

Circumventing Sanctions: The Impact of Sino-Iranian Relations on Iran Within The Middle-East Power Constellation

Case Study of Iran-Israel Proxy War in Syria

Patricia¹, Kinanti Aristawidya², Marchelle Adriani³

¹The Catholic University of Lilie, France, patriciayoana@gmail.com

²Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, Indonesia, kiki.arstwdy@gmail.com

³Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, Indonesia, marchelleadriani@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Due to its hostile behavior in the Middle East, Iran has been sanctioned severely by the international community. Despite isolation attempts by the international community, Iran is nevertheless regarded as a powerhouse in the regional power constellation, owing to its actions in the Middle-Eastern proxy wars. Acknowledging the anomaly of Iran's capabilities in spite of heavy sanctions, this research arguably shows how Sino-Iranian relations paves the way for Iran to circumvent sanctions. Subsequent to learning about China's support for Iran, this research questions if the aforementioned support has an impact on Iran's actions and status within the regional power constellation. Furthermore, this research also questions the influence of Iran and China's relations towards the former's ability in pursuing its aims through the Syrian proxy war against Israel in the account of international sanctions and condemnations. Guided by the concept of balancing by Stephen M. Walt and an exploitative model of proxy warfare theory, this research finds the Sino-Iranian relations as having a significant effect towards improving Tehran's capabilities and acquisition of power in the Middle-East power constellation. Moreover, concerning the Iran-Israel proxy war, China's actions are proven to mainly affect Iran and the Syrian civil war within the political sphere.

Keywords: *balancing; sanction; middle-east power constellation; proxy war*

ABSTRAK

Akibat perilaku agresifnya di Timur Tengah, Iran telah dikenakan sanksi berat oleh komunitas internasional. Namun, meski sudah terdapat berbagai upaya yang dilakukan oleh komunitas internasional untuk mengisolasinya, Iran tetap dianggap sebagai kekuatan besar dalam konstelasi kekuatan regional karena keterlibatannya dalam perang proksi di Timur Tengah. Menyadari sebuah anomali pada kemampuan Iran meski telah diberikan berbagai sanksi, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana hubungan Tiongkok-Iran membuka jalan bagi Iran untuk mengelakkan beberapa sanksi tersebut. Setelah mengetahui tentang dukungan Tiongkok untuk Iran, penelitian ini mempertanyakan apakah dukungan tersebut memiliki dampak pada tindakan dan status Iran dalam konstelasi kekuatan regional. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mempertanyakan pengaruh hubungan Iran dan Tiongkok terhadap kemampuan Iran dalam mengejar tujuannya melawan Israel melalui perang proksi di Suriah dibawah sanksi dan kecaman internasional. Dipandu oleh konsep *balancing* karya Stephen M. Walt dan model eksploitatif dari teori perang proksi, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa hubungan Tiongkok-Iran memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan pada peningkatan kemampuan serta perolehan kekuasaan Iran dalam konstelasi kekuatan di Timur Tengah. Ditambah lagi, terkait perang proksi Iran dan Israel, tindakan Tiongkok terbukti cenderung mempengaruhi perang sipil Suriah di ranah politik.

Kata Kunci: *penyeimbangan; sanksi; konstelasi kekuatan Timur Tengah; perang proksi*

Introduction

Throughout a few decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has had its actions condemned and sanctioned by various actors in the international community due to its contradictions to international law and norms. Embarked in 1979, the first measure imposed was by the United States during the Iran hostage crisis in the form of asset freezes and a trade embargo.¹ Presently, however, sanctions on Iran also take the form of travel bans, financial-deal prohibitions, arms and petroleum embargo, restrictions in research as well as development. Over time, sanctions towards Iran also evolved to targeting not only the operating government but individuals and private firms. With deterring Iran's nuclear ambitions and non-proliferation as their main objectives, the United States (US), United Nations (UN), and European Union (EU) act as the main actors within the effort to urge Iran to the negotiating table.² Nevertheless, sanctions imposed also concern allegations of terrorism sponsorship, development of ballistic-missile, and human rights violations.³

Corresponding to Iran's nuclear development program, the EU and the UN have placed strict measures such as an arms embargo of all variations, arms procurement, oil embargo, asset freeze and prohibition to make funds available towards all entities enlisted in Annexes VIII and IX of Council Regulation (EU) 267/2012.⁴ Over and above, penalties also include embargo on dual-use goods, cargo inspections, prohibition to satisfy claims, restrictions on admission and goods that may contribute to nuclear development.⁵ Both multilateral bodies have imposed sanctions on human rights violations as well that further involve restrictions on equipment used for internal repression and telecommunications.⁶ By April 2021, UN sanctions on Iran target 61 entities and 23 individuals.⁷ Conforming with the aforementioned penalties, the US itself have placed measures on Iran in regards to the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA), the Iran Human Rights and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act, the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act, as well as EOs 13553, 13608, 13846, and 13876.⁸ As Iran is found as the highest US sanction-designation, it is significant to note that the Obama and Trump regime combined have bound 1.599 Iranian individuals and entities.⁹

Despite the punishing sanctions imposed with the addition of Trump's 'maximum pressure' campaign as well as their implications, not only Iran is still a fully-functioning state and regime, but the Islamic Republic is known to be actively participating in several disputes and directly taking part in a few proxy wars. Viewed as one of the Middle-East powerhouses, Tehran's influence throughout

¹ "Iran Sanctions - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, January 11, 2021, accessed August 7, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/iran-sanctions/>

² Zachary Laub, "International Sanctions on Iran," Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2015, accessed August 07, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/international-sanctions-iran>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ "EU Sanctions Map," EU Sanctions Map, November 12, 2020, <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main/details/18/lists?search=%7B%22value%22:%22iran%22,%22searchType%22:%7B%22id%22:1,%22title%22:%22regimes,%20persons,%20entities%22%7D%7D>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "EU Sanctions Map," EU Sanctions Map, April 12, 2021, <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main/details/17/lists?search=%7B%22value%22:%22iran%22,%22searchType%22:%7B%22id%22:1,%22title%22:%22regimes,%20persons,%20entities%22%7D%7D>.

⁷ Julia Friedlander and Michael Albanese, "Global Sanctions DASHBOARD: APRIL," Atlantic Council, May 14, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/global-sanctions-dashboard-april/>.

⁸ Abigail Eineman, "Sanctions by the Numbers: The Geographic Distribution of U.s. Sanctions," Center for a New American Security (en-US), June 15, 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/sanctions-by-the-numbers-1>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the region flourishes through the strategic use of non-state actors.¹⁰ Acknowledging its proxy war against Saudi Arabia and Israel, Iran takes part in supporting Syrian Bashar Al-Assad regime (Syrian civil war), Houthis (Yemen war), Hezbollah (Israeli-Lebanese conflict), Hamas (Israeli-Palestinian conflict), Iraqi militias, and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict).¹¹ Moreover, Iran officials claim no hindrances of defense industry growth from the aforementioned measures imposed as is stated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)¹²,

“Despite the full scale enmity of the oppression front and the global oppression system against the Iranian nation and the chain of sanctions during the past 33 years, the field of defense industries has taken advantage of the existing potentials and cradles, as well as the capabilities of its own creative forces.”

As sanctions are defined as one of the most powerful yet peaceful coercive diplomatic tools to induce policy-changes of a specific government, this paper finds its effectiveness questionable as it has failed to show its capabilities in suppressing Iran’s power within the regional sphere. Learning its utmost promoted implications in plummeting Tehran’s oil exports, devaluing its currency, and increasing petrol prices, **the research further realizes an anomaly in Iran’s powerhouse capabilities within the Middle-East power constellation albeit the international community’s attempt to isolate the state.**

In tackling the underlying reasons behind the aforementioned anomaly, previous research by Bruce D. McDonald and Vincent Reitano have found the significance of an economic boost resulting from changes in defense expenditure within militarization in correspondence to the increase of GDP outweighing the cost of sanctions.¹³ The authors argue the sanctions as ineffective and therefore do not have an effect on Iran’s proxies.¹⁴ On the other hand, Flavius Caba-Maria elaborated on the issues behind uncollapsing Iran, focusing on its diverse economic base, high degree of resilience, and adaptability.¹⁵ Taking into account the long horizon of sanction applications, Maria proves her findings through Iran’s ‘Maximum Resilience’ policy tailored against Trump’s campaign post-withdrawal from the JCPOA.¹⁶ Another research by Ray Tarkeyh and Suzanne Maloney emphasizes Iran’s survivability as owing to the role of market change under the auspices of an authoritarian supreme leader with austere Islamism and imperialist values.¹⁷ Understanding the researches mentioned have focused on domestic actors and policies for Iran’s withstanding capabilities, their findings are considered as an underestimation of regional and international influences.

