

The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract: *The “China-Arab States Cooperation Forum” is an important cooperation mechanism between the Arab world and China. Though the forum has made remarkable achievements since its establishment, enormous challenges are still ahead. The largest challenge is that both sides have common aspirations for further achievements and integration, and for a closer relationship between China and the Arab World. The real strategic vision is not limited to trade and investment, but also includes security, national defense building, technology transfer and some other fields. To overcome these challenges, three problems must be taken care of. First, the two sides need to deepen their mutual understandings; second, both Chinese and Arabs must get rid of the deep cautiousness towards each other; and third, both parties need to develop a comprehensive outlook from an aspect of civilization.*

Key Words: *China-Arab States Cooperation Forum; China-Arab Cooperation Mechanisms; China and the Middle East; Arab World Studies*

In 2014, the “Session of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum” coincides with the tenth

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anniversary of the “Forum”. This provides a good opportunity to assess the achievements, recognize the challenges, and look forward to a better future.

I. Background

On May 30, 1956, Egypt, as the country with a dual identity in both the Arab world and Africa, recognized the People’s Republic of China. It established diplomatic relations with P. R. China at the same time. After a few decades, Egypt has become a hub connecting China and Arab World, as well as China and Africa.

The Embassy of Egypt has witnessed the birth of the “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” (FOCAC) and the “China-Arab States Cooperation Forum”. In May 1998, I served as the Egyptian Ambassador to China, when Egypt began to strengthen bilateral relations with China. In April 1999, during the former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s visit to China, the two countries established a strategic relationship. President Mubarak believed that the strategic relationship between China and Egypt is of great significance for both the Arab world and Africa. He made special efforts on this: with the approval from the African National Ambassador, President Mubarak invited Tang Jiaxuan, who served as the Chinese Foreign Minister, to meet with several ambassadors of African countries in the Egyptian Embassy. Minister Tang accepted this invitation, and attended the meeting with his staff including the Vice Minister of Chinese Foreign Affairs Ji Peiding and the Secretary of the African Division Liu Guijin. During the meeting, Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan brought up the idea of establishing a cooperation forum between China and Africa, in order to deepen Sino-Africa relations. With the joint efforts of African countries ambassadors to China and the Chinese officials, the proposal was adopted and implemented. In October 2000, the “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” was held in Beijing. Shortly after the initiative of the African ambassadors, the Ambassadors of Arab States also took a similar initiative, which followed the African countries

with action and led to the Arab League's resolution on strengthening relations between the Arab and China in September 1999.

In fact, the Arab envoys had held several meetings at the Arab League's Beijing office to convince Arab officials and help them understand the significance of this kind of forum. This laid the foundation for the initiative of the "FOCAC". In January 2004, former Chinese President Hu Jintao proposed the establishment of the "FOCAC" during an official visit to Egypt. In September, the "First Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" was held in Cairo. In May 2006, the second session of the Ministerial Conference was held in China. In May 2008, the third session was held in Bahrain. In May 2010, the Fourth Ministerial Conference was held in China. On May 31, 2012, the fifth session was held in Tunisia. In June 2014, the Sixth Ministerial Conference will be held in China.

Through the brief description above, I would like to highlight two important historical facts. First of all, Egypt has played a significant role in developing China-Arab relationship, by contributing to the acknowledgement of the P.R. China, the exchange of diplomatic representatives, and promoting diplomatic activities between China and the Arab world in the new era. Secondly, the African Envoys-to-China's Committee and the Arab Envoys-to-China's Committee also played an important role in the diplomatic activities between China and Africa, and between China and the Arabs. This action has become a landmark in the China-Africa and the China-Arab friendship and cooperation.

