

- China's Belt and Road Initiative has generated remarkable excitement despite the commitment of relatively modest resources so far. Presumptions that China is a fast-rising power and an actor that is both strategic and centrally controlled have especially energized governments throughout the Middle East, who seek to establish themselves as key nodes in China's grand strategy.
 - Senior-level visits to China
 - Xi visits to Iran, Saudi, UAE and Egypt
 - As authoritarian states, look with special admiration on China model.
- The prospect of China sweeping into the Middle East is especially enticing for governments that believe that U.S. domestic energy production and fatigue with Middle Eastern conflicts is driving the United States away from the region.
 - **Saudi Arabia** also wants to build ties to China as a major oil consumer, as a counterweight to Iranian-Chinese ties, as well as supplement to uncertain Western support.
 - **Iran** wants to build ties as a counterweight to US domination, and as a rare source of capital for Iranian development.
 - **Egypt** sees China as source of capital that is free of judgment, that is a model for economic growth, that is attuned to Egypt's strategic location. Strategically, China provides an alternative to perceived overreliance on USG.
 - All embedded in a view that US orientation has been of mixed value. Region has suffered from repeated wars, conflicts such as Palestine not solved, and USG has meddled in internal politics in ways that are often annoying and sometimes troublesome.
 - China relationship seen as providing material benefits of US ties with less baggage; although clear that China will not be defensive bulwark for these states.
- The enthusiasm China has engendered is despite the fact that China has been vague about exactly what its new western-facing strategy entails, and what the broader consequences of greater Chinese involvement might be for China's partners.
 - Assumption that states can play key role for China, even though every state cannot be key.
 - Reminds of tourists visiting pyramids; everyone thinks they are reincarnation of Cleopatra.
 - China systematically establishes ties where it is more important to the other country than vice-versa. For example, Iran – China represents 33% of Iranian trade, and Iran represents about 1% of Chinese global trade, about \$4T.
 - China has put emphasis on bilateral ties in which it is the far larger power.
 - Debt traps in Sri Lanka, and wariness in Indonesia, Myanmar, and elsewhere.

- The government of China has shown little interest in promoting transparency and anti-corruption efforts as it has extended into markets in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and it appears ambivalent about multilateral agreements and organizations in which it does not have an outsized role.
 - While bribery of foreign government officials theoretically illegal since 2011, none prosecuted through 2018.
 - Commercial deals far from “rules based order.” No effort to strengthen commercial codes, judiciary, etc.
 - While lots of examples of long-term Chinese communities engaging in commerce throughout Asia, no examples of long-term state investment.
 - Will China leave states richer or poorer, more developed or less?
 - Will China use debt traps to embed its military, as UK did in Egypt from 1882-1956?
- What is left unanswered is how China sees its growing global role.
 - Will China be a major driver of global development, and if so, does it intend to exist alongside other global players, displace them, or compete with them?
 - How will China’s growth slow and for how long, and how will that affect its global reach, global ambitions?
 - What kind of security arrangements will China seek to make to secure an increasingly global set of interests, especially if tensions with other powers continue to rise? Will China alter its pattern of being principally an economic power alongside more conventional global powers, or will, as the minister said yesterday, deploy diplomatic and military power in conventional ways to protect its economic interests?
 - How would diminishing focus on hydrocarbons affect China’s Middle East approach? Will China make fewer long-term investments if it feels end of oil era is near? Or will reliance on Middle Eastern capital build a partnership with Middle Eastern governments?
 - Will China’s focus on states as partners prove the right bet for the future of the Middle East, or will it doom Chinese ambitions for prosperity and influence?
 - What will “seams” of China’s core interests and periphery look like?
 - China has always been focused on tribute from the near-abroad. Past Himalayas, will China have same focus?
 - How will Great Powers perceive China’s actions, and how will they respond?
 - Will they cede regions to China?
 - Will smaller powers seek to balance against what they see as Chinese efforts at domination?

- Will the Indo-Pacific emerge as an area of contestation, obstructing China's clear access to the Middle East and setting off a rivalry with India?
- Answers will depend on decisions China hasn't made. But seems clear that the honeymoon of China's rise will diminish. Rising skepticism toward China in Africa after more than a decade of large-scale investment may be a harbinger. Among the most important questions to answer is how long China will feel a need to engage deeply in the Middle East, and what the effects in the Middle East will be of a potentially short-term Chinese investment in their future.