Highlighting the role of external actors and policies within Iran’s actions of circumventing sanctions, **this paper argues that Iran’s relations with China have impacted its capabilities within the regional power constellation amidst the sanctions imposed by the international**

¹⁰ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2020).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Anthony H. Cordesman, Bryan Gold, and Chloe Coughlin-Schulte, *Iran: Sanctions, ENERGY, Arms Control, and Regime Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 119.

¹³ Bruce D. McDonald and Vincent Reitano, “Sanction Failure: Economic Growth, Defense Expenditures, and the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Armed Forces & Society* 42, no. 4 (2016): pp. 635-654, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327x16631095>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Flavius Caba-Maria, “Examining the Efficiency of Current International Economic Sanctions Concerning Iran,” *WSEAS Transactions of Business and Economics* 18 (2021): pp. 462-471, <https://doi.org/10.37394/23207.2021.18.47>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ray Takeyh and Suzanne Maloney, “The Self-Limiting Success of Iran Sanctions,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2011): pp. 1297-1312, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.01037.x>.

community. To further specify its effect, the analysis will take a case study to see if the Iran-China relations have significantly influenced the course of action within the prolonged Syrian Civil War, as is also widely known as the Iran-Israel proxy war. The research will firstly outline Iran's relations with China as well as the interests of both entities in each other and continue to analyze its impacts towards the middle-east regional power constellation accounting the Iranian proxy wars. Subsequently, it will then elaborate the Iran-Israel proxy war, particularly within the Syrian Civil War, and analyze the significance of Iran-China relations specifically to the matter.

Methodology

This paper will be of qualitative research focusing on data collection, analysis, and writing. With the objective to explore the Iran-China relations as the grounds for Tehran's capabilities within the regional power constellation, this research is concluded as explanatory with a top to bottom portrait review. To support the analysis, this research will collect multiple forms of secondary data taken from journals, articles, books, state documents, news, as well as credible databases. With the purpose of comprehensiveness, this paper will entertain an individual case study method concerning the ongoing Syrian Civil War as is also the proxy war of Iran against Israel.

Theoretical Framework

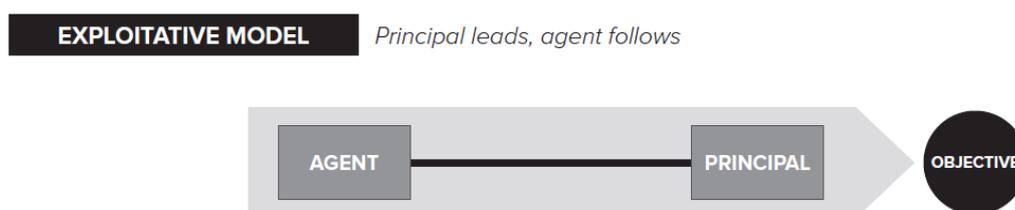
In order to guide the research on proving the impact of the Iran-China relations, this paper utilizes Stephen M. Walt's balancing concept as elaborated in his work titled '*The Origins of Alliance*' deriving from his findings within the middle east.¹⁸ Walt analyzed middle eastern history and found that international alliances are formed due to the existence of external threats and balancing is discovered more commonly done in the region instead of bandwagoning. Moreover, Walt also emphasizes the importance of balancing against threats in addition to power. In his work, he claims states in the middle east tend to form alliances in response to threats within the region and seldom account the global balance of power due to geographical proximity. With the purpose in making sense of this behavior, Walt defines balancing as an occurrence in which states seek to counter threats by accumulating another state's power to their own whereas regional states specifically have sought assistance from a superpower state and/or local entities, at the time of an involvement in an intense rivalry.

Walt identifies 2 broad types of balancing namely by military means for military ends and by political means for image and legitimacy. The relationship between both states then vary as follows: (1) the highest level would show sacrifice of tangible assets by allies; (2) the moderate level would show allies risking tangible assets as well as diplomatic sacrifices for support; (3) and the lowest level refers to simply symbolic alliances. In the case of regional alliances, Walt stresses that threats from proximate power (instead of aggregate power) leads regional states to ally with a superpower state that most aligns with their own political interests whilst considering the other superpower state as hostile. Understanding the purpose of deterring adversaries, Walt argues the objective of alliances as leaning more to balance of threat instead of balance of power. In another piece of his work titled '*Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*', Walt refers to several related but distinct derivations of threat further promoting alliance formation rather than solely focusing on aggregate

¹⁸ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007).

capability distribution.¹⁹ Therefore, states will ally with or against the most threatening power in the region.

On a different note, this paper will also refer to the Exploitative Model Theory of Proxy Warfare by Major Amos C. Fox to build an elaborate understanding of Iran's proxy relationship with the Syrian regime of Bashar Al Assad within its indirect war against Israel.²⁰ A comprehension of this relationship is considered to be of significance for analyzing the impact of Iran-China relations within the proxy war. The exploitative model emphasizes the leading role of the principal state (will be designated as Iran) in which the agent state (will be designated as Syria) follows as shown in the figure below,



The model insists on the dependence of the proxy force on its principal for survivability, resulting in a strong bond and extremely high influence of the principal on the agent. Highlighting the objective of the principal as a stronger actor, the proxy is utilized as a strategic tool of pursuance of its interests. That being said, the relationship of both entities heavily rely on the use and power of the proxy.

Analysis

Through a top to bottom framework, the analysis is distinguished into three sub-analysis beginning with the outline of Iran-China relations and how they led to circumventing sanctions. Following the main argument of this paper, the next sub-analysis will elaborate on the impact of aforementioned relations towards Iran in the Middle East power constellation as well as the proxy wars involved. Further narrowing the research, it will then analyze Bashar Al Assad's regime as an Iranian proxy and how significantly have Iran-China relations impacted the course of action of the Syrian Civil War in spite of imposed sanctions by the international community.

Iran-China Relations and Circumventing Sanctions

Though Iran's relations with China can be traced back into the Han Dynasty and the Ancient Silk Road, this research focuses on its relations with modern China beginning in 1974 marking the first Chinese import of oil from the Islamic Republic.²¹ Nevertheless, the presently deep and friendly partnership of both states substantially owes to its rich historical backgrounds of political, economic, and cultural exchanges. Prior to learning its relations, it is crucial to be aware of China and Iran's many common interests as both are ambitious emerging power states. Realizing Beijing's rapidly

¹⁹ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

²⁰ Amos C. Fox, *In Pursuit of a General Theory of Proxy Warfare* (Arlington, VA: The Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, 2019).

²¹ Zahid Khan and Changgang Guo, "China's Energy Driven Initiatives WITH Iran: Implications for the United States," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 4 (2017): pp. 15-31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023315>.

growing economic, military, and political power, Iran perceives China as a significant ally against US-backed regional powers and therefore pushing the balance in its favour as it is able to offset the Middle- East constellation of power.²² Noting China as Iran's largest trading partner, Tehran also sees China as a key economic partner and technological as well as investment provider, holding an important role not only in Iran's defense, economic, and infrastructure development, yet also its survivability in the account of sanctions imposed.²³ Within the global power constellation, Iran has heavily relied on China amidst external pressures, including advantages received from China's permanent seat in the Security Council.²⁴ As China holds the non-interference principle so dearly, the Iranian regime also values its silence and telecommunication technology assistance in facing internal pressures.²⁵

Similarly benefitting from the relations, China perceives Iran as one of its main contributors to the attainment of energy security. Learning of China's growing petroleum needs amidst its emerging influence, Iran's antagonism towards United States allies in the Middle East paves the way for China to guarantee its oil attainment despite US' attempts to block China's rising great power status.²⁶ Further exceeding energy and trade, China also sees Iran as the linchpin to reinforcing its strategic power in the Gulf region through the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).²⁷ On the other hand, China acknowledges Iran's great influence in the Muslim world and therefore considers the Islamic Republic as an advantageous ally in coping with Taliban influence resurgence in its muslim dominated province of Xin Jiang.²⁸ Emphasizing complementing interests, Chinese presidents over the years have repeatedly prompted the importance of Iran-China cooperation in managing regional and global developments.²⁹ Built upon the aforementioned interests, China's role as a main strategic ally to Tehran corresponds to Stephen M. Walt's conceptual claims as Iran hopes to achieve political leverage in the region by stabilizing and growing its economy, military, as well as infrastructure from its alignment with Beijing despite imposed measures. Though culture plays a role in China's decision in its partnership with Iran, it does not play a role otherwise. Therefore, proving the basis of Iran's alliance as purely due to China's interests which align most to its own.