II. Evolution of the Concept: The China-Arab State Cooperation Forum

China, African and Arab countries all agreed to hold the "Forum" every two years in Africa, the Arab states and China by turns, in accordance with the nature of the "Forum". Both China and the Arabs wish to develop bilateral relations based on the following five guidelines:

First, maintaining and strengthening the bilateral relations

between China and Arab states should be the base point for China-Arab and China-Africa cooperation. Second, the action of the "Forum" must be laid on the basis of promoting and strengthening bilateral relationship via the "China-Arab State Cooperation Forum". The "Forum" must have specific work plans. It should also monitor the implementation of the work plan, and update the work plan during each session of the "Forum". Third, as a framework for bilateral relations, the "Forum" should not rule out the establishment of other links with entrepreneurs at greater levels. For example, on March 23, 2010, the first China-Gulf Countries Economic Cooperation Forum was held in Bahrain. In the same year, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) established a strategic dialogue mechanism with China. Fourth, the "Forum" must hold a foreign ministerial conference every two years. In accordance with the diplomatic convention, the President or the Head of Government of the host country should announce the opening of the "Forum". Fifth, according to the action plan adopted at each Forum meeting, the "Forum" is not limited to the official level, but also includes private sector experts, chambers of commerce and experts in education, culture, media, the environment and other areas.

The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum has gone through several stages. In January 1999, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan signed the "Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Political Consultation Mechanism between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China and the Secretariat of the League of Arab States" with the Arab League Secretary-General Dr. Ahmad Abdul Majid Asoka Matt. Since then, the development of China-Arab relations became an important issue in the Arab League Committee.

On December 26, 2001, the Arab League Secretary in General Amr Moussa Amuru proposed to establish a cooperation forum during the Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's visit to Cairo. On April 21, 2002, during his visit to Cairo, former Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji told the Secretary-General Amr Moussa that China had a strong will in establishing the "China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" step by step. On January 30, 2004, when the Chinese President Hu Jintao

visited the Arab League's headquarter in Egypt, he proposed the establishment of a new partnership between China and the Arab world under four principles: to promote political relations based on mutual respect; to increase economic and trade exchanges with the goal of common developments; to expand cultural exchanges by learning from each other; to strengthen cooperation in international affairs for the purpose of safeguarding world peace and promoting common development. On September 14, 2004, in witness of Arab states foreign ministers, the Secretary- General of Arab League, Amr Moussa, and the Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, signed two documents: the *Declaration of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum* and the *Action Plan of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum*. Then the "Session of the First Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" was held, marking the peak of the "Forum" from 1999 to 2004.

III. Mechanism of the "Forum"

The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum has established a number of mechanisms to help make decisions and monitor their implementation. The main mechanisms of the "Forum" include:

1) Ministerial Conference: it is a long-term mechanism for the "Forum", formed by the foreign ministers of all parties and the secretary-general of the Arab League. The ministerial conference is held every two years alternately in China or the Arab League headquarters, or any Arab countries. An extra emergency meeting can be held when necessary. The meetings focus on strengthening cooperation between China and Arab countries in political, economic and security areas. This includes exchanging views on regional and international issues of common concerns and on hot issues discussed at the meeting of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, reviewing the implementation of the Action Plan of the "Forum", and discussing other matters of mutual concern.

2) Senior Officials Committee Meeting: The annual meeting was held by China and Arab countries taking turns. If necessary, it can also

be held with mutual consent at any time. The meeting aims at settling down the preparation of the Ministerial Conference and implementation of the resolutions and decisions from the Ministerial Conference. The Senior Officials Committee Meeting also contains collective political consultations between China and the Arab states.

3) Other mechanisms: In addition to the Ministerial Conference and the Senior Officials Committee Meeting, under the framework of the "Forum", other mechanisms, such as the China-Arab Business Conference, the China-Arab Relations and China-Arab Civil Dialogue Seminar, the China-Arab Friendship Conference, the China-Arab Energy Cooperation Conference, the China-Arab News Cooperation Forum, and the cultural festivals mechanisms, have been formed. These mechanisms are generally held once every two years, alternately in China or the Arab countries. In addition, China and the Arab states also have technical cooperation in fields of personnel trainings and environmental protection.

