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# China's Role in International Conflict Mediation and Its Implications for International Relations

Nur Rachmat Yuliantoro

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta – Indonesia

Corresponding Email: [nur.rachmat@ugm.ac.id](mailto:nur.rachmat@ugm.ac.id)

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## Abstract

This study examines China's evolving role as a mediator in international conflicts, particularly its involvement in the Saudi-Iranian dispute and the Russia-Ukraine war. It underscores China's evolution from a historically reclusive nation to a significant global actor, accentuating its "peaceful rise" policy. In doing so, the study employs a conceptual framework to analyze the evolution of China's foreign policy. It examines China's strategic deployment of soft power through cultural diplomacy, economic influence, and mediation initiatives. The study's findings indicate that China's mediation has contested traditional Western hegemony in conflict resolution by presenting an alternative approach centered on sovereignty and non-interference. Challenges persist regarding perceptions of bias, particularly in conflict such as the Russia-Ukraine war, where neutrality is scrutinized. Ultimately, this study underscores China's increasing role as a mediator, capable of shaping global diplomatic norms while navigating complex geopolitical contexts.

Keywords: China, Mediation, Saudi-Iran, Russia-Ukraine, Diplomacy

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary international relations have experienced numerous transformations. The development of China as a significant player in global diplomacy, expanding its influence beyond traditional economic and commercial ties, is notable (Kurlantzick, 2007). China's political clout and economic strength have enabled the nation to take on a more significant role in addressing international crises. China's involvement in two notable conflicts—the Saudi-Iran tensions and the Russia-Ukraine war—illustrates this change. China's mediation efforts in these circumstances highlight its increasing influence and evolving foreign policy.

The Saudi-Iran conflict, stemming from religious, political, and regional power dynamics, profoundly influenced Middle Eastern geopolitics prior to the 2023 peace agreement. Saudi Arabia, primarily Sunni Muslim, and Iran, predominantly Shia Muslim, have historically been adversaries, each competing for regional hegemony. This rivalry manifested through proxy conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, as both nations endorsed opposing factions, exacerbating violence and instability (Ighani, 2016). The conflict transcended sectarian divisions, encompassing rival goals in oil politics and regional hegemony. Diplomatic ties significantly declined with the 2016 killing of a notable Shia cleric by Saudi Arabia, prompting Iran to respond by breaching the Saudi embassy in Tehran (Hubbard, 2016). Over the years, both

countries participated in diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, and clandestine actions against one another. This heated standoff exacerbated wider unrest in Middle Eastern politics until the Saudi-Iran peace agreement was reached in March 2023. The deal represents a significant development in Middle Eastern diplomacy, challenging traditional Western-centric approaches to conflict resolution. China acts as a neutral and effective intermediary, advancing its political and economic goals while bolstering its image as a responsible global power (see Jash, 2023; Eslami Papageorgiou, 2023).

Following the overthrow of Russian-backed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, Russia invaded Crimea in southern Ukraine in March 2014. The world community strongly denounced this move and regarded it as illegitimate. Soon after, military battles broke out in Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists declared independence (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). The war claimed thousands of lives and displaced countless civilians. As the animosity between Russia and Ukraine persists, the conflict exposed deep geopolitical tensions between Russia and Western countries. Eight years later, in February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, worsening the situation significantly. This attack caused significant devastation and a severe humanitarian disaster. The global response included harsh economic penalties against Russia, increased military help to Ukraine, and heightened geopolitical tensions around the world. China's position on this crisis, while largely neutral, suggests a notable geopolitical realignment. The proposed peace initiatives, including the "China Peace Plan" for Ukraine, reflect an attempt to position itself as a leader in international conflict resolution (Bekkefold, 2023). This transition highlights the growing multipolarity in global power dynamics and the potential for new diplomatic coalitions to emerge.

China's increasing involvement in international mediation reflects its strategic aim to position itself as a global peacekeeper and an alternative to Western nations. For decades, China has sought to enhance its influence in global diplomacy by promoting peace and stability (Wang Yi, 2020). The country asserts its commitment to conflict resolution through dialogue rather than intervention or coercion. This approach significantly contrasts with the interventionist foreign policy of Western powers, particularly the United States (US), which has historically played a key role in mediating crises and shaping international peace processes. China's mediation initiatives arise from its desire to offer an alternative to Western-centric global governance frameworks, often conflicting with American foreign policies (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2021). China aims to position itself as a neutral and constructive participant in conflict resolution, increasing its appeal to countries in the Global South and emerging economies, which often express dissatisfaction with the dominance of Western powers in global affairs (Hong Liu, 2022).