Within the fulfillment of those interests, China and Iran have focused their relations mainly on trade of petroleum in particular, which owes to the fact that it is one of China's most crucial necessities and also Iran's main source of economic value. Nonetheless, relations have also involved joint military training, technological developments (including weapons and telecommunication), oil drill investments, intelligence sharing, along with health disaster management. Further elaboration on notable Iran-China relations are found in the following chronological table:

²² Zhao Hong, "China's Dilemma on Iran: Between Energy Security and a Responsible Rising Power," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 87 (2013): pp. 408-424, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.843880>.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Sune Engel Rasmussen and Aresu Egbali, "Iran Seeks to Rally International Support against U.s. Pressure," *The Wall Street Journal* (Dow Jones & Company, June 18, 2019), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-seeks-to-build-international-alliance-against-u-s-pressure-11560870847>.

²⁵ Hong, 2013.

²⁶ Scott W. Harold and Alireza Nader, "China and Iran: Economic, Political, and Military Relations," RAND Corporation, May 2, 2012, https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP351.html.

²⁷ Yu Hong, "China-Iran Deal Complements the Bri, but Faces Iranian Domestic Opposition and US Sanctions," *ThinkChina*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/china-iran-deal-complements-bri-faces-iranian-domestic-opposition-and-us-sanctions>.

²⁸ Hong, 2013.

²⁹ 关晓萌, "China Urges Us to Lift All Illegal Sanctions against Iran," *Chinadaily.com.cn*, April 7, 2021, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202104/07/WS606ced18a31024ad0bab3dc5.html>.

Table 1. Iran-China Relations (since 1974)

No.	Year	Sector	Category	Description
1	1974	Economy	Oil Export	Iran's first oil export to China
2	1983	Economy	Trade	Bilateral Trade pact increasing bilateral trade up to 150%
3	1983	Military	Defense Equipment	China provided Iran with military supplies and equipment
4	1985	Various	Various	Establishment of Joint Committee on Cooperation of Economy, Trade, Science and Technology
5	1993	Economy	Oil Export	China increases its imports of Iranian oil as it becomes a net importer
6	1996	Military	Defense Equipment	Contract signed for China to sell combat aircrafts, warships, MBTs, missiles, and military training
7	1997	Energy	Exploration/Drill	China's first investment on oil and gas exploration in Iran
8	2000	Energy	Exploration/Drill	Contract signed for drilling 19 oil wells in Iran
9	2004	Economy	Natural Gas Export	The world's largest purchase of natural gas by China towards Iran for a 25-year period
10	2004	Energy	Exploration/Drill	Deal signed to develop Yadavaran oil field in 2006

11	2007	Energy	Exploration/Drill	Deal signed to develop 137 oil wells in the Yadavaran oil field
12	2009	Economy	Trade	Global Economic Crisis pushed down trade from \$27.8 billion to \$27.2 billion
13	2009	Energy	Exploration/Drill	Deal signed to develop North Azadegan oil field and explore Iran's South Pars gas field
14	2009	Energy	Other	National Iranian Oil Company opened office in Beijing to attract investment
15	2009	Economy	Trade	China became Iran's largest trading partner
16	2010	Military	Trade	China sells C-704 anti ship cruise missile to Iran
17	2011	Economy	Trade	Bilateral trade increase to \$45.10 billion and China became the top buyer of Iranian oil
18	2011	Economy	Trade	China continues to import Iranian oil despite US sanction threats
19	2013	Military	Diplomatic Visits	Iranian destroyer Sabalan and the helicopter carrier Kharg paid a port visit to Zhangjiagang port in Jiangsu province
20	2014	Economy	Trade	Bilateral trade increase to \$51.8 billion due to US sanction waivers
21	2014	Military	Military Training	China-Iran first joint naval exercise drill in the Persian Gulf
22	2014	Military	Diplomatic Visits	Two People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ships, the destroyer Changchun and the frigate Changzhou, to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, located in the Strait of Hormuz.
23	2015	Military	Military Cooperation	Meetings held to discuss the deepening of military cooperation
24	2016	Economy	Trade	Bilateral trade decrease to \$31.2 billion due to sharp decrease in global oil prices
25	2016	Military	Security Cooperation	Iranian and Chinese defense ministers sign agreement for military-to-military exchanges, joint counterterrorism training, and joint military exercises

26	2016	Military	Trade	China agreed to sell 150 J-10 multirole fighter jets to Iran
27	2017	Military	Military Training	China and Iran hold naval exercises in the strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman
28	2019	Economy	Trade	China continue to import Iranian oil despite US sanctions
29	2019	Political, Military	Security Cooperation	Iranian armed force chief visits and holds meetings with China resulting in a Joint Naval Drill along with Russia
30	2019	Economy, Energy	JCPOA and economic ties	Joint meeting in Beijing discussing JCPOA and strengthening economic ties
31	2020	Various	Cooperation	Chinese and Iranian foreign ministers meeting discussing 25-year comprehensive partnership
32	2021	Various	Cooperation	Iran and China signed the 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership which includes includes economic, military and security partnerships, research and weapons development, also intelligence sharing
33	2021	Military	Security Cooperation	Joint Naval Drills in the Indian ocean along with Russia

Source: Multiple Sources³⁰³¹³²³³³⁴³⁵³⁶³⁷³⁸

In addition, it is also important to note that China has supplied Iran with 890 anti-ship missiles in the range of 1994-2012, consisting of types namely C-802, FL-6, TL-10, C-704, and CSS-N-4.³⁹

³⁰ Alex Yacoubian, "Iran's Increasing Reliance on China," United States Institute of Peace, April 19, 2021, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/sep/11/irans-increasing-reliance-china>.

³¹ Dr. Ardavan Khoshnood, "Security Implications of The Iran-China Deal," Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, April 29, 2021, <https://besacenter.org/iran-china-deal-security-implications/>.

³² Franz-Stefan Gady, "China, Iran to Deepen Military Ties," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, December 14, 2017), <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-iran-to-deepen-military-ties/>.

³³ Franz-Stefan Gady, "China Wants to Deepen Military Ties With Iran," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 17, 2015), <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/china-wants-to-deepen-military-ties-with-iran/>.

³⁴ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Iran, China Sign Military Cooperation Agreement," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, November 15, 2016), <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/iran-china-sign-military-cooperation-agreement/>.

³⁵ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Will Iran ORDER 150 New Fighter Jets from China?," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, August 4, 2015), <https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/will-iran-order-150-new-fighter-jets-from-china/>.

³⁶ Shannon Tiezzi, "China Wants More Military Co-Op With Iran (SORRY, US and Pakistan)," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 24, 2014), <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/china-wants-more-military-co-op-with-iran-sorry-us-and-pakistan/>.

³⁷ Franz-Stefan Gady, "China Wants to Deepen Military Ties With Iran," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 17, 2015), <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/china-wants-to-deepen-military-ties-with-iran/>.

³⁸ Harold and Nader, 2012.

³⁹ John W. Garver, "China and Iran: Expanding Cooperation under Conditions of US Domination," *Toward Well-Oiled Relations?*, 2016, pp. 180-205, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539793_12.

Accounting for several security partnerships, arms trade, joint military training, and diplomatic military visits enlisted, the analysis highlights Walt's concept of balancing through military means.

As China, to some extent, continues its Iranian oil imports despite measures imposed, sanctions are argued to be less efficient in inducing policy-changes towards Iran. Corresponding to oil embargo sanctions on Tehran, reports have shown that Iran stockpiled oil in Chinese ports as proven when six Iranian tankers were found unloading crude oil in TianJin and JinZhou ports in 2019.⁴⁰ Bonded storage of oil was also found in ports of HuiZhou containing more crude oil which were still in the ownership of Tehran and not listed as Chinese imports.⁴¹ However, the United States Institute of Peace shows that storing in such a way provided time for Tehran to market its oil in Asia without tariff payments.⁴² The petroleum inventory in JinZhou is reported to have almost doubled within 6 weeks by July 2019 into 6 million barrels.⁴³ Acting as an example of Iran's subterfuge in avoiding sanction implications, the phenomenon showed the significant role of China as its accomplice in maintaining oil operations. Concluding the aforementioned relations of the two countries, it is acknowledged that Iran is closely aligned with China. Its balancing strategies with China against the Middle Eastern regional powers have shown acts of circumventing sanctions specifically in oil trade with the purpose of insubordination as a political act to achieve a capable image and legitimacy amidst measures upholding yet another part of Walt's concept of balancing.