4) Liaison Group: the Chinese Embassy in Egypt acts as the liaison group of China. Similarly, the Arab Envoys' Committee to China and the Arab League Representative Office in China represents the Arab liaison group. The two groups are responsible for the liaison job between the two sides, as well as the implementation of the resolutions and decisions from the Ministerial Conference and the Senior Officials Committee Meeting. The Chinese Affairs Secretariat of the "Forum" works under the West Asia and North African Affairs Division, in the Foreign Ministry of the P. R. China.^①

IV. The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum

On May 31, 2012, the "Fifth Ministerial Conference of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" was held in Tunisia. The meeting pointed out that the China-Arab relations were facing several challenges,

^① Please see the website of the "China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" at <http://www.cascf.org>.

under the circumstance of the “Arab Spring” and the transition period in the Arab world. The section below will discuss particularly on this issue. I will not recount every details of each session of “China-Arab States Cooperation Forum” and its action plan. I will only briefly mention the Fifth Ministerial Conference. This session, which was hosted by the President of Tunisia Mohamed Moncef Marzouki, had honored the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, and Arab League Secretary in General Nabil Arabi and their delegations from China and the Arab states. Foreign ministers of many Arab countries also attended this session, and Ghanim ibn Fadl Al-Buainain, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain, attended the meeting on behalf of the King of Bahrain. The Fifth Ministerial Conference of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum was originally scheduled to be held from May 31 to June 1, 2012, a time when the Arab world was experiencing upheavals. In this way, this meeting should be convened without delay. Although some countries only sent representative officials below the ministerial level due to the outbreak of the “Arab Spring”, this session of Ministerial Conference still released the *Communiqué of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum* and the *2012-2014 Action Plan of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum* as previous sessions did. Both sides recognized that the “Forum” at the official level should not be affected by these unfavorable events. Even if the impact could not be avoided, it would only stay in the practical level. The following sector of the paper will be devoted to this issue. In theory, the conference only issued a “Communiqué” and an “Action Plan of Implementation”. The “Communiqué” has a specific chapter calling for establishing a foundation to provide funds for activities of cooperation programs (*Communiqué of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum*, 2012: May 31). The “Action Plan of Implementation” laid the foundation for cooperation in politics, economy, social issues, cultures, news, sports, science and technology, education, parliaments and civil work, the press and publishing, entrepreneurs, vocational training, teacher and student and arts (*Action Plan of Implementation of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum*,

2012-2014, 2012: May 31).

V. Changes in the Arab World Since 2011

Since 2011, the Arab world has undergone several fundamental changes. The so-called “Arab Spring” broke out in the most stable Arab countries (at least in theory) such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. In Syria, civil war broke out. Domestic situations are quite different among these countries. Accordingly, the international and regional responses to these events also greatly vary.

In Tunisia and Egypt, the revolution was carried out more smoothly. After the transition to the interim government, even though the bilateral relations with China were affected by the turmoil and unrests and economic insecurity in Egypt and Tunisia, China still did not encounter much difficulty in maintaining good relations with the new regimes. Since then, Libya was almost caught in a civil war. With NATO’s armed intervention, Libya’s relations with China began to show a certain degree of tension. NATO’s military operations, as well as continuous unstable domestic situation in Libya, had an impact on bilateral relations with China. In spite of China’s efforts to adapt to the new situation, the progress went slowly.

On the issue of Yemen, the Gulf Cooperation Council proposed the “Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative to Resolve the Crisis in Yemen” and pressured the Yemeni President to accept the initiative. Soon after this, Yemen formed the interim government. Consequently, even if bilateral economic relations suffered some setbacks, the bilateral political relations had not been affected.

