**The China-KSA Strategic Partnership**

**The Abraham Accord and I2U2 have not been able to deliver at the level they were expected to**

[**Imran Malik**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/imran-malik)

January 03, 2023

The China-KSA Comprehensive Strategic Partnership brings mul tidimensional implications notonly for the GMER but also creates opportunities for the region at large. China’s ingress into the region gives the Arabs another option, a possible alternative to the hegemonic US-Israel Combine. For decades, the US has managed the GMER through a policy of divide and rule. Israel is its nuclear-armed and militarily dominant ally while the Arabs have traditionally looked up to it for their security and defence needs. Iran, the “designated adversary” in the GMER and its potential to become a nuclear weapons state, have been portrayed as existential threats to Israel and the Gulf Arabs. This has helped array them together against it. The Abraham Accord and I2U2 have not been able to deliver at the level they were expected to. However, all this carefully contrived strategic (im)balance in the GMER seems about to unravel as China’s ingress and its Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with KSA threaten to upset the status quo and challenge US’ unquestioned hegemony! China’s move into the GMER redefines the contours of the strategic environment emphatically. One, it starts challenging the US for influence in the GMER and emerges as a competing centre of power, though presently largely restricted to the economic and geopolitical domains. The US (and Israel) is likely to retain its military superiority for the time being. Two, it creates the possibility of converting the KSA/Gulf Arabs’ economic clout into geopolitical and geostrategic advantage with China’s help. This will help restore strategic balance in the GMER. Three, China could help the KSA/Gulf Arabs diversify their economies through the infusion of technology, joint economic ventures, etc and become a viable alternative to western influence, domination and control. Four, an eventual alignment of economic and foreign policies could allow them to forge meaningful regional and extraregional groupings. Five, China stands to assert its presence on both sides of the Persian Gulf; with the Gulf Arabs as well as Iran. It has already signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Iran and will be investing around US $ 400 billion in its oil, gas and other infrastructure in the next 25 years. Six, this places it in a very good position to intercede as an honest broker between the Arabs and Iran to help overcome their grievances against one another. Seven, it could help mellow their mutual, toxic rhetoric, reduce their animosities, initiate direct talks and enable a possible No-War Pact between them, at some later stage. This would be anathema to the US as it would nullify its raison d’eter to stay in the GMER. Eight, the harmonisation of the Vision 2030 and the BRI will kickstart the connectivity and economic interdependence between the SCAR and the GMER. Nine, this will allow the BRI to expand further West into Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe. Ten, thus an ever-expanding, mutually beneficial economic stake will be evolved between KSA/Gulf Arabs, the region at large including Iran and China which will bind them together in the future. Two of the world’s largest economies could thus come together to make an enormous investment into their combined future. Its overall benefits for the region will be colossal. Eleven, the interconnectivity between KSA/Gulf Arabs and China is bound to bring Iran and Pakistan (CPEC) into the equation and create immense economic and geopolitical possibilities within the region. Twelve, at a later stage, this economic interdependence could be expanded to gradually induct Turkey, Afghanistan and the CARs to make a massive economic union or bloc. Russia too would be interested. The geopolitical possibilities thereafter are limitless! For Pakistan, this will turn out to be a very opportune development. It has excellent strategic relations with both the KSA and China. Pakistan will be particularly interested in seeing how the harmonisation of Vison 2030 and the BRI evolves, how it impacts the GMER-SCAR Complex and what opportunities it offers to it. The BRI can move to the Arab Peninsula in two prongs; it can jump across the Arabian Sea from the Makran Coast/Gwadar, from the Iranian coastline along the Persian Gulf, or both. Currently, China buys the bulk of its oil/energy requirements from the Gulf Arab states, especially KSA. A portion of it could eventually go through oil and gas pipelines that may emanate from the Arab Peninsula and/or Iran and move through Pakistan on to Xinjiang in western China. This would be necessitated by the need to avoid interdiction by hostile forces and the formidable Malacca Straits chokepoint, in times of conflict. The Makran Coast, especially the Gwadar Port region could emerge as an oil and gas hub for the transportation of these and other commodities. Petrochemical complexes, refineries could be made on the Makran hinterland to meet Pakistan’s and other regional countries’ needs. Both the KSA and China could jointly and independently invest in the Special Economic and Industrial Zones in and around Gwadar. Balochistan’s vast mineral reserves, rare earth metals could be mined, refined and converted into marketable goods in these Special Economic and Industrial Zones. The BRI’s expansion into Iran and the Arab Peninsula is being threatened by Terrorism Central (myriad terrorist groups) milling around in the badlands of Afghanistan. Supported by hostile Governments and their intelligence agencies like RAW, MOSSAD and others, the TTP and ISK are already attacking CPEC/Pakistan. From a security point of view, the CPEC appears to be the weakest link in the BRI chain that will connect the Arab peninsula to China. It is bound to be continuously attacked to delay, disrupt and destroy it. Is the timing of this resurgence of terrorist attacks on the CPEC/Pakistan a mere coincidence? Eliminating this terrorist threat will be a sine qua non for the BRI-CPEC’s further progress. Decisive, proactive and meaningful kinetic operations are thus the need of the hour and the only plausible way forward. The sudden uptick in US support for counter-terrorism operations is meaningful and must be interpreted in its true and correct perspective! Regardless, Pakistan must secure its western flank and position itself well to eventually become a part of this emerging colossus, the China-KSA Strategic Partnership!