



What role does China play in the turmoil in the Middle East?

Stephnie Flood / February 23, 2024

Tel Aviv - The Middle East is currently in crisis. Since last October, Israel and Hamas have been at war, Hezbollah militants supported by Iran and Iranian Revolutionary Guards acting as proxies in Syria have been launching occasional attacks, and Iran-backed Houthi militants have been attacking and seizing Red Sea vessels, severely disrupting maritime commerce.

[...]

Galia Lavi, deputy director of the Israel-China Policy Center, outlined China's position in the Middle East in harsher terms. She said, "China has absolutely no allies, although it seems to be friends with everyone. Economically, before October 7, 2021 (the day Hamas launched large-scale infiltrations and attacks on Israel), the Chinese government tried to establish influence in the Middle East through economic investments." China's main regional investment targets include the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

As China strengthens its economic ties with these countries, its influence grows. "In the past two to three years, China has considered itself to have enormous influence in the region, and therefore began to play the role of a superpower," Lavi continued. "It has to some extent facilitated the reconciliation agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but that is basically picking flowers planted by others." Last March, Iran and Saudi Arabia finally restored diplomatic relations after decades of hostility and seven years since officially severing ties.

[...]

However, **Tuvia Gering, a researcher at the Israel-China Policy Center**, said that China is seen as "an opportunistic participant rather than a responsible major power deeply involved in the Middle East." Gering believes that China could have played a moderating role in the current Middle East crisis because it maintains close ties with all disputing parties. Gering said, "China has not joined the international community in combating terrorism, but instead stands aside criticizing the United States and other Western countries that support Israel."

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