However, Syria’s situation had posed a challenge to both China and the Arab countries’ policies. China vetoed three times at the UN Security Council on the resolutions involving Syria. Although some Arab countries were dissatisfied with this, China was still striving to explain its position to the Arab countries, and meanwhile proposed an initiative to resolve the Syrian crisis. ^①

^① On October 31, 2012, China put forward the four-point proposal on promoting

At the international level, the internal situation of Syria can be viewed as the performance of the game among the great powers such as United States, Russia and China. At the regional level, Syria's domestic situation represents the game between Iran and GCC countries. In terms of the attitude towards the Syrian regime, divergence existed within the Arab world. Egypt and Tunisia showed support to Syria, and Libya had a swing stance. In contrast, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan expressed opposition towards Syria, and even Algeria opposed the Syrian regime to some extent. There is no uniform position within the Arab world as well as in the international community. For common interest considerations, China chose to remain consistent with the Russian position. China has a standing point of trying to deal with the US global strategy and the strategy of containing China. On the issues of Bahrain, Oman, and Jordan, the Chinese tended to adopt a neutral position regarding the legitimacy of the current regimes, which was in line with its principle of "no interference in the domestic affairs". Although the GCC countries had reservations about China's stance on Syria issues, these countries still feel relieved on China's practice of "no interference in the internal affairs".

VI. Achievements and Challenges

The "China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" has made a plenty of achievements, mainly including the following:

1. In terms of political achievements, the two sides have not encountered severe obstacles when coordinating a variety of issues. After studying the Syrian issues under the framework of the UN

the process of political settlement of the Syrian issue, including that the Syrian parties should strive to achieve a ceasefire and end the turmoil, and should develop the political transition roadmap as soon as possible in a manner of consultation. Moreover, the international community should completely cooperate with Brahimi (the joint Special Representative of the UN-Syrian Arab League), and take effective measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Security Council, stands of both sides became clear. Nevertheless, China can achieve these accomplishments because it adheres to the principle of “no interference in the internal affairs” of Arab countries, which is different from the position of the European and American countries.

2. In terms of technology and education, many Arab students study in China. Meanwhile, the number and frequency of teacher exchanges, and arts and culture exhibitions, are also increasing.

3. Trade is the most important area of development in China-Arab relations. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the China-Arab trade. Here are some statistics on China-Arab trade.

Table 1: China-Arab Trade Volume (Unit: Billion Dollars)^①

Year	1998/1999	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2011	2012	2013	2014
Trade Volume	8	36.7	51.3	65.4	80	132.8	200	222	241	300

As the peacefully rising economic giants in the Arab world, the GCC countries have become China’s eighth largest trading partner, the eighth largest export market and the ninth largest source of imports. In 2013, trade volume between China and the GCC countries amounted to 173 billion dollars. Also, China has become the third largest trading partner of the Arab world. The data in Table 2 clearly show that the GCC countries have become China’s “first group” in the Arab world, in terms of bilateral economic and trade relations.

^① The 2013 data are estimates and 2014 data are the forecasting values. See the keynote speech by the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on the opening ceremony of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation, Hammamet, Tunisia, May 31, 2012; *Bahrain Middle News*, October 4, 2010; *People’s Daily* Arabic version of the website, February 20, 2013, January 17, 2014.

Table 2: China-GCC Countries Trade Volume (Unit: Billion Dollars)

Year	2004	2006	2008	2012	2013
Trade Volume	25	35	70	155	173

4. From 2012 to 2014, the Arab countries have 5,000 professionals in a variety of fields who completed their trainings in China. Between 2012 and 2013, more than 100 Arab youths were scheduled to visit China.

Moreover, Chinese investment in the Arab world, especially investment in oil, gas, petrochemical products, transit trade and warehouses, achieved sustainable growth. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that, according to data in 2012, the Arab countries' proven oil and gas reserves accounted for 58% and 28% of the world reserves respectively.^②

Table 3: China-GCC Countries Trade Volume in 2012 (Unit: Billion Dollars)^③

Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Total
73.27	40.41	18.78	12.55	8.45	1.55	155.3

In general, the China-Arab relations are developing healthily and positively, with trade and investment continue to grow. Nevertheless, international and regional developments are still playing a significant role on the development of China-Arab relations and posing many challenges over the bilateral relations. The major challenges include:

^① See the speech of Ghanim ibn Fadl Al-Buainain, the Bahraini Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, "China GCC third round of strategic dialogue", Beijing, January 17, 2014; *People's Daily* website in Arabic, February 20, 2013.