More on balancing through political acts, Iran shows its strong bargaining power from its partnership with China through Beijing's support against US initiatives, be it within the UN or not. In regards to unilateral sanctions imposed by the US to bring Iran's oil export to zero, China has actively voiced its concerns through its foreign ministers throughout its regime periods, naming unilateral sanctions on Iran as violations of international law and harmful towards innocent Iranian people.⁴⁴ As China juggles its role as a strategic partner for Iran and a responsible rising power, Beijing has also delayed and drawn out processes of Iranian sanction-related UNSC resolutions despite approving them in the end.⁴⁵ Referring to the US proposed building-process of S/RES/1929, China takes part in blocking all barriers that might be placed on economic transactions, especially concerning the energy sector.⁴⁶ Beijing evidently also prolonged the proposal talks by postponing its discussion for 3,5 months and continued talks for 9 weeks, allowing Iran to escape the delayed security council actions by approximately 6 months.⁴⁷ Reviewing China's approaches corresponding to the international community's stance towards Iran, it is significant to note that (1) China supports Iran's NPT right for a peaceful nuclear energy; (2) China supports Russian and EU attempts at negotiation; (3) China rejects the use of any military force, be as intervention or threat; (4) China continues its assistance and partnerships for trade and military development; (5) China have built a case to stop the use of unilateral sanctions; (6) Chinese companies have taken place in Iranian trade as some companies bailed; and (7) China have urged the US to stop and lift all illegal sanctions towards Iran.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Yacoubian, 2021.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ 赵诗悦, "China, Iran Ink Blueprint, Oppose Unilateral Sanctions," World - Chinadaily.com.cn, accessed August 9, 2021, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/29/WS60610d18a31024ad0bab2164.html>.

⁴⁵ Hong, 2013.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ John Garver, "China-Iran Relations: Cautious Friendship with America's Nemesis," China Report 49, no. 1 (2013): pp. 69-88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445513479247>, 1-3

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The aforementioned actions of China in upholding its in-depth relations with Iran are analyzed to be a form of Walt's moderate level balancing. As this research acknowledges the common international view of Iran as part of the Axis of Resistance and a threat, China's expressed statements condemning other powerful entities and their actions towards Tehran as well as Beijing's continued assistance and trade with the rogue state are of diplomatic sacrifices. Furthermore, as sanctions imposed on Iran also comprises measures for any entity that engages with the Islamic Republic within a given sector, China's continuance of energy partnerships, investments, arms trade, and anyone involved are put at risk on similar sanctions. Learning of China as the underlying reason behind Iran's capability of fully-functioning as a state in spite of sanctions, the analysis brings us to study its effect on the Middle-East regional power constellation as well as the proxy wars within.

The Impact of Iran-China Relations: Middle-East Power Constellation

The ever growing cooperation between Iran and China, made possible through their deepening economic ties and collaboration in the military as well as political field, led to the diminishing of the former's reputation as a pariah state.⁴⁹ Through both countries' parallel counter-hegemonic nature, Iran had been seeking to utilize China's potential as an emerging great power for the benefit of its own in the regional power constellation. It is important to note, however, that despite its determination, Iran was constrained not only by the lack of necessary economic and military might, but also the absence of a strong external ally that its contenders in the regional sphere like Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia possess (all three were allies of the U.S.). China's support towards Iran thus became crucial in tipping the equilibrium to Iran's favor, complementing Stephen M. Walt's concept of external balancing.⁵⁰

Consequently, despite the imposed sanctions, Iran managed to survive and develop capabilities which enabled them a certain regional power to achieve the status as a regional hegemon.⁵¹ Iran then managed to fill in the power gaps through the mobilization of its Shi'a armed groups across the Middle East, a region characterized by its conflictual environment and its tendency in resorting to hard power.⁵² In doing so, not only that Iran had been providing funds towards Shi'a insurgent groups and political entities, they also had been conducting aggressive and threatening naval activity in the Gulf and the Hormuz Strait. Furthermore, Iran had also been developing a nuclear energy strategy and asymmetric weapons, especially missile and drone technologies as part of their power projection to coerce Arab states and its alliances.⁵³

Tehran's intention to acquire a large bargaining power, showcased through the above-mentioned series of belligerent performances, was materialized through the help of Beijing's support. For years, China had been aiding Iran's efforts in military modernization, both in terms of hardware and doctrine. The former had been supplying the latter with small arms, tactical ballistic missiles, and

⁴⁹ Joel Wuthnow, "Posing Problems without an Alliance: China-Iran Relations after the Nuclear DEAL," (NDU Press, February 2016), 3, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1004293.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Scott Harold and Alireza Nader, *China and Iran : Economic, Political, and Military Relations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 2012), 5,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7249/j.ctt1q60w8.7.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A76e58fb65ca3e0e7a040abb20f5c548e>.

⁵¹ Alam Saleh, "The Iran-China Strategic Partnership and Changing Regional Order," Australian Institute of International Affairs, April 16, 2021, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-iran-china-strategic-partnership-and-changing-regional-order/>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Huda Raouf, "Iranian Quest for Regional Hegemony: Motivations, Strategies and Constraints," *Review of Economics and Political Science* 4, no. 3 (July 12, 2019): 248, <https://doi.org/10.1108/reps-02-2019-0017>.

anti-ship cruise missiles which became a critical form of reinforcement.⁵⁴ Eventually, direct sales began decreasing as Beijing started aiding Tehran in establishing its very own military-industry, a modern one at that. With China's help, Iran managed to establish its own anti-ship cruise missiles, Nasr, which was reported to be almost identical to China's C-704.⁵⁵ Iran's newfound capabilities then acted as the core of its military doctrine against the United States and its allies in the Middle East where it aims to utilize their missile forces to emphasize its regional standing.⁵⁶

Still in terms of China's Assistance towards Iran's developing bargaining power, the former has assisted the latter's nuclear development program. China's technicians and engineers were sent to train Iran's engineers as well as assisting them in the establishment of the Esfahan Nuclear Research Center, which is critical to Iran's nuclear program growth.⁵⁷ Through its increasing nuclear capability, Iran was made capable of affecting the balance of threat in the Persian Gulf by neutralizing the U.S. and its allies.⁵⁸

Regional tensions were further amplified as the Gulf countries and Israel began voicing concerns regarding Iran's nuclear development.⁵⁹ For one, Israel began perceiving Iran and its nuclear program as an existential threat, thus deciding to take matters into their own hands by countlessly threatening to destroy Iran's nuclear arsenal facilities.⁶⁰ Furthermore, both countries were also involved in armed conflicts both directly and indirectly. In the case of the Lebanon Civil War, Iran had been supporting the pan-Shi'a organization, Hezbollah, by providing various weapons such as missiles and short-range rockets as well as conducting training with the IRGC.⁶¹ Israel, on the other hand, had been directly involved in supporting the Government of Lebanon through a series of air campaigns as a response to Hezbollah's hostility.⁶² Iran and Israel's involvement in armed conflicts can also be seen in the case of Syrian Civil War where Iran stood beside Bashar al-Assad's regime against Israel, the U.S., Turkey, and Saudi Arabia as some of the countries that backed the anti-government movement.⁶³ Further elaborations on the Iran-Israel proxy war will be provided in the next section.

Aside from Israel, Turkey was also deeply affected by the impact of Iran and China's strategic partnership, especially in terms of security. Prior to understanding the effects, it is crucial to understand that Turkey and Iran had long been regional rivals with opposing agendas and interests. Due to Iran's increasing participation in the regional power projection, Turkey began facing complications in accomplishing its missions in countries like Libya. The aforementioned was evident as Iran was allegedly supporting Khalifa Haftar, against the Government of National Accord which was backed by Turkey.⁶⁴ In addition, Turkey feared that the proliferation of Iran's self-made weapons

⁵⁴ Harold, 2012, 6-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁵⁷ Harold, 8.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Raouf, 2019, 249.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Christian Kaunert and Ori Wertman, "The Securitization of Hybrid Warfare through Practices within the Iran-Israel Conflict - Israel's Practices to Securitize Hezbollah's Proxy War," *Security and Defence Quarterly*, December 11, 2020, 103-4, <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/130866>.

⁶² Ibid, 106.

⁶³ Karim Sadjadpour, "Combating Terrorism Center at West Point," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, August 27, 2013, <https://ctc.usma.edu/irans-unwavering-support-to-assads-syria/>.

⁶⁴ Ali Bakir, "What an Iran-China Pact Means for Turkey," What an Iran-China pact means for Turkey, August 18, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/what-an-iran-china-pact-means-for-turkey-38903>.

under China's assistance could pose a bigger security threat for them as the latter had been supplying Turkey's enemies in Libya and Syria with weapons.⁶⁵

Iran's growing influence in the Middle also affected its most prickly rival, Saudi Arabia. Rooted from the seventh-century struggle on Shi'a-Sunni rivalry, Saudi and Iran had been involved in a war in pursuit of regional hegemony.⁶⁶ Both countries utilized the conflict of sectarianism to approach war-torn Yemen where Iran allegedly provided military support for the Zaydi-influenced Houthi Group against President Mansour Hadi's regime which was backed by the Saudi-led coalition.⁶⁷ Furthermore, their highly-volatile relationship was worsened by the oil rivalry occurring between the two oil-rich states in the region. Their contention in becoming the number one oil exporting country in the region resorted to the extent where both countries began attacking one another's oil rig facilities.⁶⁸

Acknowledging Iran's active involvement in the Middle East power constellation, whilst oftentimes being viewed as the opposition party, its alliance with China are highly strategic to survive and respond to the regional threats. Corresponding to Stephen M. Walt's balancing concept, Iran had sought for assistance from China, an entity that fit to Walt's idea of superpower state, at the time of their involvement in an intense rivalry against strong proximate powers such as Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia as have been mentioned above.

