


Chapter 11

China and the Persian Gulf: A New Era of Strategic Cooperation

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, China has managed to establish itself as an important and influential player in the Persian Gulf. Despite the dominant role and actorness of the United States in the Persian Gulf over the past few decades, Beijing has succeeded in enhancing its relations with Persian Gulf countries within the framework of strategic hedging. China's desire to expand cooperation with Persian Gulf nations and strengthen its presence in the region has been met with a positive response from these countries. The Persian Gulf states, in turn, are keen to balance and diversify their foreign policies by strengthening their ties with China. This article, utilizing the concept of strategic hedging, examines the growing strategic cooperation between China and Persian Gulf countries in the economic, technological, and security domains. It also highlights that the United States, in an effort to maintain its position in the Persian Gulf, is attempting to prevent the expansion of these countries' cooperation with China, particularly in the fields of technology and armaments.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of China stands as the most transformative development in 21st-century international politics and economics. In recent years, Beijing has intensified its pursuit of sustainable energy resources to support its booming economy. The Persian Gulf, a strategically vital region for energy supplies, has become a key focus for China, an emerging political and economic power. Once guided by revolutionary ideology in its approach to the Persian Gulf, China has shifted to a pragmatic stance, prioritizing energy security in its relations with the Persian Gulf countries. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further deepened ties, particularly with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, expanding cooperation beyond energy trade into sectors like defense and security.

China's rapid growth has heightened its reliance on foreign markets and energy resources, with the Persian Gulf emerging as a critical hub for both. Oil and energy resources have significantly strengthened the relationship between China and the Arab Persian Gulf states, leading to increased trade and economic exchange between the two parties. This dynamic has not only strengthened political ties but also elevated Beijing's role in the development strategies of Persian Gulf nations. Driven by growing energy demands, China positions itself as an active player in the global energy sector, pursuing mutual interests and benefits. It has consistently signaled its willingness to enhance dialogue and cooperation with other nations to ensure energy stability and security worldwide. Today, Beijing is the largest trading partner of Persian Gulf countries, wielding significant influence in energy, trade, and investment. Over the past six decades, China's diplomacy in the region has evolved from an ideological framework to a pragmatic one, transitioning from a focus on balancing power to achieving strategic equilibrium. This article explores the Persian Gulf's importance in China's foreign policy, Beijing's strategic hedging approach, the drivers behind its growing ties with Persian Gulf countries, and the U.S. perspective on this expanding relationship.

The Importance of the Persian Gulf for China

During the Cold War, China interpreted global events through an ideological lens. In the post-Cold War era, however, national interests and pragmatism have defined its foreign policy. China's remarkable economic growth has fueled a surging demand for fossil fuels like oil and gas, making the Persian Gulf a cornerstone of its energy strategy. Since losing energy self-sufficiency in the early 1990s, China has relied on oil imports and sought to secure a stable supply by forging closer ties with key Persian Gulf players such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Iran. The region's geographic and geopolitical significance—highlighted by the Strait of

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