^② See the website of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC): www.oapec.org.

^③ See *People's Daily* website in Arabic, February 20, 2013.

1. From 2011 to 2013, due to endogenous factors such as political instability, insecurity, and economic recession, the “Arab Spring” countries’ (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Syria) relations with China, in terms of trade volume and investment, has worsened.

2. The actual attention --rather than the theoretical level of attention-- the Arab countries pay to the “Forum” is falling. The same thing happened to China: Chinese attention to core issues such as the Palestinian issue is declining. This situation results from three factors: first, the internal Palestinian division. Second, the axis of Arab countries, especially Egypt and Syria, focus too much on their domestic affairs in the last three years. Third, the US and Israel are leveling up their pressure on these countries, so that the United States can have an opportunity to play a direct role in the Israeli and Palestinian affairs. This can be seen from the US Secretary of State John Kerry’s shuttle diplomacy.

3. In terms of resolving the Syrian crisis, China and the Arab countries, especially the GCC countries, disagree with each other. GCC countries were unhappy with the veto from the Chinese and the Russians. During their visits to China, the Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Arabi and several Arab foreign ministers, as well as a number of Arab leaders, all tried to persuade China to vote in favor of the Arab League Council’s adoption of the draft resolution involving Syria. However, China stood its ground and joined Russia to hedge against the US global strategy.

4. On January 4, 2011, Sudan split into two states, the North and South Sudan. This has had an impact on relations between China and Sudan on oil investments. However, bilateral relations were slightly affected and continued to gain enough attention in fields of culture, sports and youth exchanges.

VII. Looking Forward: Prospects of the “China-Arab States Cooperation Forum”

The Prospect section of this article aims at making suggestions on strengthening and deepening the relationship between China and the

Arab world. The outlook is based on reality which depends on three main factors: first, the development of China-Arab relations in the past decade; second, their existing capabilities; and third, all kinds of suggestions to promote mutual benefits and deepen consensus between China and the Arab world.

1) Existing Achievements

In 1999, the Arab League agreed to establish a strategic partnership between the Arab countries and China. At that time, China had already begun to strengthen its relations with Arab countries. Over the past fifteen years, the bilateral trade volume increased from \$ 8 billion in 1999, up to \$36 billion in 2004. Moreover, bilateral trade volume is expected to reach \$ 300 billion in 2014. ^①In 1999, Arab countries had very limited investments in China, and so did Chinese investments in Arab states. Nowadays, the amount of investment from both sides has amounted to hundreds of billions of dollars. Furthermore, investments are no longer confined to the oil, gas and petrochemical sectors. The two sides have invested largely in the service sectors, human resources and human development, construction and contracting, culture, education, tourism and many other areas.

In terms of China's relations with the GCC countries, the trade volume increased from \$ 9 billion in 2001 to \$151 billion in 2012, and further to 2013's \$ 173 billion. In 2012, China's trade with Egypt has increased to \$ 9.5 billion.

2) The Potentials

Data and statistics show that currently China and the Arab countries have huge potentials based on their population scale. China has 1.3 billion people, covers an area of 9.6 million square kilometers, and is an enormous goods, services and investment market with a rapid growth. Over the past three decades, China achieved an annual economic growth rate of about 10%. In 2013, China's economy grew at

^① At the "Fifth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" in 2012, the Arab states reached a consensus, guaranteeing to achieve a China-Arab trade volume of \$ 300 billion by 2014.