The Syrian Uprising: An Iran-Israeli Proxy War Stage

As their relations deteriorated after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, both Israel and Iran have been on high alert with each other. The rise of Islamist rule in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini has brought the notion of the United States and Israel immediately takes place to oppose their intrusion in the Middle East political constellation.⁶⁹ Iran views that the involvement of Western powers in the region, especially Israel, will jeopardize Iran's dream to spread their pan-Islamism ideology. On the other side, Israel has been cautious of Iran's build-up of power, notably its nuclear weapon programme and ballistic missiles program capabilities to assert their regional expansion intentions.⁷⁰ Having the privilege as US' close ally, Israel has their own advantage in influencing the U.S. to impose sanctions on Iran as negotiations on JCPOA are violated.⁷¹ These sanctions are utilized as an instrument to contain Iran's influence over the Middle East states and neutralize Iran's offensive capabilities to prevent conflict spillovers.

The clashing insecurities instigated the proxy war between Iran and Israel that took place in four main stages, namely Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Palestine. In these proxies, Iran has been supporting the Assad regime in Syria, Houthi rebels in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine. A 'political alliance' called the Axis of Resistance was established between Iran, Syria, and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, "Opinion | Iran, Saudi Arabia and Modern Hatreds (Published 2018)," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2018, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/15/opinion/iran-saudi-arabia-and-modern-hatreds.html>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Humeyra Pamuk, "Exclusive: U.S. Probe of Saudi Oil Attack Shows It Came from North - Report," *Reuters*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-iran-exclusive-idUSKBN1YN299>.

⁶⁹ Jubin M. Goodarzi, "Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment," *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4, no. 2 (January 2013): pp. 31-54.

⁷⁰ Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, *The Sixth CRISIS: Iran, Israel, America and the Rumors of War* (New York, US: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷¹ Jacob Magid, "Israel Pushing Us to Keep Trump Sanctions on Iran, Even If Nuke Deal Resurrected," *The Times of Israel*, July 8, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-pushing-us-to-keep-trump-sanctions-on-iran-even-if-nuke-deal-resurrected/>.

Lebanon that stood their ground against the US hegemony in the Middle East, contesting the political position of US, Israel, NATO, and Saudi Arabia in the region.⁷² Going beyond state-related proxies, Iran-Israeli proxies also involve a series of sabotages, be it through maritime shipments or even through cyberattacks.⁷³

Syria has been one of Iran's strategic partners in confronting Israel within the contestation of power in the Middle East. It needs to be underlined that the relations built between Iran and Syria itself are quite peculiar. Although the Alawite is a part of a Shiite sect which is followed by the majority of Iran, Syria is built upon ruled by the Ba'athists as a secular pan-Arabic state while Iran itself runs as an Islamic republic with a theocratic pan-Islamist ideology.⁷⁴ Ideally, contradictory regimes will not allow both countries to form an alliance. However, under the same initial purpose of neutralizing the Iraqi and Israeli offensive and preventing American intervention in the Middle East, Iran and Syria have been maintaining their defensive alliance for four decades since 1979.⁷⁵ The alliance depends heavily on Iran and Syria's needs to fulfil both countries' regional national interest. Their overlapping interests lies in how both countries feel the need to diminish foreign influence in the region, for Iran in order to brand revolutionary Islam to transcend nationalism and realize Muslim Unity and for Syria to overcome the Arabic political fragmentation as the vehicle for Arab unit.⁷⁶ To reach their goal, this strategic alliance framed the urgency of Arab-Israeli struggle in actualizing the pan-Islamic goals and opposed every course of action done by Israel as the extension of the U.S.' power in the region, if not by directly opposing the U.S. directly.

In 2011, Iran-Syria relations were challenged by the emergence of the Syrian Uprising during the Arab Spring. It confronts Iran with the option of condemning the oppression done by the Syrian government and lose their strategic alliance, or supporting Assad's regime and undermine their own reputation from the other Muslim states of Iran's hypocrisy on their own words supporting the Arab Spring.⁷⁷ In the end, Iran stood by its stance to support Assad's regime in Syria as its strategic partner by sending military advisors, establishing militias, and providing political support.⁷⁸ With Israel's stance following US' to support the opposition group in regaining power from the authoritative Assad regime, Syrian Civil War has become one of Iran's main fronts of proxy war. Tehran views that strong relations with Syria and strategic movements in the area will give them heightened support towards their goal to contain Israel's movements in the regional power contestation.

In order to maintain its position as one of a great regional power in the Middle East, Iran as the principal has been utilizing the conflict in Syria to challenge the influence Israel had among the Middle East states through Assad's regime as the agent based on Amos's Exploitative Model of Proxy.⁷⁹ The instability caused by Syrian Uprisings are perceived by the IRGC as an existential threat towards the established connection with Syria that are deemed necessary to fulfil Iran's regional

⁷² Marisa Sullivan, "Hezbollah in Syria," Middle East Security Report 19, April 2014, pp. 1-43.

⁷³ Frank Gardner, "Iran and Israel's Shadow War Takes a Dangerous Turn," BBC News (BBC, April 12, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56724039>.

⁷⁴ Hassan Ahmadian and Payam Mohseni, "Iran's Syria Strategy: The Evolution of Deterrence," *International Affairs* 95, no. 2 (January 2019): pp. 341-364, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy271>.

⁷⁵ Jubin M. Goodarzi, "Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment," *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4, no. 2 (January 2013): pp. 31-54.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

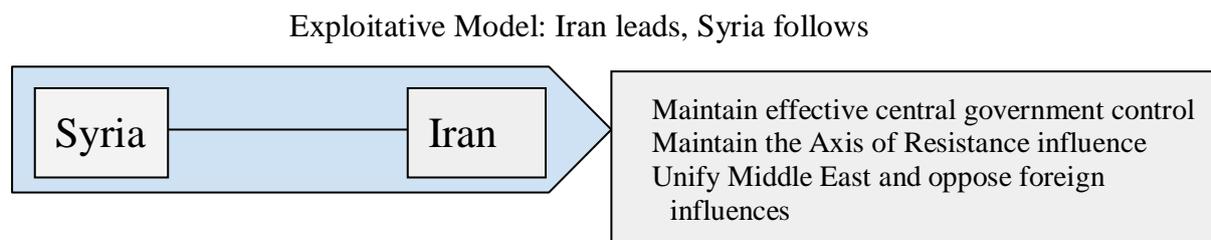
⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hassan Ahmadian and Payam Mohseni, "Iran's Syria Strategy: The Evolution of Deterrence," *International Affairs* 95, no. 2 (January 2019): pp. 341-364, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy271>.

⁷⁹ Amos C. Fox, *In Pursuit of a General Theory of Proxy Warfare* (Arlington, VA: The Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, 2019).

interest. Noting their strategic importance in Syria, Iran did not hesitate to involve themselves in the conflict by giving military and financial assistance to Assad in order to prevent the regime from being overthrown by the opposition groups. Having Hezbollah as their proxy organization in Lebanon, Iran initially ordered Hezbollah to intervene and assist Syrian regime forces.⁸⁰ However, when the assistance from Hezbollah was deemed lacking to ensure Assad’s monopoly of power in Syria, Iran directly intervened in the conflict.

Figure 1. Exploitative model of proxy warfare theory analysis



Source: Primary data

As the situation escalated, Iran deployed around 8.000-9.000 IRGC forces and 5.000-6.000 Iranian army forces in Syria during the joint Russian-Iranian intervention in September 2015.⁸¹ The IRGC were also reportedly sending military advisors to Syrian security forces as the prisoner exchange with the rebel groups in January 2013 released 48 alleged IRGC officers.⁸² Major-General Mohammed Ali Jafari, IRGC’s commander, has publicly admitted that Iran is giving military assistance to Assad as they are reportedly sending 150 IRGC’s Quds Forces to Damascus in the aftermath of a rebel bomb attack on the National Security Headquarter on 18 July 2012.⁸³ Iran also provided a \$1 billion ‘credit facility agreement’ and \$3,6 billion additional credit in January 2013 for Assad’s regime as a form of financial aid.⁸⁴ Some sources mentioned that Iran has spent around \$600-\$700 million per month to ensure the survivability of Syria.⁸⁵ These assistance shows that the Assad regime requires help from Iran as the stronger actor to survive from the crisis it faced. Iran’s role as the principal state can be seen in how they lead Syria as the agent to use their forces in opposing foreign powers overthrowing Assad’s regime. However, Iran does not involve themselves directly any longer if the situation is perceived to be in favour of Assad. It implies that Iran is maximizing the utilization of power and strategic use of Assad’s regime in pursuing their interests. Having Iran and Assad holding dearly the interest of sustaining the long-established strategic alliance, both states are achieving their common objective to resist the Israeli influence towards the region. This results in Iran obtaining a significant amount of control in Syria.

