

Invigorating Sino-Arab Relations by “One Belt and One Road” Strategy

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Abstract: *This article reviews the development of Sino-Arab relations in the past six decades. Politically, the two sides support each other and safeguard their rights. Economically, the two sides have complementary advantages and advance win-win cooperation. Since the outbreak of the Middle East Turmoil at the end of 2010, China has always paid close attention to the situation in the Arab countries and wishes the unrest in the Arab countries end soon and the stability be recovered. As time goes on, the Arab countries will increase their understandings to China’s position of respecting the national sovereignty and independence, insisting on not to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and standing for the political settlement of disputes. They will come to learn that China is a reliable country. Under the “One Belt and One Road” Strategy, Sino-Arab relations will thrive.*

Key Words: *Sino-Arab Relations; “One Belt and One Road” Strategy; Middle East Turmoil; China’s Middle East Diplomacy*

In September and October 2013, during President Xi Jinping’s visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, he put forth the strategic vision of

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establishing the “Silk Road economic belt” and the “Marine Silk Road in the 21st century” respectively. In January 2014, when President Xi met with the GCC delegation, he proposed to build the “Silk Road economic belt” with West Asian countries including the GCC countries. This indicated that the establishment of “One Belt and One Road” has involved a number of countries in Central Asia, West Asia, and Southeast Asia, with a total population of more than 3 billion. From an economic point of view, this means a huge market, which will not only benefit all the stakeholders, but also play a positive role in regional and global economic development. For China, this idea embodies a new layout to achieve an all-round opening-up policy as well as the “win-win” policy that it has long been promoting.

Arab countries are the major players in West Asia. They have a total population of about 400 million and their total economic output has reached \$2.7 trillion (Galal, M., 3-15). They boast abundant oil and gas resources and occupy a certain position in the world political and economic arena. Historically, this region is the part of the Silk Road—the confluence of the “One Belt and One Road” is in the Arab world. I believe they will be able to make a positive contribution in the establishment of the “One Belt and One Road” cooperation.

China has been in a friendly and cooperative relationship with the Arab countries for nearly six decades, which is a treasure for both sides. I have experienced some events, and hereby review these events through three phases. Hopefully, it will lead to better understanding of Sino-Arab relations.

I. A Handshake in the Bandung Conference

Since the founding of the P. R. China, China’s first official contacts

with Arab countries occurred in the Asian-African Conference, which was held in Bandung, Indonesia. On April 15, 1955, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, who arrived in Myanmar on the previous day, accompanied the Myanmar Prime Minister U Nu to the airport to greet the Egyptian Premier Gamal Abdel Nasser. This was the first time that political leaders of China and Egypt met with each other. When they shook hands, Premier Zhou said, "Dear Prime Minister, it is a surprise that you're so young." (Chen, D., 2007: 6). A handshake, along with a simple sentence, ringed the bell of the start of Sino-Arab bilateral relations. There were representatives from 29 countries in the Bandung Conference, 9 of which were Arab countries: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, besides Egypt. During the meeting, Premier Zhou expressed support in Egypt's efforts on taking back the ownership of the Suez Canal. He also said, "Chinese people have full sympathy and full support for Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and their struggle for self-determination and independence, as well as the Arab people to fight for human rights in Palestine." (Jiang, C. & Guo, Y., 2001: 248). This completely embodied China's support for the Arab countries in anti-imperialist and anti-colonial efforts. At that time, the P. R. China was newly founded and the two great powers--the Soviet Union and the US were in the Cold War. The Western countries were striving to suppress and block China, and smear China's image. During the Bandung Conference, China almost became the focus of the meeting. Words of doubts, confusion, and even criticism were fired at China. It was Premier Zhou, who reversed the situation during the meeting, and invited representatives to visit China to explore the truth.