a rate of 7.6%, becoming one of the countries with the world's highest economic growth rates. China is also considered as the country with the highest annual output in the world. Meanwhile, China's economic weight in the world and its GDP are both rising. There are important data indicating that about five years ago, China had become the world's second largest economy, just behind the United States, and was marching forward towards the world's largest economy. China might be able to achieve this goal in a few years (most likely within five years). It is worth mentioning that in 2013, the United States, the world's largest economy, had a GDP of \$16.5 trillion; in the same year, Chinese GDP reached \$9.4 trillion, ranking the second; Japanese GDP was up to \$6.1 trillion. In terms of world trade, China has become the world's second largest trading nation. Statistical data released in early January 2014 show that in 2013, China has become the world's largest trading partner in commodities, even though China is still the world's second largest trade partner in services. In 2013, China's total trade volume reached \$4.16 trillion, of which exports amounted to \$2.21 trillion, and imports amounted to \$1.95 trillion, with a trade surplus of \$260 billion. In 2013, the EU became China's largest trading partner, followed by the United States, ASEAN, Hong Kong and Japan. The Arab countries ranked the seventh in term of trade volume.

According to the released documents by the CIA, in 2012, the Arab economy amounted to \$ 2.7 trillion, with trade amounted up to \$ 869 billion. Trade surplus in 2012 was \$851 billion, and increased to \$ 974.2 billion in 2013. The Arab countries have an area of 13,673,123 square kilometers, a population of over 400 million, and have the world's largest population and highest economic growth. In particular, the GCC countries, as emerging economies, have become one of the world's ten largest economies. Saudi Arabia is the largest economy in the Arab world, which is also a G20 member. In 2012, Saudi Arabia's GDP reached \$72.7 billion, ranked 19th in the world. The GCC countries have the highest human development index as a regional group in the Arab world (United Nations Development Program, 2013), and also have a tremendous commodity, investment and construction market. The UAE is the second largest economy in the

Arab world. In 2012, its GDP reached \$359 billion. China has become the UAE's second largest trading partner. Similarly, other Arab countries also have a huge potential, especially Egypt. In 2012, Egypt's GDP was \$256 billion. With a large population and strong industrial capability, Egypt has abundant human resources with rich experiences. After three years of chaos and unrest, Egypt has become ambitious. From January 14 to January 15, 2014, Egypt held a referendum on the new constitution draft. The draft was passed with 98.1% support rate and the voting rate was 38.6%, which are higher than the 64% support rate and the 32.4% voting rate in 2012. The country began to stabilize.

For countries with relatively low GDP figures in the Arab world but have close ties with China, such as Algeria, Sudan, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Iraq, even if they are going through political and security turbulence, I believe the unfavorable situations won't last long.

If we take a quick look at the Chinese investment in the Arab world, it is easy to observe that in 2009, China's investment in the region amounted to \$44.2 billion, and Arab investment in China amounted to \$28.1 billion. These figures have been growing during the last few years and there is still large growth potential, leaving a huge space for future investment.

Table 4: Main Data of Arab and GCC Countries in 2012 ^①

Data	Arab Countries	GCC Countries	Unit
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^① See *The World Factbook 2012*, CIA, February 14, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/download/download-2012/factbook.zip>; keynote speech by the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on the opening ceremony of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation, Hammamet, Tunisia, May 31, 2012; *Bahrain Middle News*, October 4, 2010; *People's Daily* Arabic version of the website, February 20, 2013, January 17, 2014

Area	13.95 3.041	2.673.123	Square kilometers
Population	400	45.9	Million
GDP	2.7	1.56	Trillion
Total Trade Volume	869	155	Billion
Trade with China	224	155	Billion
Religious distribution of population	92% Muslim, 6% Christian, 2% other religions		
Arab world's most populous countries	Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria		
Countries with largest GDP	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, Qatar		

3) Suggestions for Promoting and Deepening Cooperation between China and the Arab Countries

The next ten years (2014-2024) is an important period for bilateral relations and cooperation between China and the Arab states. I put forward the following recommendations based on the achievements in the last decade, as well as the existing potentials and determination:

