

CHINA AND THE ARAB WORLD AND EMERGING EAST ASIA-MIDDLE EAST NEXUS

In 2005 Fred Halliday characterised the relationship between China and the Middle East in the following terms:

China had no significant impact on any regional country or issue; indeed, for most of the period up to the 1990s at the earliest, the modern history of the Middle East could be written without any reference to it.¹

It is unlikely that any future analyst will reach comparable conclusions about China's relations with the Middle East in this century. What is commonly characterised as China's 'rise' is in fact a diverse and complex embedding of China, and China's influence, in international affairs. The impacts are likely to be sizeable and permanent, particularly in those regions that neighbour China in Asia and Europe. In part this drive has been occasioned by the transformation of China internally; but it has equally been driven by the transformation of Asia as a whole, including the Middle East. China's rise and Asia's rise are mutually supporting processes, therefore, and driven by comparable factors and motivations. For this reason, China's rise is broadly welcomed in the Arab world as being emblematic and enabling of a new century that will be substantially different from the proceeding one, particularly in terms of the capacity of Asian countries to achieve self-government of their relations in economy, security and cultural-civilizational exchange. This autonomy of East Asian and West Asian powers within Asia will then become the foundation for Asia's new role in global affairs.

Yet precisely because China's relations with the Arab World have no tradition – at least no tradition in the modern era - we need to look closely at how the new Chinese-Arab world relationship is being organised, in terms of its principles, its processes and its consequences, including for people in other regions of Eurasia. The kind of research questions we should be asking are:

- Why have China and the Arab countries existed in isolation in the recent past and what factors, internal and international, are driving their convergence at present?
- What are the principles on which the new Chinese-Arab world relationship is being established, and what are the systems of 'transmission': the respective factors of security, political economy (including the energy issue), technology, and cultural-civilizational perceptions and exchanges?
- What are the roles and consequences for other international actors? In which regard we should focus on two categories: the 'internal' powers of the wider Islamic world, especially Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Islamic Africa and Southeast Asia; and the 'external' powers of India, Japan, Russia, Europe, and the US.
- What does the new relationship between the Arab world and China tell us about the New East Asia-Middle East Nexus?

It is therefore proposed to hold a two-day conference at Durham University on 29-30 September 2009 which brings together Arab and UK specialists in the fields

¹ Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: power, politics and ideology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 98.

of Chinese and Middle East international relations to debate China and the Arab world. There will be three partners and one sponsor. The three partners will be:

- A partner from the Arab world;
- A partner from UK;
- Durham University's Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World and Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies (CASAW/ CCCS).

CASAW will provide £3,500 towards venue, accommodation, catering for all the speakers, as well as transportation for guest speakers within UK.

Day One:

- Panel 1: Conceptualizing the New Middle East-East Asia Nexus
- Panel 2: Economic Nexus
- Panel 3: Security Nexus

Day Two

- Panel 4: China-Saudi Relations
- Other Dimensions of the Emerging Nexus
- Roundtable: Assessing the East Asia- Middle East Nexus