⁸⁰ Ido Yahel, “Iran in Syria: From Expansion to Entrenchment,” *Tel Aviv Notes* 15, no. 5 (June 17, 2017): pp. 1-6.

⁸¹ Majid Rafizadeh, “Iran's Forces Outnumber Assad's in Syria,” *Gatestone Institute*, November 24, 2016, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/9406/iran-soldiers-syria>.

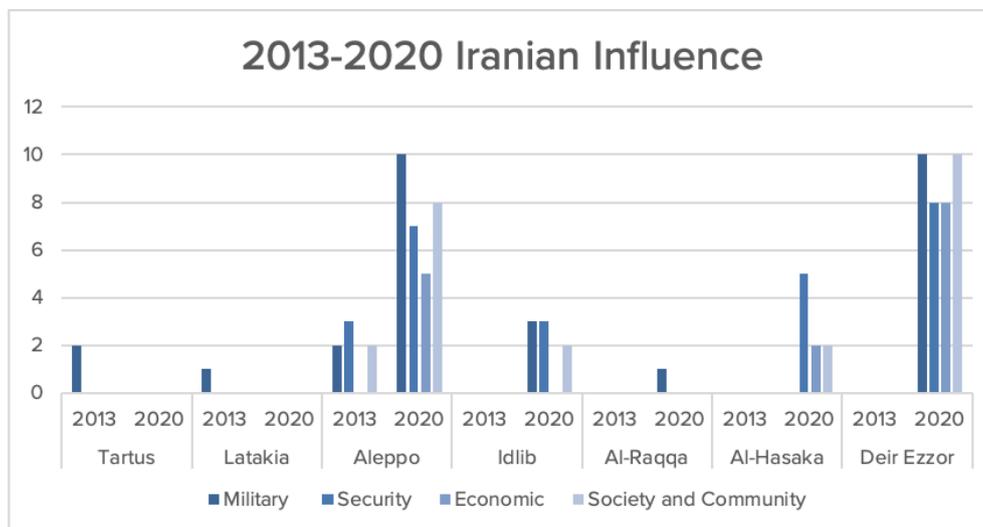
⁸² Geraint Alun Hughes, “Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 3 (April 2014): pp. 522-538, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.913542>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Karim Sadjadpour, “Iran’s Unwavering Support to Assad’s Syria,” *SYRIA SPECIAL ISSUE* 6, no. 8 (August 2013): pp. 11-13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Figure 2. Iranian Influence in Syria by region



Source: Navvar Saban, “Factbox: Iranian Influence and Presence in Syria,” Atlantic Council, November 5, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/factbox-iranian-influence-and-presence-in-syria/>.

As of now, tension has been rising with both Iran and Israel aware of each others’ offensive capabilities. Iran’s IRGC has been recruiting and organizing around 200.000 Shiite militia fighters and armed them with increasingly accurate and longer-range missiles and rockets, while helping them to develop the weapons locally.⁸⁶ The strategic deployments of missiles by Iran are reportedly capable of hitting Israel accurately from Syria. Meanwhile, Israeli Air Force has been maintaining their air force campaign and conducted 500 airstrikes within Syrian territory.⁸⁷ In facing the threats from Iranian missiles, Israel focuses on their air capabilities to neutralize Iran’s air defense missile and prevent any air developments. Both countries are rallying their powers to assert their influence in the region and their retaliation capabilities. As the situation between Iran and Israel is heating up, Syrian grounds are used as the strategic battleground of their proxy, especially by Iran. For them to maintain its actions in Syria, alliances are vital to ensure the survivability of the heavily-sanctioned Iran. Hence, this is where China took part in the conflict.

The Impact of Iran-China Relations to Iran’s Proxy War in Syria

Although China did hold onto their non-interference policy by not involving themselves directly within political conflict, China’s course of actions in securing their geopolitical interest in the Middle East through Iran does have an impact in Iran’s survivability in their proxy war against Israel. The relatively close Sino-Iranian ties backs up Iran from getting isolated in the region. As partnerships are established for, various Sino-Iranian partnerships, be it political, military, and economic partnerships, have been designed to bring benefits for countries. For Iran’s situation under the ‘maximum pressure’ policy imposed by the US, China’s decision to continue importing oil from

⁸⁶ Paul Iddon, “How Iran’s Militia Proxies Could Threaten Israel From These Four Countries,” Forbes (Forbes, April 29, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2021/04/29/how-irans-militia-proxies-could-threaten-israel-from-these-four-countries/?sh=4a9e2b1a5975>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Iran despite all the sanctions elevated Iran’s concern of international alienation.⁸⁸ Other than that, Iran shows the characteristic of Middle Eastern states in establishing alliances, responding to an existential threat in the region.⁸⁹ On China’s part, maintaining close relations with Iran will give them access to exploit Iranian oil to support Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese Dream’.⁹⁰ This gave a reciprocal nature of their bilateral relations, giving a strong foundation for further cooperation despite the international condemnation of Iran.

To see the significance of China’s relations with Iran in their involvement within the Syrian Civil war, it can be seen from the intensity of cooperation both states have been maintaining. This can be tracked from comparing the number of partnerships established by Iran and China and its correlation with the number of actions done by Iran in supporting Assad’s regime. GDP, military budget, and military expenditures are utilized as a parameter to see the significance of China’s investments in Iran to their economic capabilities and its impact to the proportion of Iran’s funds in being involved within the Syrian Civil War. This notes financial assistance and agreements done between Iran-Syria, the development of Iranian offensive capabilities, until the current Shiite militias recruitment and deployment in Syria by the IRGC that are backed with financial incentives.⁹¹

Table 2. Iran-China Relations, Iranian GDP, Military Budget, Military Expenditure, and Course of Actions in the Syrian Civil War (2010-2020)

Year	Number of Partnership	Type of Partnership	GDP*	Military Budget & Expenditure*	Course of Actions**
2010	1	Arms trade (China sells anti ship cruise missile to Iran)	413	10,6 & N/A	None (Pre-Syrian War)
2011	2	Economic trade (China continues to import Iranian oil and became its top buyer)	482,43	26,5 & N/A	7
2012	-	-	549	25,2 & N/A	6
2013	1	Diplomatic visits	367	N/A & 14,8	6
2014	3	China-Iran joint naval exercise drill and increase of bilateral trade	416	N/A & 15,9	4
2015	1	Discussions of deepening	390	14,2 & N/A	8

⁸⁸ Mohammad Soltaninejad, “Iran Turns to China and India in the Face of US Sanctions,” *East Asia Forum Quarterly (EAFQ): Economics and Security* 11, no. 4 (2019): pp. 26-27.

⁸⁹ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

⁹⁰ Winberg Chai and May-lee Chai, “The Meaning of Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 20, no. 2 (October 2013): pp. 95-97.

⁹¹ Paul Iddon, “How Iran’s Militia Proxies Could Threaten Israel From These Four Countries,” *Forbes* (Forbes, April 29, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2021/04/29/how-irans-militia-proxies-could-threaten-israel-from-these-four-countries/?sh=4a9e2b1a5975>.

		military cooperation			
2016	3	Defense ministers agreement, fighter jet trade, bilateral trade decrease due to falling oil prices	404	15,9 & N/A	6
2017	1	Naval naval exercises	413	21 & N/A	8

Notes:

* = *in billion dollar*

** = *includes all diplomatic, economic, and military*

Source: *Multiple Sources*⁹²⁹³⁹⁴⁹⁵⁹⁶⁹⁷

Sino-Iranian partnerships have shown a fluctuating trend seeing from their negative correlations with the course of actions that Iran is doing in Syria and positive correlation with Iran's GDP and military expenditures. As Iran is deemed to have a decrease in their GDP, they tend to have several cooperation with China. In 2012, it can be seen that there is no significant partnership happening between Iran and China, but their GDP and military budget is rather high. This implies that at the time, Iran was self-sufficient enough to support their own regime and their actions in Syria. After the Astana talks in 2017, the trends that are happening in 2018 to 2020 are different due to their high GDP, low military budget, yet cooperation with China is strengthened especially through the 25-year comprehensive partnership.⁹⁸ However, these trends should not be taken into a conclusion blatantly due to the fact that there are other determinants that affect Iran's capabilities in Syria, such as but not limited to externalities, escalation of conflicts, and immediate retaliations. These are just several of the variables that could be taken as a contributing factor to the strategic alliance of China and Iran. One example is how the urgency of actions taken regardless of their military budget are one of the factors that need to be considered to determine Iran's course of actions, which is not largely influenced by the help of China as it is the issue of interest.