First, in politics, in view of China's economic, scientific and technological status, as well as its identity of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, China is expected to strengthen its position in the international political arena and become a great political power. China nowadays is quite similar to Japan in previous and current period: an economic giant on one hand, but a political dwarf on the other hand, which is inconsistent with China's history

and culture. China should be a great power of independent political wills. It should neither be afraid of the United States, nor to follow Russia's old path. Instead, China should play an independent role, thinking through its relations with other countries, especially its interests and relationships with Arab countries. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, China has become a revolutionary state that defended the rights of the weak countries, supported the freedom and dignity of all ethnic groups, and opposed great powers' interference in the internal affairs of other countries. On one hand, China should always follow the principle of balance: balance among its status as a world great power whose interests are associated with other countries, its original principles of rights, justice, freedom and equality, and its humanitarian principles since ancient times. On the other hand, the Arab countries are in need of such a principled country. This is because the Arab countries have never and will not be able to fully realize these principles, as they are vulnerable to interference by external forces and are suffering from all kinds of conspiracies that attempt to destroy the Arab cultural heritage and plunder its natural resources. Currently, the Arab countries are still in an unstable state. There are many causes, but the main problem is that they have suffered injustice on the Palestine issues for decades. Palestinian people have been subjected to the oppression, disenfranchisement, and international manipulation in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. In June 2013, when the Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama held the first meeting between the heads of state, President Xi proposed to build new model of China-US relations with joint efforts. China could become an influential country, which plays an active role under the diplomatic framework of the two superpowers.

Second, if China continues to adhere to its declared principles, namely, to achieve win-win economic and trade interests on the basis of mutual benefits, it should help Arab countries develop civil industries and build economic foundation, and achieve the industrial integration between China and the Arab states. This is a sound economic principle, not the incorrect principles adopted by the

developed countries over the past decades--developing countries stay in a stage of no manufacturing, so that it can continue to serve as the import market for developed countries. A sound and realistic economic principle calls for the abandonment of selfish ideas, highlighting that the advanced industrial countries can achieve closer economic ties only under the framework of economic integration and industrial diversification. Each industry has created an additional new market, so the market can be diversified. For developing countries, technology transfer and technical localization will never hurt China. On the contrary, they bring China with new prospects. Perhaps the case of the current relations between China and the major industrialized countries can deepen our understanding.

Third, it is necessary for China to respond to the efforts and expectations of the Arab countries to achieve state security. The security of the Arab countries can be achieved via three ways: an arms industry, nuclear development, and Arab integration. Despite the fact that the acquisition of these elements varies among the Arab states, knowledge and technology are the most needed but lacked factor. Only by acquiring knowledge and skills, state security can be achieved in the Arab world. At this moment, the safety of GCC countries is the core issue of the Arab world security. Egypt has a long history, as well as an important demographic, technical and economic status. It will take the primary responsibility of enhancing the power of the Arab nations. The GCC countries and Egypt are the center of the Arab world. They have shouldered a sense of national responsibility in all kinds of problems within the Arab region as well as the international position of their own.

Forth, the funding sources of investment between China and the Arab states are essential. In terms of Chinese investments, we will first mention the necessity and importance of Chinese investments and the Chinese pivotal position. China's investment activities should not be limited to traditional energy sources, such as oil and natural gas, but should be committed to high-tech industry, which is a field with a broader prospect, and commit to nonconventional energy development, renewable energy production, and other natural

resources. Arab countries have a unique advantage in geographical location and climatic conditions. Many Arab countries lie on the coast, so they have great potentials in this field. The Arab countries should learn from the east, especially learn from Chinese experience in terms of making investment. The western, central, southern and northern parts of China all have remarkable investment potential. China has vast areas for investment. China also has an area, which is almost the equivalent of a continent. It has diverse climates, environments and agricultures, and the degrees of development of different regions vary. This provides the Arab countries with an excellent opportunity to invest in China. Arab countries have a huge surplus of oil and natural gas revenues. Both sides should seek innovative mechanisms to deepen mutual investments.