When Gamal Abdel Nasser returned to Egypt in May 1955, the following month after the conclusion of the Bandung Conference, he

sent his Minister of Religious Affairs Ahmed Ba Curry to China. The two countries signed the “Minutes of Sino-Egypt Bilateral Cultural Cooperation Talks”. “Minutes” incorporated cultural interactions such as the exchange of teachers and students, exchange of cultural and artistic delegations, exchange of films, and so on. In August 1955, the Egyptian Minister of Trade and Industry Mohammed Abu Nusselt visited China. The two sides signed a trade agreement and a protocol on implementation of the agreement. In addition to defining the specific commodities, the two countries also agreed on the establishment of trade representatives’ offices. Confirmed by the exchange of official documents, the “offices” were endowed with the right to hang the national flags as well as national emblems, representatives and deputy representatives have the inviolability right, documents and archives shall be inviolable and have the right to use passwords. These provisions provided the “offices” with certain diplomatic treatment.

Based on the “Minutes”, China decided to send a teacher and seven students to Egypt. Two students were from Peking University, one from Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (now the Beijing Foreign Studies University), one from the Institute of Foreign Trade (now the University of International Business and Economics), two from the Preparation Department of Study Abroad in the USSR. I was studying at the Institute of Foreign Trade, and it was my honor to be selected as one of seven students. In September 1955, I had just started my sophomore year when I was informed that I would be sent to Egypt. In November, when we had gone through all the required procedures and were ready to depart, we suddenly received a notice, saying that Premier Zhou wanted to meet with us. Premier Zhou is a very respectable man in our eyes. He was busy with work but still made

himself available to meet with us, which was a total surprise for us. I felt both happy and nervous. When I got there, I saw staffs from the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Foreign Trade Ministry, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, the Islamic Association, and the Xinhua News Agency. Premier Zhou shook hands with all of us, asking each person's situation. This relaxing opening start eased the tension in our hearts.

Premier Zhou said to us with earnestness, "you should learn its (Egypt's) language and culture diligently, behave modestly and in reasonable manners. Arab countries and their people know little about the P. R. China, so they judge China through your words and deeds. Therefore, studying abroad in Egypt is not merely your personal business, but also representing the first group of Chinese students abroad in Egypt. You must show respect to the local customs and religious beliefs..." (Li, Z., 2010: 66). Those teachings of Premier Zhou served as the guidelines for us in Egypt. In addition, Premier Zhou also gave instructions on some specific issues: 1) When he knew there were no Muslims among the students, he thought that this was very inappropriate. He said, "Since the founding of P. R. China, foreign reactionaries spread the rumors that the Chinese Communist Party is committing genocide against minorities, in particular, being more 'brutal' towards Muslims, which of course was slander. However, none of the first group of students and teachers we sent to the Arab Islamic countries was Muslim. This will give foreign enemy an opportunity and an excuse to slander maliciously on the P .R. China." (Li, Z., 2010: 64). Premier Zhou requested to replace two students with Muslim students. A staff from the Ministry of Education said, tickets to Hong Kong had been bought, and the baggage had been carried away, therefore whether or not we shall wait and send Muslims in the

next batch of delegation. Premier Zhou said that the ticket could be refunded, and luggage could be recovered, the first batch of students must have Muslims. In this way, two students from the Preparation Department of Study Abroad in the USSR were replaced by a Muslim student from the same department and the president of the Student Union at Beijing Hui School (a high school) who graduated in 1955. 2) When Premier Zhou found out the teacher had a very strong Shandong local accent, he asked to replace the teacher with a good Mandarin speaker, because to teach foreigners Chinese, the teacher must have accurate pronunciation. Jin Jiazhen from the Northwest University was chosen. 3) When Premier Zhou learned the teacher and students left for Egypt first, he felt insecure because the KMT had embassies in Cairo. If they had problems, it would be inconvenient to contact their own country (they previously contacted Beijing through the Indian Embassy in Cairo). He asked the trade representative's office to facilitate their preparation and head to Egypt together with the teacher and students. 4) He asked the Foreign Trade Minister Ye Jizhuang how the preparation of forming the trade representative's office went. Ye responded that they had not found a person with some experience in foreign affairs. Premier Zhou immediately pointed to the Deputy Director of West Asia & Africa Division at the Foreign Ministry Zhang Yue, and said Zhang Yue could be the one. After the meeting, Zhang Yue consulted with Premier Zhou: what if we encounter the so-called diplomatic personnel of Taiwan's Kuomintang authorities, what should we say then? Prime Minister said firmly: "tell them to love their motherland, and give yourself a way to go backward." (Zhang, Y., 1987). Zhang Yue was the deputy representative at the Office, Li Yingjie from the Ministry of Foreign Trade was the representative.

