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China's strategic partnership diplomacy and its approach to West-Asia

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Abstract

After the end of the Cold War, China has formed a global partnership network. In the last three decades, China's participatory diplomacy has become the main tool of this country's foreign policy and is a symbolic indicator of the level of bilateral and multi-lateral relations with governments and international and regional organizations. The main question of the article is what is the position of West Asia in China's cooperative diplomacy? In response to the main question, the hypothesis of the article is that China has not limited its partners to big powers as in the past, which is the most significant change in China's partnership network. Since West Asia is one of the most important regions for China outside the Indo-Pacific region, China's approach to West Asia is based on the security of key resources and access to markets and resources. This article argues that the hierarchy of levels of participatory diplomacy shows that

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the governments and organizations of the West Asian region are important for China. Therefore, by understanding this hierarchy, it is possible to analyze China's approach to relations with West-Asian countries. China's partnership diplomacy with West Asia is centered around energy, the Belt and Road Initiative, foreign investment, trade and technology. The research method of this article is descriptive-analytical.

After the end of the Cold War, China has formed a global and multidimensional partnership network. Since 1993, when Beijing established its first strategic partnership with Brazil, cooperative diplomacy has gradually become one of the main components of China's grand diplomacy, and Beijing has expanded its special relations in the world with the concept of strategic partnership. To better understand China's strategic evolution in diplomacy, we need to know how these partnerships are formed and what motivates Beijing to strengthen its partnership network. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, by the end of 2021, more than 100 partnerships have been established at different levels, which include regional and international countries and organizations. These partnerships have been a prominent tool in China's diplomatic toolkit to ensure a suitable environment for the country's emergence. As a diplomatic tool, strategic partnership diplomacy reflects a broader change in China's development path and its diplomacy paradigm. China is not unique in using participatory diplomacy as a way to advance its national interests, but what distinguishes China's approach is that Beijing has placed participatory networks at the center of its foreign policy strategy. Also, like in the past, China has not limited its partners to big powers, which is the most significant change in China's partnership network. In fact, cooperative diplomacy has become China's prominent strategy to advance its economic and political growth. From an economic point of view, China is looking for partnerships with countries that have the ability to provide a market for Chinese goods and natural resources and strengthen China's economic presence in the world. Politically, China's goal of participation is to counter American pressure and create a favorable political environment for China's rise. Outside the Indo-Pacific region, West Asia is the most important region for China. The unique geopolitical position of West Asia is a vital source for the exchange of energy, technology and expansion of economic, trade and investment relations between the two sides.

In the last decade, China has increased its economic, political and, to a lesser extent, its security footprint in West Asia and has become the largest trading partner and foreign investor for many countries in the region; China's role has also expanded with the announcement by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013

of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is the cornerstone of China's modern strategy. We start this article by analyzing the concept of strategic partnership based on the existing literature in international relations. Since there is no consensus on the meaning of the term strategic partnership, in this article we use the conceptual framework of Thomas Wilkins to explain the partnership between China and the West Asia region. Wilkins is one of the few authors who explained the conceptual framework of strategic partnership. The main question of the article is what is the position of West Asia in China's cooperative diplomacy? In response to this question, we propose the hypothesis that China has not limited its partners to big powers as in the past, that this strategy is the most significant change in China's partnership network, and China's partnership diplomacy with West Asia with energy, foreign investment, trade, innovation One Belt and One Road is focused, and Beijing is careful to avoid repeating what it sees as Western interference and present a narrative of neutral engagement with all countries, including those that are in conflict with each other, based on mutually beneficial agreements.

In this article, after analyzing the concept of strategic partnership diplomacy and reviewing the existing literature, we examined the position of West Asia in China's strategic partnership diplomacy. The findings of the research showed that China did not limit its partners to big powers as in the past, which is the most significant change in China's partnership network. Since West Asia is the most important region for China outside the Indo-Pacific region, China's approach to West Asia is based on the security of key resources and access to markets and resources. The hierarchy of levels of cooperative diplomacy shows that the governments and organizations of the West Asian region are important to China. Therefore, by understanding this hierarchy, China's approach to relations with West Asian countries can be analyzed.

China's partnership diplomacy with West Asia focuses on energy, the Belt and Road Initiative, foreign investment, and trade and technology. In general, strategic partnerships go beyond security alignments. This is especially true for China. In recent years, Beijing has repeatedly emphasized that the partnerships are "a new type of state-to-state relationship and not against any third state." What makes China's approach unique is that partnership networks are at the strategic center of China's foreign policy. It seems that China's choice to create a cooperative diplomacy network is not accidental. On the contrary, it is determined to a large extent by the three factors of the need to deal with American pressure, the need to maintain peace and stability in its borders, and to achieve the long-term goal of modernization. Overall, although China's main goal is to

seek economic benefits while avoiding political conflict, it seems that Beijing cannot indefinitely avoid playing an active role in regional security. In order to protect its long-term economic interests in West Asia, as well as to present itself as an emerging power in the multipolar international order, China will find it necessary to play a greater and more active role in the security and political dynamics of the region as soon as possible.

Key words: Cooperative Diplomacy, China, West-Asia, Strategic Partnership.