Other than their bilateral partnerships, China's power as one of UNSC's Permanent 5 (P5) countries has its indirect effect towards Iran's involvement in the war. China's veto powers and diplomatic leverage are significant in passing any resolutions correlated to Iran's sanction nor for any international actions being taken in Syria.⁹⁹ For Iran, China is known to be delaying and relieving the

⁹² "Part 2: Iran in Syria Timeline," The Iran Primer, April 10, 2018, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2018/apr/10/iran-syria-2-timeline>.

⁹³ Alex Yacoubian, "Iran's Increasing Reliance on China," United States Institute of Peace, April 19, 2021, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/sep/11/irans-increasing-reliance-china>.

⁹⁴ Franz-Stefan Gady, "China Wants to Deepen Military Ties With Iran," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 17, 2015), <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/china-wants-to-deepen-military-ties-with-iran/>.

⁹⁵ Shannon Tiezzi, "China Wants More Military Co-Op With Iran (SORRY, US and Pakistan)," – The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, October 24, 2014), <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/china-wants-more-military-co-op-with-iran-sorry-us-and-pakistan/>.

⁹⁶ Dr. Ardavan Khoshnood, "Security Implications of The Iran-China Deal," Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, April 29, 2021, <https://besacenter.org/iran-china-deal-security-implications/>.

⁹⁷ "The Military Balance," Taylor and Francis Online, accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tmib20>.

⁹⁸ "Part 2: Iran in Syria Timeline," The Iran Primer, April 10, 2018, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2018/apr/10/iran-syria-2-timeline>.

⁹⁹ John W. Garver, "China and Iran: Expanding Cooperation under Conditions of US Domination," *Toward Well-Oiled Relations?*, 2016, pp. 180-205, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539793_12.

sanctions that are being imposed to them, giving Iran more time to configure their strategic movements in the region.¹⁰⁰ With their political leverage, China is able to oppose unilateral sanctions from the US, support Iran's peaceful nuclear development to the international community, oppose and delay the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) referral of Iran's nuclear use to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and more political actions in the international level that benefited Iran in their contestation of power in the Middle East.¹⁰¹ In UNSC, an indirect impact China did to support Iran in their proxy came from their usage of veto powers in resolutions concerning Syria and Assad's regime. An example is their immediate veto on UNSC Resolution 612 (S/2011/612) regarding the condemnation of human rights violations in Syria, call to restraint for any transfers of arms, and consider the implementation of measures under Article 41 United Nations Charter toward Syria.¹⁰² Restriction of movements to Syria will surely hinder Iran from securing their interests in the region, hence the act of China vetoing the resolution indirectly allows Iran to operate within Syria.

The Sino-Iranian relationship can be seen as a form of alliance, notably with both of the states sharing the same views of the ineffective unipolar US-dominance of world affairs.¹⁰³ Both are rising powers, China currently rising as a global power and Iran that is striving to maintain its position as the regional power in the Middle East. By forming an alliance, Iran and China show a shared perception of the existential threat that looms in front of them, which is the US dominance in global politics. Seeing that Iran is subject to the most sanctions imposed by the US, China views an opportunity to channel their influence in the Middle East through Iran while also securing their needs of oil reserves.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, Iran perceived China--with their reputation as the emerging global power--as a strategic partner to challenge US' influence in the region and support their survivability amidst the global isolation.¹⁰⁵ Having their interests aligned in some way, Iran and China can establish a longstanding relationship regardless of the international criticism imposed on Iran and China.

Iran's behaviour in establishing their alliance with China comes in line with Waltz's external balancing. As Waltz states that alliances are made to balance the existence of external threats for the survivability of said state, the absence of support coming from Western countries that sided with the US that imposed the 'maximum pressure policy' made Iran take their turn to seek assistance from their strategic partners in Asia, namely China.¹⁰⁶ The alliance mostly relies on political means to maintain the image and legitimacy of Sino-Iranian relations, which are reflected from the numerous negotiations and diplomacy done by both countries.¹⁰⁷ Iran also gained political legitimacy from China, having an emerging global power as their strategic partner. This is reflected in China's active behaviour in ensuring Iran's interests are not badly influenced by the sanctions imposed. Consequently, China can build their image in the Middle East and expand their geopolitical interests in the region through Iran. There are also some military means used in the alliance, namely the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² "United Nations Security Council Resolution 612," United Nations (United Nations), accessed August 9, 2021, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S%2F2011%2F612.

¹⁰³ John W. Garver, "China and Iran: Expanding Cooperation under Conditions of US Domination," *Toward Well-Oiled Relations?*, 2016, pp. 180-205, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539793_12.

¹⁰⁴ John Garver, "China-Iran Relations: Cautious Friendship with America's Nemesis," *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013): pp. 69-88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445513479247>, 1-3

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Mohammad Soltaninejad, "Iran Turns to China and India in the Face of US Sanctions," *East Asia Forum Quarterly (EAFQ): Economics and Security* 11, no. 4 (2019): pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

exchange of joint military training as well as arms trade in Iran's military modernization.¹⁰⁸ Noting that Iran is participating in a proxy war, military means provides a significant advantage to Iran's capabilities to support Assad's regime in the Syrian Civil war.

The alliance does not come without any consequences, especially to China. Waltz mentioned that a moderate level of alliance can risk tangible assets, as well as diplomatic sacrifices for support.¹⁰⁹ On Iran's part, cooperation with China correlates deeply with their oil reserves assets. Knowing that oil is China's main interest in their partnerships, further exploitation is bound to happen if left unchecked. Meanwhile, China's consequences lie in their global credibility and their position towards the international community. By supporting Iran through a series of political and diplomatic acts, it raises the question of China's stance and their morality, knowing that Iran is proven to benefit from its network of militia fighters to fight their battles.¹¹⁰ With that being said, Sino-Iranian relations are prone to inflict diplomatic damage towards China's political leverage in the international community.

Conclusion

As a state being involved in various proxy wars with Israel contesting influence in the Middle East, Iran benefits from their partnerships with China in continuously providing technical, military, and financial assistance to Assad's regime. Various partnerships were established between Iran and China with the basis of common interest in securing geopolitical importance in the region and in a way or another opposing US influence within the region. The partnership is also supported by the fact that Iran is facing sanctions from the Western world and China is available to lend a hand to Iran, while still benefiting themselves in getting the oil reserves they need for China's development. While the relations between Iran and China encompasses many aspects, namely military, economic, and political aspects, China's political partnership is the most influential towards Iran's position in the regional power contestation. China's privilege to veto power has granted its allies, especially Iran and their proxy in Syria, to buy time and acquire temporary freedom for them to make their strategic moves amidst the imposition of sanction by the international community. The dynamic acts of circumventing sanction by Iran-China has proven to give Iran the opportunity to maintain its regional influence.

On a side note, Iran's influence in Syria can be seen as the extension of China's influence in the Middle East. China's involvement in Iran is not one to be overlooked. Recognizing China's rising power within the global power constellation, it is possible that China is starting to extend its hands to get a grip on Middle Eastern states. The possible projection for this course of behaviour is the emergence of China as a global power opposing the US hegemony, as we have been seeing by the occurrence of the US-China trade war. Noting that China is after oil to achieve Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream", the Middle East is one of the notable strategic opportunities that is required to strengthen its position as a global power.

¹⁰⁸ Scott Harold and Alireza Nader, *China and Iran Economic, Political, and Military Relations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

¹¹⁰ Scott Harold and Alireza Nader, *China and Iran Economic, Political, and Military Relations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012).

References

Book:

- Allin, Dana H., and Steven Simon. *The Sixth CRISIS: Iran, Israel, America and the Rumors of War*. New York, US: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Cordesman, Anthony H., Bryan Gold, and Chloe Coughlin-Schulte. *Iran: Sanctions, ENERGY, Arms Control, and Regime Change*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Fox, Amos C. *In Pursuit of a General Theory of Proxy Warfare*. Arlington, VA: The Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, 2019.
- Harold, Scott, and Alireza Nader. *China and Iran : Economic, Political, and Military Relations*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 2012.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7249/j.ctt1q60w8.7.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A76e58fb65ca3e0e7a040abb20f5c548e>.
- The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East*. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Walt, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007.