When the Office was ready and about to leave for Egypt with the teacher and students, Premier Zhou again met with two groups of personnel. Staff from the Ministry of Education introduced Mr. Jin and the two Muslim students to him, Premier Zhou kindly invited the teacher to sit next to him, and asked about his age. Mr. Jin said he was 56 years old, then Premier Zhou said "we are the same age". This was also a relaxing start. Premier Zhou gave further instructions to students, of which the main contents were: to study hard and master new skills in Egypt, and set up a broad and sturdy bridge for future friendship between peoples in China and Egypt; to make friends with the Egyptian youth and those from other Arab countries, communicate ideas, and communicate feelings. He said, the future of the world belonged to you, the younger generation; Asian and African countries were facing the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, as well as having the task of developing their national economy and culture, and whether or not these tasks could be completed depended on you young people: you should be strict with yourselves, overcome difficulties by yourselves, try not to create trouble for the Egyptian government, the Ministry of Education and the universities, and comply with local rules and regulations (Li, Z., 2010: 72). Those instructions were more specific than the previous ones, also with more stringent requirements and a broader view. As a student, I focused more on the words from Premier Zhou to us students. However, in fact, during the second meeting, he spoke more to staff of the trade representative office and provided them very specific and important instructions. Premier Zhou explained explicitly about the importance of Egypt, mission of the trade representative's office, as well as our policies and the issues we should pay attention to.

We were just a group of students. Meeting with high-level leaders

twice before leaving the country seemed incredible even now, and exceptional at that time. Premier Zhou's extraordinary attention and emphasis on these students was associated with the international situation of that time, and was also part of his overall diplomacy. In the early 1950s, few countries had established diplomatic relations with China, only including a small number of socialist countries and friendly neighbors. Meanwhile, the voice of anti-China was high, especially during the Korean War in 1950. In addition to South Korea, China's enemy also included the coalition forces masked with the banner of the "United Nations troops". China was under great international pressure and needed interactions with foreign countries to break the block. Premier Zhou's attendance in the Bandung Conference was an important step. Ahmed Ba Curry's visit to China, and sending teachers and students to Egypt, were a further step after the Bandung Conference. Development of bilateral relationship with Egypt also opened up a channel for China to develop relationship with Arab countries and African states. Therefore, Premier Zhou attached great importance to the work of the trade representative's office in Egypt and the students abroad. Small fishes like us were also attached to strategies of great importance.

We departed on December 24, 1955, transited in Hong Kong and Karachi (waiting for visa), and arrived in Cairo on January 14, 1956, and started our studies abroad.

II. Comprehensive Establishment of Diplomatic Relationship and Deep Friendship

Since May 30, 1956, when China established diplomatic relationship with Egypt, till July 21, 1990, when the diplomatic

relationship with Saudi Arabia was established, China has established diplomatic relations with all the 22 Arab League countries.

Based on the principle of mutual respect and mutual support, the Sino-Arab relationship has gone through nearly six decades and is developing positively and smoothly. Friendship between the two sides is deepening and their cooperation has been enhanced. This relationship is embodied as:

First, Mutual support to each other on the fight for national independence.

In the fifties and sixties, anti-imperialist and anticolonial movements were surging. China and the Arab countries showed support to each other. In the Bandung Conference, Premier Zhou put forward the well-known proposal of "put aside minor differences so as to seek common ground". For Asian and African countries, the biggest common feature they share was that almost all these countries were suffered from and exploited by imperialism and colonialism. Based on the common interests of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, the two sides understood and cooperated with each other, and put aside secondary contradictions, which was quite reasonable and achievable. Therefore, this proposal was considered as an important idea that shifted the direction of the conference and made it a success. In practice, in November 1954, the Algerian National Liberation Front launched the armed uprising to fight for national independence. In less than half a year, Premier Zhou showed support during the Bandung Conference and then provided military aid through a third country (Jiang, C. & Guo, Y., 2001: 291). In September 1958, Algeria formed the provisional government in Cairo. China immediately recognized its legitimacy--China is the first non-Arab country to recognize the Algerian government. On July 26,

1956, Egypt announced that the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. In October, the UK, France, and Israel invaded Egypt. Besides strongly condemning their invasion and backing the justness of Egypt's struggle, Premier Zhou also sent a telegram to President Nasser and indicated China would be on Egypt's side firmly. Therefore, "Chinese government decided to grant 20 million Swiss francs in cash to Egypt without any additional provisions". Moreover, the Chinese Red Cross also donated 100,000 RMB to Egypt Red Crescent for purchases of medical supplies (Jiang, C. & Guo, Y., 2001: 305).