This article aims to examine China's mediating strategy and role by analyzing its involvement in the Saudi-Iran peace agreement and the Russia-Ukraine war. These two conflicts were chosen for this study not only because they are directly related to China's political, economic and security interests, but also because of their

far-reaching implications on regional and global security. It will also examine how China's initiatives are transforming power dynamics in international relations and their potential effects on future diplomatic practices. China's emergence as a mediator marks a new phase in international relations, where conventional Western dominance is being contested and a new paradigm of conflict resolution is emerging.

## DISCUSSION

### China's Diplomatic Evolution

China's foreign policy has evolved from relative isolation to its current position as a prominent global player. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, China's foreign relations were shaped by internal strife, Western imperialism, and isolationism under the Qing Dynasty. The Opium Wars and the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 weakened the country's standing in international relations. During the mid-20th century, China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, began its emergence as a global power, implementing a foreign policy rooted in revolutionary Marxism and aligning with the Soviet Union (Khan, 2006). The Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s compelled China to reassess its international relations, particularly with Western nations. The normalization of relations with the US in 1972 marked a crucial juncture, paving the way for China's eventual entry into the United Nations (UN) in 1971. Deng Xiaoping's focus on economic reform and liberalization led to an increase in China's global influence through trade and investment. Since the 2000s, under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, China has systematically strengthened its economic, political, and military influence, positioning itself as a key player in global affairs (Kurlantzick, 2007).

China's diplomatic evolution has centered on the concept of "peaceful rise," which began in the early 2000s (Buzan, 2010; Zheng Bijian, 2015). This approach emphasized economic growth as a collective advantage, promoting cooperation with other countries rather than territorial expansion. It aimed to portray China as a responsible global power, eschewing confrontation and preserving the stability of the international order. The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations has been a cornerstone of Chinese diplomacy, particularly under Xi's leadership. This idea shaped China's relations with developing countries and directed its engagements with major powers. China advocated for multilateralism, respect for sovereignty, and mutual benefits in trade and diplomacy. This period saw the emergence of China's "soft power" through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and economic aid (Yiwei Wang, 2008; Nye, 2023).

Simultaneously, China has enhanced its economic prowess, providing the government with the capital necessary to implement its international development plan, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI, launched in 2013 as a significant development in China's global ambitions, aims to enhance connectivity between Asia, Europe, and Africa by financing infrastructure projects in numerous countries (Yongnian Zheng & Chi Zhang, 2018; Fiengold, 2023). Its dual purpose is to stimulate China's economic growth by creating new markets for its industries and to augment its geopolitical influence in regions critical to global trade and security.

The BRI has impacted China's economic relations and transformed regional power dynamics. China has challenged the dominance of the United States and its allies in Asia by strengthening economic ties and expanding its influence in regional affairs. The growing economic influence has augmented China's ability to impact political outcomes, both regionally and globally. Its regional impact is evident in its engagement with Asia-Pacific security dynamics, as illustrated by its assertion of dominance in the South China Sea through the establishment of military facilities on artificial islands. Despite these forceful moves, China advocates for communication and diplomacy as methods to settle regional disputes (Singh, 2017).

### **China's Soft Power and International Influence**

China has skillfully utilized soft power, a non-coercive approach, to influence the actions of other nations through diplomatic initiatives, economic leverage, and cultural interaction. This approach involves persuading and captivating others through charisma and appeal, rather than relying on military or economic pressure. China's growing involvement in global conflict resolution exemplifies the application of diplomatic efforts as a manifestation of its soft power. The nation's expanding diplomatic influence, facilitating mediation in international conflicts, positions it as an attractive alternative for Western countries. China's growing economic influence through trade and investments, epitomized by the BRI, serves as a tool of soft power, facilitating the formation of alliances and partnerships. Cultural outreach projects, such as the Confucius Institutes, promote the worldwide spread of China's language, culture, and values, thereby improving its international standing and fostering goodwill. China aims to enhance its worldwide standing and position itself as a responsible and approachable force by integrating cultural diplomacy with economic and political strategies.

China's efforts to mediate disputes, coupled with its economic growth and cultural dissemination, have significantly shaped its international standing. In recent decades, China has transformed from a previously isolated and misunderstood nation into a global power with a growing reputation as a responsible international actor. By emphasizing dialogue rather than conflict and offering alternative resolutions to global challenges, China seeks to position itself as a responsible and productive participant in international diplomacy (Jaeho & Glosserman, 2010; Yizhou Wang, 2024).

