Energy Security and Competition

Energy security is a key driver of U.S.–China rivalry in the region. Both countries depend on stable energy supplies, but their approaches differ.

Table 3: Energy Strategies Comparison

| Aspect        | United States                      | China                       |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dependence    | Reduced due to domestic production | High dependence on imports  |
| Strategy      | Secure global supply routes        | Long-term supply agreements |
| Presence      | Military protection of routes      | Economic partnerships       |
| Risk Approach | Security-focused                   | Investment-focused          |

China’s reliance on Middle Eastern energy makes the region critical to its economic stability, while the United States focuses on maintaining global energy market balance.

Diplomacy and Non-Military Influence

Both powers increasingly rely on diplomacy and non-military tools to expand their influence. The United States continues to use alliances and international institutions, while China emphasizes economic diplomacy and development partnerships.

Table 4: Non-Military Influence Tools

| Tool      | United States       | China              |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Diplomacy | Strategic alliances | Economic diplomacy |

| Tool       | United States         | China                    |
|------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Economy    | Investment and aid    | Infrastructure financing |
| Technology | Innovation leadership | Digital infrastructure   |
| Soft Power | Cultural influence    | Development partnerships |

This shift reflects a broader transformation in global competition, where influence is achieved through economic and diplomatic engagement rather than direct force.

### Conceptual Figure — Strategic Rivalry Model

Energy Security + Trade Interests → Diplomatic Engagement → Economic Influence → Regional Presence → Strategic Competition

This model illustrates how non-military tools drive competition between major powers in the region.

### Implications for the Middle East

The rivalry between the United States and China has important implications for the Middle East. It creates opportunities for regional states to diversify partnerships and attract investment. At the same time, it introduces new complexities, as countries must balance relationships with competing global powers.

The region is increasingly becoming a space of strategic balancing, where states pursue flexible alliances rather than fixed alignments.

### Future Prospects

Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of China's economic model in the region and the evolution of US strategic priorities. The role of emerging technologies, including AI and digital infrastructure, in shaping geopolitical competition is another critical area. Additionally, the impact of regional conflicts on China–US rivalry warrants further investigation.

### Recommendations

Policymakers should promote balanced engagement strategies that leverage opportunities from both China and the United States while minimizing risks. Strengthening regional cooperation and economic diversification can enhance resilience. International institutions should facilitate dialogue to reduce tensions and encourage cooperative frameworks. Transparency in technological and economic partnerships is also essential.

### Conclusion

The strategic rivalry between China and the United States in the Middle East represents a key dimension of the evolving global order. While China's economic engagement and the United States' security presence offer complementary benefits to regional actors, their competition introduces new complexities and uncertainties. The Middle East is increasingly becoming a space of strategic balancing rather than exclusive influence. Managing this rivalry requires careful diplomacy, institutional adaptation, and a commitment to stability to ensure that competition does not escalate into conflict.



### **Review Typology and Reporting**

Review designs were classified into standard categories (scoping, umbrella, rapid, qualitative, and mixed-methods), with reporting aligned to established guidelines (PRISMA-ScR, PRIOR, PRISMA-RR, ENTREQ, and PRISMA/MMAT) to ensure methodological rigor and transparency.

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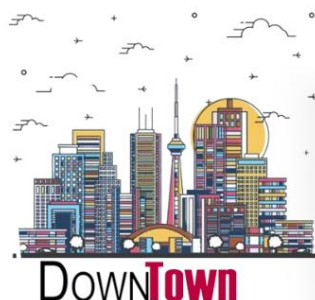
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