Second, both sides respect and support major concerns of each other.

For China, realizing the unity of the country and preventing the independence of Taiwan was the biggest concern. Arab countries showed support to China on this issue. The Declaration of the establishment of the Sino-Arab State Forum (hereinafter referred to as the "Forum") in 2004 clearly mentioned that "Arab countries adhere to the principle of 'One China'". The same issue was always mentioned in the following rounds of the Ministerial Conference of the "Forum". The communique of the fourth Ministerial Conference in 2010 stated, "Arab countries emphasize and are in favor of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, firmly pursuing the 'One China' policy ... and support the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and the peaceful reunification of China." For the Arab countries, the Palestinian issue is the core of all the issues around the Middle East, because it is not the concern of just one country, but instead, it involves the entire Arab world, or even all Islamic countries. China has always been in support of Arab countries on the Palestinian issue. During the Bandung Conference, Premier Zhou insisted that the

Palestinian issue should be on the agenda of the conference. Moreover, with his effort, the Arab countries were satisfied with the final resolution that came out of the conference (Jiang, C. & Guo, Y., 2001: 276). In March 1965, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Ahmad Shukeiri, visited China. The two sides agreed to set up offices in China (later upgraded to the Palestine embassy). China's support to Palestine was not a result of favoritism, but of justice: land of Palestine was still occupied by others, many Palestinian people became refugees, they failed to achieve the aspirations of founding their own country, and their legitimate national rights were not regained. In May 2010, according to the communique of the fourth Ministerial Conference of the forum, the two parties jointly showed full support for the establishment of an independent Palestine, restoration of the Arabs' legitimate rights, a complete end to Israel's occupation of Arab countries' territories since 1967, including Arab East Jerusalem, and to achieve a comprehensive, fair and lasting peace in the Middle East. Under the new situation, on May 6, 2013, when President Xi Jinping held talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Beijing, he put forward four proposals on the settlement of the Palestine issue, which uphold the right of Palestinian and promote the peaceful settlement of the issue.

Third, regarding many international issues, the two sides have the same or identical standpoint.

China and Arab countries are developing countries. They have strong will in defending national rights and dignity, and are strongly against hegemony and unilateralism. For example, in 2004, the United States proposed the Greater Middle East reform plan, which triggered criticism and opposition from Arab states. As a result, the United States had to drop the plan (even if temporarily). The Declaration of

the establishment of the Forum in 2004 made the following statement on the international issues: “to promote the democratization of international relations; adhere to the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs; emphasize on equal right to participate in international affairs rights, no matter the state is big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, and should support people’s right of freedom, independence and sovereignty on their entire territories, based on international law, universally recognized norms governing international relations, and the UN resolution.” This was an international consensus of both sides at that time, which incorporated the idea of anti-hegemony and anti-unilateralism.

Fourth, Trade and economic cooperation between the two sides is increasing.

The economic cooperation exists in many areas, such as trade, project contracting, labor dispatch, investment, etc., and all maintain great growth. Take trade as an example, the bilateral trade volume is rising: it was only \$789 million in 1979, and increased to \$2.129 billion in 1989, almost doubled in ten years. In 1997, the trade volume was \$9.23 billion, close to the \$10 billion mark. In 2003, it was \$25.43 billion, but climbed up to \$238.862 billion in 2013, an increase of nearly nine times in ten years. Industrial structures of China and the Arab countries are different but highly complementary, especially in the energy sector. Since China became a net importer of energy in 1993, its energy demand grows year after year due to economic development. The Middle East is an important source of China’s imported energy. In 2003 China imported 9,736,900 tons of oil from Arab countries. Ten years later, in 2013, China’s imports of oil from there was up to 133,083,900 tons, an increase of more than ten times, accounting for 47.2% of total oil imports in that year. Moreover, in terms of the

volume of the Sino-Arab trade, non-oil products outweighs petroleum products, and "Made in China" are welcomed by the Arab countries.