The image of China, however, is ambiguous. While many developing countries in the Global South view it as an advocate for their interests, Western nations exhibit distrust due to China's affiliations with authoritarian regimes like Russia and Iran. Despite this, China's commitment to peace and stability (Desheng Cao, 2024), as demonstrated by its mediation efforts, has earned considerable global esteem, particularly in regions that perceive themselves as marginalized by Western foreign policies. Similarly, China's leadership in institutions like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has championed the Global South in shaping international diplomacy, offering mediation services during crises involving nations from these regions (Garlick & Fangxing Qin, 2023; Yau, 2024). This leadership is

essential to a holistic approach designed to create a more inclusive international system that reflects the values and aspirations of the Global South, rather than one controlled by the West.

China's incentives for participating in global mediation efforts are diverse, encompassing both economic interests and political and ideological objectives. By employing soft power, China has expanded its international influence, establishing itself as a pivotal global actor capable of influencing peace processes and promoting a more multipolar world order. China has demonstrated all of these in its attempt to mediate between conflicting parties in the Saudi Arabia-Iran dispute and the Russia-Ukraine war.

### **The Saudi-Iran Dispute and China's Mediation**

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is rooted in the Shia-Sunni divide, a theological and geopolitical rift that has provoked conflict and struggle in the Middle East (Wehrey & Friedman, 2016; van der Heiden & Krijger, 2018; Fraihat, 2020). The Shia-Sunni schism, arising after the death of Prophet Muhammad, has been a significant cause of strife, as both groups compete for religious authority and leadership within Islam. The ideological differences between the two nations are equally substantial. Saudi Arabia, a monarchic and conservative country, advocates a Sunni, Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, while Iran, under Ayatollah Khomeini, established a Shia theocratic government. Iran's revolutionary philosophy emphasizes the propagation of Shia Islam and opposition to Western influence, but Saudi Arabia's alliance with the United States has led to a complex and enduring rivalry.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 marked a significant shift in Saudi-Iranian ties, as the removal of the Shah of Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic under Khomeini challenged the conventional monarchy of Saudi Arabia (Entessar, 2019; Jalal, Khan & Pitafi, 2023). The recent leadership in Iran has advocated for an Islamic revolution beyond its borders, raising apprehensions in Saudi Arabia regarding the spread of revolutionary Shia Islam and the possible destabilization of the region. The Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988) exacerbated tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as Saudi supported Iraq under Saddam Hussein, concerned about the spread of Iran's revolutionary ideology. The conflict resulted in substantial losses with negligible territorial changes, exacerbating the hostility between the two nations.

The Syrian civil war (2011-2024) has escalated Saudi-Iranian competition, as Iran backed President Bashar al-Assad's regime to protect its strategic presence in Syria. Conversely, Saudi Arabia had sponsored several opposition factions, considering Assad's rule as a manifestation of Iranian hegemony in the Levant. The Yemen conflict has then worsened Saudi-Iran relations, as Saudi Arabia heads a coalition of Arab nations against Houthi rebels, who are reported to receive Iranian support. This proxy battle has generated a humanitarian calamity and exacerbated the hatred between the two countries (Nagi, 2023).



The Saudi-Iran rivalry has been a contentious issue, with various international organizations attempting to mediate the conflict. The United States, a major ally of Saudi Arabia, has endeavored to alleviate tensions through military alliances and diplomatic efforts. However, its close ties with Saudi Arabia have led to accusations of bias, particularly from Iran. The United Nations has attempted to mediate. However, these attempts have been ineffective due to competing geopolitical agendas with its resolutions. The European Union (EU) has also sporadically engaged in nuclear negotiations with Iran. Yet, the prevailing geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has undermined its efforts. This situation presents an opportunity for China to emerge as a potential mediator (Jash, 2023; Afterman & Urhová, 2024), facilitating agreements and providing a neutral platform for dialogue. This new phase of the conflict challenges traditional Western diplomatic approaches.

China has actively established itself as a neutral actor in the Middle East, a region largely dominated by the United States. This presents China with significant opportunities to mediate the situation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Two significant episodes highlight China's position as a mediator in the Saudi-Iranian agreement. First, the two nations reiterated their commitment to preserving national sovereignty, advancing non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, and advancing each other's core interests during President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia in December 2022. Second, Xi pledged China's support for Iran during Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Beijing in February 2023, vowing to protect its sovereignty and resist outside intervention. These exchanges hinted at the fundamental tenets of the Saudi-Iranian agreement, such as China's support for peaceful dispute resolution, Iran's desire to strengthen ties with its neighbors, and its interest in regional stability (Jash, 2023).