Journal:

- Ahmadian, Hassan, and Payam Mohseni. "Iran's Syria Strategy: The Evolution of Deterrence." *International Affairs* 95, no. 2 (2019): 341–64. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy271>.
- Caba-Maria, Flavius. "Examining the Efficiency of Current International Economic Sanctions CONCERNING IRAN." *WSEAS TRANSACTIONS ON BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS* 18 (2021): 462–71. <https://doi.org/10.37394/23207.2021.18.47>.
- Chai, Winberg, and May-lee Chai. "The Meaning of Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream." *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 20, no. 2 (October 2013): 95–97.
- Eineman Former Intern, Abigail. "Sanctions by the Numbers: The Geographic Distribution of U.S. Sanctions." Center for a New American Security (en-US), June 15, 2020. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/sanctions-by-the-numbers-1>.
- "EU Sanctions Map." EU Sanctions Map, April 12, 2021. <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main/details/17/lists?search=%7B%22value%22:%22iran%22,%22searchType%22:%7B%22id%22:1,%22title%22:%22regimes,%20persons,%20entities%22%7D%7D>.
- "EU Sanctions Map." EU Sanctions Map, November 12, 2020. <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main/details/18/lists?search=%7B%22value%22:%22iran%22,%22searchType%22:%7B%22id%22:1,%22title%22:%22regimes,%20persons,%20entities%22%7D%7D>.
- Garver, John W. "China and Iran: Expanding Cooperation under Conditions of US DOMINATION." *Toward Well-Oiled Relations?*, 2016, 180–205. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539793_12.
- Garver, John. "China–Iran Relations: Cautious Friendship with America's Nemesis." *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013): 69–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445513479247>.
- Goodarzi, Jubin M. "Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment." *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4, no. 2 (January 2013): 31–54.

- Hong, Zhao. "China's Dilemma on Iran: Between Energy Security and a Responsible Rising Power." *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 87 (2013): 408–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.843880>
- Hughes, Geraint Alun. "Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 3 (2014): 522–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.913542>.
- Kaunert, Christian, and Ori Wertman. "The Securitization of Hybrid Warfare through Practices within the Iran-Israel Conflict - Israel's Practices to Securitize Hezbollah's Proxy War." *Security and Defence Quarterly*, December 11, 2020, 103–4. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/130866>.
- Khan, Zahid, and Changgang Guo. "China's Energy Driven Initiatives WITH Iran: Implications for the United States." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 4 (2017): 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023315>.
- McDonald, Bruce D., and Vincent Reitano. "Sanction Failure: Economic Growth, Defense Expenditures, and the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Armed Forces & Society* 42, no. 4 (2016): 635–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327x16631095>.
- Raouf, Huda. "Iranian Quest for Regional Hegemony: Motivations, Strategies and Constraints." *Review of Economics and Political Science* 4, no. 3 (July 12, 2019): 248. <https://doi.org/10.1108/reps-02-2019-0017>.
- Sadjadpour, Karim. "Iran's Unwavering Support to Assad's Syria." *SYRIA SPECIAL ISSUE* 6, no. 8 (August 2013): 11–13.
- Soltaninejad, Mohammad. "Iran Turns to China and India in the Face of US Sanctions." *East Asia Forum Quarterly (EAFQ): Economics and Security* 11, no. 4 (2019): 26–27.
- Takeyh, Ray, and Suzanne Maloney. "The Self-Limiting Success of Iran Sanctions." *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2011): 1297–1312. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.01037.x>.
- Walt, Stephen M. "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power." *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.
- Wuthnow, Joel. "Posing Problems without an Alliance: China-Iran Relations after the Nuclear DEAL." . NDU Press, February 2016. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1004293.pdf>.
- Yahel, Ido. "Iran in Syria: From Expansion to Entrenchment." *Tel Aviv Notes* 15, no. 5 (June 17, 2017): 1–6.

Website:

- Bakir, Ali. "What an Iran-China Pact Means for Turkey." What an Iran-China pact means for Turkey, August 18, 2020. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/what-an-iran-china-pact-means-for-turkey-38903>.
- Friedlander, Julia, and Michael Albanese. "Global Sanctions DASHBOARD: APRIL." Atlantic Council, May 14, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/global-sanctions-dashboard-april/>.
- Gardner, Frank. "Iran and Israel's Shadow War Takes a Dangerous Turn." BBC News. BBC, April 12, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56724039>.
- Gady, Franz-Stefan. "China Wants to Deepen Military Ties With Iran." – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, October 17, 2015. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/china-wants-to-deepen-military-ties-with-iran/>.

- . “China, Iran to Deepen Military Ties.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, December 14, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-iran-to-deepen-military-ties/>.
- . “Iran, China Sign Military Cooperation Agreement.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, November 15, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/iran-china-sign-military-cooperation-agreement/>.
- . “China Wants to Deepen Military Ties With Iran.” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, October 17, 2015. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/china-wants-to-deepen-military-ties-with-iran/>.
- . “Will Iran ORDER 150 New Fighter Jets from China?” – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, August 4, 2015. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/will-iran-order-150-new-fighter-jets-from-china/>.
- Hashemi, Nader, and Danny Postel. “Opinion | Iran, Saudi Arabia and Modern Hatreds (Published 2018).” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2018, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/15/opinion/iran-saudi-arabia-and-modern-hatreds.html>.
- Hong, Yu. “China-Iran Deal Complements the Bri, but Faces Iranian Domestic Opposition and US Sanctions.” ThinkChina, April 21, 2021. <https://www.thinkchina.sg/china-iran-deal-complements-bri-faces-iranian-domestic-opposition-and-us-sanctions>.
- Iddon, Paul. “How Iran’s Militia Proxies Could Threaten Israel From These Four Countries.” *Forbes*. *Forbes*, April 29, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2021/04/29/how-irans-militia-proxies-could-threaten-israel-from-these-four-countries/?sh=4a9e2b1a5975>.
- “Iran Sanctions - United States Department of State.” U.S. Department of State. January 11, 2021. Accessed August 7, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/iran-sanctions/>.
- Khoshnood, Dr. Ardavan. “Security Implications of The Iran-China Deal.” Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, April 29, 2021. <https://besacenter.org/iran-china-deal-security-implications/>.
- Laub, Zachary. “International Sanctions on Iran.” Council on Foreign Relations. July 15, 2015. Accessed August 07, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/background/international-sanctions-iran>.
- Magid, Jacob. “Israel Pushing Us to Keep Trump Sanctions on Iran, Even If Nuke DEAL RESURRECTED.” *The Times of Israel*, July 8, 2021. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-pushing-us-to-keep-trump-sanctions-on-iran-even-if-uke-deal-resurrected/>.
- Pamuk, Humeyra. “Exclusive: U.S. Probe of Saudi Oil Attack Shows It Came from North - Report.” *Reuters*, December 20, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-iran-exclusive-idUSKBN1YN299>.
- “Part 2: Iran in Syria Timeline.” *The Iran Primer*, April 10, 2018. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2018/apr/10/iran-syria-2-timeline>.
- Rafizadeh, Majid. “Iran's Forces Outnumber Assad's in Syria.” *Gatestone Institute*, November 24, 2016. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/9406/iran-soldiers-syria>.
- Rasmussen, Sune Engel, and Aresu Egbali. “Iran Seeks to Rally International Support against U.s. Pressure.” *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, June 18, 2019. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-seeks-to-build-international-alliance-against-u-s-pressure-11560870847>.
- Saban, Navvar. “Factbox: Iranian Influence and Presence in Syria.” *Atlantic Council*, November 5, 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/factbox-iranian-influence-and-presence-in-syria/>.

- Sadjadpour, Karim. "Combating Terrorism Center at West Point." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, August 27, 2013. <https://ctc.usma.edu/irans-unwavering-support-to-assads-syria/>.
- Saleh, Alam. "The Iran-China Strategic Partnership and Changing Regional Order." *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, April 16, 2021. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-iran-china-strategic-partnership-and-changing-regional-order/>.
- "The Military Balance." *Taylor and Francis Online*. Accessed August 9, 2021. <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tmib20>.
- Tiezzi, Shannon. "China Wants More Military Co-Op With Iran (SORRY, US and Pakistan)." – *The Diplomat*. for *The Diplomat*, October 24, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/china-wants-more-military-co-op-with-iran-sorry-us-and-pakistan/>.
- "United Nations Security Council Resolution 612." *United Nations*. United Nations. Accessed August 9, 2021. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S%2F2011%2F612.
- Yacoubian, Alex. "Iran's Increasing Reliance on China." *United States Institute of Peace*, April 19, 2021. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/sep/11/irans-increasing-reliance-china>.
- 关晓萌. "China Urges Us to Lift All Illegal Sanctions against Iran." *Chinadaily.com.cn*, April 7, 2021. <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202104/07/WS606ced18a31024ad0bab3dc5.html>.
- 赵诗悦. "China, Iran Ink Blueprint, Oppose Unilateral Sanctions." *World - Chinadaily.com.cn*. Accessed August 9, 2021. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/29/WS60610d18a31024ad0bab2164.html>.