In the 21st century, there have been complicated changes in international relations. Since the 9/11 attacks against the United States in 2001, antiterrorism has become an important global issue. The US started the war against Afghanistan, and then invaded Iraq without any excuse, destroying the sovereignty country. This was uncommon in the history of international relations. The US also sent UAVs to Pakistan for bombing, causing casualties among innocent civilians. Antiterrorism has become a global consensus, and only the states which cooperate with each other can success be achieved. Nevertheless, some Western countries target Islam in their fight against terrorism, and thus some Arab countries are treated unjustly. In this context, China adopted three measures to uphold justice and maintain long-term friendly relations with Arab countries: 1) in December 2001, China established the Sino-Arab Friendship Association, expressing support for the Arab States; 2) in 2002, China set up the position of Special Envoy to the Middle East, in order to contribute to solving the issues of Arab-Israeli conflict in the region that has lasted for half a century; 3) in 2004, the China-Arab State Cooperation Forum was established, providing a new platform of communication and exchanges for the development of bilateral relations.

Fortunately, the Forum has not become an institution that exists in name only; instead, the two sides have done a lot of real work to promote the development of bilateral relations under this framework. Officially, the two parties set up a mechanism to hold ministerial meetings every two years. In addition to exploring ways to strengthen bilateral relations, it also allows the two sides to exchange views on

mutual concerns and regional and international situation. Each Ministerial meeting will make action plans for bilateral relations development in the next two years. The Senior Officials Meetings are held once a year to implement the decisions and resolutions of the Ministerial meetings and to prepare for the next Ministerial meeting. Unofficially, there are many mechanisms: economic and trade cooperation such as the Business Conference, the Sino-Arab Investment Seminar, the Sino-Arab trade and agricultural cooperation seminar, Energy Cooperation Conference, etc.; cultural cooperation such as the Sino-Arab relations and Sino-Arab Civilization Dialogue Seminar, Advanced Education and Research Seminars, Language and Cultural Exchange Seminars, and exchanges and visits of other arts organizations every year; in addition, there is also cooperation in environmental protection and press. Large scale Sino-Arab friendship conference is held once every two years, which has been a formal mechanism.

Sino-Arab relations and the Sino-Arab Civilization Dialogue Seminar is held every two years. To date, it has been held five times, with the first seminar hosted by Beijing in 2005. The following seminars took place in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Xinjiang (China). I attended all these five meetings, and would like to share some information about them.

The origin of the issue originates from the theory of “clash of civilizations”, which was proposed by Western scholars in 1990s. This resulted in debates in academia. Indeed, there exist some difference among different civilizations, but it does not necessarily lead to conflicts. On the contrary, there are plenty of examples of cooperation, exchanges and mutual reinforcement among civilizations. In most cases, the clash of civilizations cannot be attributed to civilization

factors, but instead, should be attributed to political reasons. For example, the US invasion of Iraq is far from the clash of civilizations, as the United States did not intend to replace Islam with Christianity in Iraq. In addition, there are conflicts between countries which share the same kind of civilization. For example, the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s was between two Islamic countries. Moreover, they were both Shiite-dominated countries. However, the war had lasted for eight years, which could only result from political factors. After 9/11, some people wanted to link this terrorist incident with Islam, as well as the "clash of civilizations". China and Arab countries both propose to conduct a dialogue among different civilizations and establish mechanisms for civilization dialogues, so that both sides have the opportunity to explore and have a theoretic discussion on these issues together, rather than running into conflicts.