Fifth, to deepen the China-Arab civilization dialogue through new ways means to explore common values with real efforts, to eliminate misunderstandings of Chinese civilization in the Arab world, and to eliminate China's misunderstandings about the Arab-Islamic civilization. The misconceptions stem from the following three aspects: first, imagination and the facts from the cultural heritage of ancient civilizations were mixed with each other during the cultural exchanges in the ancient and medieval times. Second, both sides can partially rely on Western media and the cultural resources, but it must be kept in mind that some of them are valuable, but some are distorted or biased. In his book of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington portrays the Arab-Islamic civilization and Chinese civilization as new enemies of the West. Writings of the American Orientalist Bernard Lewis and other distinguished scholars are generally distorting the image of Arabs and Muslims. Third, civilization dialogue between China and the Arab world should be on the basis of the establishment of authentic cultural centers. These cultural centers should involve the civilizations of both sides, and should remain vibrant. Perhaps the establishment of Chinese Confucius Institutes in the Arab world is a good example. Similarly, the GCC countries and other Arab countries have also funded the establishment of Arabic teaching centers, training talent people who

know both Chinese and Arabic as well as the culture of both sides, promoting translation activities, and cultivating professionals specialized in Chinese and Arabic cultures. Professionals and language translators are critical to eliminate prejudice, and serve as an important foundation and pillar for deepening mutual understandings. In particular, they can help eliminate misunderstanding of the multi-ethnic Chinese Muslims have on real Islamic concepts. Islamic states promote a sense of belonging and beliefs, unity, tolerance and justice while opposing separatism. However, some extremist Islamic and Arab countries run into confrontation with the rest of the world, some people blame Islam for the conflicts, which is not the reality. I appeal to deepening the understanding of civilization and culture between the Arab states and China. The two sides need to strengthen their public diplomacy via media. I believe that China should play a major role in this effort, because China is a country, but the Arab world consists of 22 countries. Currently, the Arab countries do not have a comprehensive plan. To be specific, there is still no clear common vision among them. I believe that the "China-Arab States Cooperation Forum" is shouldering a significant responsibility on this issue.

I know that these may only be appearances, but it is true that a lot of people have gradually developed a negative view on China, which will undermine the positive image of China that Arab scholars have depicted. These scholars have visited China, or were in touch with Chinese technical experts and intellectuals, or have been keeping an eye on Chinese technological development. The two sides should resist and correct misconceptions from a few unreasonable people, maintaining the right values and ideals, as well as a positive attitude towards the other party. At the same time, both should develop cooperation between Arab and Chinese media, strengthen and deepen a variety of media plans, making them a tool for communication, interaction, integration, and deeper understanding, rather than having many Arabs not understand the real situation of Muslims in China, meanwhile many Chinese people do not understand the situation of minorities in the Arab world. They fail to understand the interaction

and integration within a country. Regarding this, national media institutions are mainly responsible for the misunderstandings. Media must convey to the other party the correct knowledge and information.

Finally, universities, think tanks, research institutes, academics and the press must shoulder the major responsibility on this issue. They are the elites who can promote the progress and lead the history move forward. I would like to commend the Middle East Institute at Shanghai International Studies University, Arab research centers at several colleges and universities in Beijing, and technical education centers in other parts of China. These universities and research institutions have projects on Arabic language and culture. I expect that these institutions can transcend beyond the field of language and literature, and further expand activities in the economy, politics and culture with the Arab world. This requires increasing researches in various fields of contemporary Arab world, rather than the narrow scope of Arabic study; it also requires a sharp vision and a positive prospect. People should not be concerned merely about the negative news and the status quo in the Arab world, because it can only reach conclusions with misconceptions. Similarly, the research centers in the Arab world should also develop studies and analyses about China.

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