The formation and development of a civilized nation are closely related to the historical background, production levels, and specific social and ecological factors. A civilization, which has gone through changes and numerous vicissitudes but is still alive, must have some value and lessons that can be learned from it. The Chinese and Arab civilizations both have a long history. Among the world's four ancient civilizations, three of them belong to China and the Arab, namely China, Egypt, and Iraq, signifying a profound influence of the two. Moreover, both sides have attached great importance to the seminars of civilization dialogues. In the five meetings, both dispatched well-known experts and scholars. They were well-prepared and submitted high-level papers, which ensured the success of these meetings. The host countries also attached great importance to the meeting. In 2007, when the second session was held in Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah and the Crown Prince met with all attendees, and

spoke highly of Sino-Arab relations. This was a great support to the seminars as well as the mechanism.

The two sides have agreed that the connection between China and the Arab world has existed for a long time. The two civilizations showed mutual respect for each other, and made important contributions to promoting the development of human civilization. Under the new situation, they both advocate a spirit of tolerance, harmony and cooperation, as well as maintaining cultural diversity. They also emphasize the efforts to comprehensively understand and show respect to cultural identity of other ethnics, as well as people's free choice on their won development path. They support active and fruitful cultural dialogues between China and the Arab world, which help consolidate the traditional friendship between China and the Arabs, deepen Sino-Arab cooperation in various fields, maintain the diversity of civilizations, promote the realization of lasting peace, common prosperity and a harmonious world, and build a more just and humane international order.^①

The Chinese not only agreed on what is mentioned above, but also emphasized that: first, we must recognize that the diversity of civilizations is an objective reality, which contributes to a colorful and constantly advancing world; Secondly, we must admit that all civilizations are equal. There is no clash between different civilizations, and disrespect towards a civilization is also disrespect on the history of a nation; third, there should be exchanges between different civilizations so that they can learn from each other, rather than

^① *Final Report of the Third Seminar of Sino-Arab Relations & Cultural Dialogue of China-Arab State Cooperation Forum*, May 11-12, 2009, Tunisia; Department of Asia and North Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, ed., *Compilation of Files of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (September 2004-May 2010)*, Beijing: World knowledge Press, 2010, pp. 112-116.

exclusion and hostility. Only in this way could the world be better; fourth, terrorism should not be linked to a certain ethnic group or religion. During the second meeting in 2007, when King Abdullah met with the attendees, I explained China's points of view, which are mentioned above, to him on behalf of the Chinese delegation and gained his applause. The next day, a Saudi newspaper published the full text of my speech.

III. China's Wise Response to Turmoil in the Middle East

Since the Middle East turmoil in 2010, China has been closely following the situation and expecting the unrest in the Arab countries to end soon so the countries can regain stability.

China's policy towards the unrest in Middle East countries are: 1) China respects the legitimate aspirations and demands on reform of peoples in these countries; China promotes peaceful talks, hoping the two parties, i.e., the government and the opponents, to sit down and resolve disputes by peaceful means; China is against the use of force to avoid bloodshed. 2) China adheres to the principles and objectives of the UN Charter, especially the provisions on respect for the independent sovereignty rights and territorial integrity, and fight for foreign interference in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality of States. China opposes "regime change", which will make the problems more difficult to resolve. 3) China insisted on a peaceful foreign policy, which is in favor of settling disputes by peaceful means. I hope the international community can also move forward towards this goal, and oppose foreign intervention on a certain party as well as the imposition of sanctions or frequently threats of sanctions.

According to the policy above, China has never been in support of

someone or opposition to someone in turmoil based on the likes and dislikes of certain former leaders; and never provided arms to either side involved in the conflict to avoid the intensification of contradictions; nor disregard the sovereignty rights of other countries by accusing certain leaders of being illegitimate—whether a leader has legitimacy should be decided by the country's own people. China always believes that the people are the masters of the country, and make final decision on the fate of their country. Foreign countries should not intervene in other countries' domestic affairs. Some people were unhappy that China showed no support in people's efforts to overthrow their leaders—the so-called "people's revolution." From 2011 to 2012, when the UN Security Council voted on the Syria issue, China voted against the proposed resolution three times. Some Arab countries, especially the GCC countries, did not understand this and they made all kinds of interpretations. In addition to diplomatic efforts China made to eliminate some of the misunderstandings, the academia also carried out extensive exchanges and communication with the media and scholars in Arab countries. The Sino-Arab State Cooperation Forum research center, located in Shanghai, dispatched delegations to Arab countries, especially the GCC countries, in both 2012 and 2013, to gather inputs on Arab countries' perspective and meanwhile explain China's standpoint. The delegation was composed by professors from the Shanghai International Studies University, Peking University, and Beijing Foreign Studies University. I was a counselor at the center, so I joined the delegation. In addition to academic discussion, the delegation also interacted with the media. For example, the Al-Jazeera and the Arabic One interviewed us. During the interview, we introduced China's policy and explained the reasons why China voted against the resolution on Syria. Both sides

also discussed the topics we disagreed on. In the following part, I will have a brief introduction on concerns of Arab countries and the delegation's responses.

(1) China did not worry that the "Arab Spring" might spread to China.

Arab scholars have suggested that China did not have a positive attitude towards the Arab "revolution" because China was worried that the "revolution" could spread to China. We explained to them that China and the Arabs had different regimes—they were not comparable, therefore, China had no worry about this issue. Factors that triggered unrest in the Arab also existed in China for some reason, for example, the problem of corruption, which people in both states hated. The widening wealth gap was another one. China's Gini coefficient was over 0.473 ten years since 2003, crossed the internationally recognized "alert line" (Han, B., 2014: January 21); in addition, there were also rising prices, employment and other issues in China. The difference was that the Chinese leaders had these issues fully under control, and tried to resolve them. Over thirty years since the reform and opening up policy was implemented, development of China's economic and improvement in people's living quality were remarkable; more than 20 provincial and ministerial level officials had been punished for corruption since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012 (Ren, K., 2014: February 19). These anti-corruption efforts were noticeable. China addressed social problems mainly through reforms. The third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC in November 2013 decided to further reform and opening up, and improve people's living. The delegation had introduced these to Arab scholars and concluded that what was happening in the Arab world would not spread to China.

(2) China will not give up the policy of non-interference in internal affairs.

Some Arab scholars believe that today's China is different from what it used to be, and it should no longer be restricted by the policy of "non-interference in internal affairs". Therefore, China will play a larger role in international affairs and support the "Arab Spring" by actions. We explained China's viewpoint to them. The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs was proposed in 1954. It has been six decades since then and China is still adhering firmly to the principle. This is because that principle has its rationality, and is in line with regulations in the UN Charter, which provides legal supports for the principle. China adhered to the principle in the past, is pursuing it at present and will keep it in the future. Adhering to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs actually safeguards the interests of developing countries, as applied interventionists are from strong, big, and rich countries. When talking about this, Arab scholars agreed with and named the example of Mozambique. We also added, small countries like Mauritania would never interfere in other countries' affairs. They were only worried that others might interfere in their internal affairs. During our visit to Oman, when we were discussing Oman's policy towards the Middle East, a leader said to us, Oman would not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and also would not allow others to interfere in their internal affairs. We immediately said that this expression was in line with China's policy. China will continue to adhere to the principle of non-interference in the future.

(3) China determines its own foreign policy, not following any other country's policy.

Scholars in the two Gulf countries put forward a question: why

was China always following a big country. For example, when the UN Security Council voted on resolution 678 on the Gulf crisis, China followed the US, and when the UN Security Council voted on the proposal of Syria issue, China followed the Russian. In August 1990, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait triggered the outbreak of the Gulf crisis. I knew a few things about this and explained to them. In late November of the same year, when the UN Security Council discussed draft Resolution 678, the United States exerted tremendous pressure on China to vote in favor of it, otherwise, the foreign minister's visit arrangements would be affected. During the voting, since the draft had the phrases "use all necessary means", which was contrary to the peaceful settlement of disputes China had always advocated, China could not vote with an "aye"; on the other hand, the draft resolution demanded Iraq to immediately withdraw its troops from Kuwait, so China could not vote against it. Finally, China abstained from the vote, which could not be treated as "following the United States". In terms of China's vote on Syria, China made its own decision based on the respect to the UN Charter, and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs and respect national sovereignty and independence, as well as the lessons learned from Libya, instead of following Russia. During the visit to Saudi Arabia, we had a meeting with the chairperson of the "Riyadh newspaper". After that, this newspaper published a report entitled "China does not support the current regime in Syria, and its veto is to safeguard the principle of sovereignty rights", explaining the Chinese point of view in detail.

(4) China did not vote only based on its own interests.

Some Arab scholars and the media believe that China voted against the Syrian issue for its own interests' sake. The two sides have different policy orientations and faced different situations; therefore, it

is reasonable that different positions and actions are natural. From the perspective of interest, China has much greater interests in its relations with the GCC countries than with Syria. Politically, China and Syria have maintained friendly relations and cooperation. But China's relationship with the GCC countries has higher priorities than the relationship with Syria. Currently, China has strategic partnerships with four Arab countries--two of them are GCC countries, that is, Saudi Arabia and UAE. China has also established a strategic dialogue mechanism with the GCC countries. Economically, bilateral trade with the GCC countries reached \$133.7 billion in 2011, while only \$2.4 billion with Syria. In 2012, bilateral trade volume rose to \$155 billion with the GCC countries, while trade volume with Syria fell to \$1.2 billion. The gap is quite considerable. Therefore, China did not veto on this issue due to its own interests, but for the principles of it sticks on: the resolution included a phase of "regime change", which was interference in the internal affairs of a country. If there is an interest, it is a sincere wish of China that all parties comply with the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. If they can achieve this, it is China's fortune as well as the world fortune.

IV. Conclusion

The concept of "One Belt and One Road" was put forward only a few months ago. It needs more time to consult with the countries of interest to develop further plans and programs of action. However, the Sino-Arab cooperation can start early and lead the way, this is because:

(1) China and the Arab world have different but highly complementary industrial structures. Energy is a pillar industry of the

Arab countries' exports, and China is a major energy consuming country. In 2013, oil imports from Arab countries amounted to \$ 104.606 billion, accounting for half of the total trade of \$238.862 billion between China and the Arab world. China's demand for energy will increase year by year in the future; similarly, China's machinery, textiles, telecommunication equipment, and light industry products are welcomed by the Argentine people. The former Egyptian Ambassador to China Jalal believes, "what the Arab most lacks is knowledge and technology", China needs to help them "develop civilian industrial and economic foundation, and achieve Arab industrial integration." (Galal, M., 3-15). As long as the two sides make efforts, issues mentioned above will achieve a positive outcome. This is because in the next five years, China's annual foreign investment will reach \$100 billion, with \$2 trillion of goods imported. China welcomes and supports the Arab countries to occupy more shares (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014: April 23).

(2) Countries that are experiencing unrest urgent need to restore the building to improve the people's living standards. More than three years of turmoil in some Arab countries brought great even devastating effect to their economies, which needed to be restored. These countries are making efforts to overcome the difficulties they face. As a friend, China is also doing its part and may provide some help. In 2012, China provided Egypt a three-year preferential loan of RMB 450 million. When foreign countries were in hurry to pull their capital out of Egypt, the glass fiber plant China invested more than \$200 million when it started to operate. China knew that the Egyptian government had high hopes for the development of the Suez Canal area, so it expressed willingness to actively participate in construction of the "Suez Economic Corridor" and "Suez Economic and trade

cooperation zone". The "One Belt and One Road" will promote free flow of resource elements between China and Arab countries and optimize the allocation. China has put forward a number of new areas to cooperate on, such as strengthening Sino-Arab cooperation in the field of railways, roads, ports, civil aviation, telecommunications, etc. It also expressed its willingness to explore the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, satellite manufacturing and launch, and other specific projects with the Arab world. If they can carry out cooperation in these areas, economy of Arab countries will grow and the two sides can achieve win-win cooperation.

(3) The Arab world moves towards the east, and China approaches to the west, so the two sides can get closer and closer. Ambassador Galal said in his article, "In terms of investment, Arab countries should 'Look towards the East', especially towards China." (Galal, M., 3-15). China, especially its western region, proposed to launch westward, mainly referring to the Arab countries. China and the Arab share the same orientation and goal. The concept of "One Belt and One Road" fully fit into the common aspiration of both sides. It caught the Arab world's attention immediately after it was proposed. I believe if there is a specific implementation program, it will get a positive response from both side.

The Sino-Arab friendship in half a century is just like towering trees with deep roots. The proposal of "One Belt and One Road" has added a nutritional agent for this tree, and makes it to thrive.

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