On 10 March 2023, China brokered a significant peace accord between Saudi Arabia and Iran, signifying a notable shift in Middle Eastern diplomacy (Azimi, 2023; Esfandiary & Jacobs, 2023; Jash, 2023). The accord, which led to both nations reopening embassies and restoring diplomatic relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2023), was viewed as a significant shift in regional balance. Following the deal, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that "This is a victory for dialogue, a victory for peace, offering major good news at a time of much turbulence in the world ... As a good-faith and reliable mediator, China has faithfully fulfilled its duties as the host" (Reuters, 2023). The timing of this accord was crucial since both governments were engaged in proxy hostilities in Yemen and Syria. China's role as a mediator was pivotal, as it was perceived as an unbiased intermediary, unburdened by the historical baggage of Western involvement. By cultivating economic links with Saudi Arabia and Iran, China promoted dialogue over discord, demonstrating its commitment to enhancing regional peace and stability.

China's mediation in the Saudi-Iran conflict was based on its foreign policy principles of non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and economic diplomacy (Hamzawy, 2023; Gallagher, Hamasaeed & Nada, 2023; Jash, 2023). Unlike the US, which has traditionally allied with Saudi Arabia, China has maintained a neutral stance in the region, allowing it to present itself as an effective mediator. China's

influence over both nations, primarily through trade and investment, provided leverage to initiate negotiations. China's chief diplomat Wang Yi said, "As a reliable friend of the two countries, China will continue to play a constructive role [in their renewed relations]" (The Global Times, 2023). China was essential for Saudi Arabia in establishing stable energy markets. Conversely, for Iran, China's support for its incorporation into the global economy through initiatives like the BRI was essential. By highlighting mutual benefits, such as economic cooperation and regional stability, China fostered a diplomatic-friendly environment.

Saudi Arabia and Iran received the peace agreement with measured optimism, acknowledging the prospective economic and security advantages of a stable relationship (International Crisis Group, 2024). The broader international community recognized China's increasing influence in the region, with nations such as Russia and Turkey endorsing its mediation initiatives. The United States and its allies expressed skepticism regarding China's expanding influence in Middle Eastern diplomacy, referencing strategic competition and longstanding partnerships with Saudi Arabia.

### **The Russia-Ukraine War**

The Russia-Ukraine war stems from Ukraine's independence and its evolving relationship with Russia (see D'Anieri, 2023; Mankoff, 2022). Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence, thereby terminating centuries of Russian and Soviet dominance. This split created a new geopolitical reality that Russia has never fully recognized. Russia regards Ukraine's independence as crucial to its broader geopolitical strategy and historical claims of dominance over former Soviet territories, considering Ukraine a vital buffer state between itself and the West (Mearsheimer, 2014).

The expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the 1990s intensified tensions in Ukraine, leading to the 2014 Euromaidan uprisings, which culminated in the removal of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych (Switzer, 2024). This event marked a pivotal moment as Ukraine increasingly pursued alignment with the EU and NATO. Russia perceived this change as a direct threat to its sphere of influence. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, an action that garnered extensive international condemnation and supported separatist groups in eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The current extensive confrontation between Russia and Ukraine started on 24 February 2022, when Russia launched a major invasion of Ukraine. Russia's persistent concerns about NATO expansion were exacerbated by the growing Western support for Ukraine in both military and political spheres. Russian President Vladimir Putin described the invasion as a "special military operation" (Osborn & Nikolskaya, 2022) aimed at denazifying and demilitarizing Ukraine. Nevertheless, these assertions have been widely rejected as justifications for imperial expansion.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has had significant global repercussions, including sanctions on Russia, disruptions in international energy markets, and concerns

about global food security (Xi-Yin Zhou et al., 2023; Mingsong Sun et al., 2024). Russia, a major global energy producer, has been significantly impacted by Western sanctions, resulting in increased oil prices and concerns over energy security. The conflict has undermined global food security, as Russia and Ukraine are major exporters of essential agricultural commodities. The Russian invasion and naval blockade of Ukrainian ports have severely hindered grain shipments, intensifying food prices and shortages in developing countries.

The war has altered geopolitical alliances and power structures, with the United States and European Union supporting Ukraine. Simultaneously, Russia seeks to strengthen its partnerships with China and other countries in the Global South. The battle has reinvigorated NATO and promoted increased military cooperation among member states. In the early stages of the crisis, Turkey played a pivotal role as a mediator, facilitating negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, which ultimately led to the establishment of a grain export agreement in 2022 (Wódka, 2023). Turkey's mediation efforts have faced considerable challenges due to the intransigence of both parties.

The United Nations has attempted to mediate by promoting an immediate ceasefire and creating humanitarian corridors for populations trapped in combat areas. Nevertheless, Russia's veto power in the Security Council and the lack of leverage over Moscow have obstructed the UN's actions. Multiple peace proposals from global powers have failed to progress, as Russia demands territorial concessions while Ukraine maintains its autonomy. The persistent conflict underscores the vital importance of international mediation, despite the uncertain prospects for achieving lasting peace. The war in Ukraine, like the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, significantly influences China's international affairs, particularly due to its primary alliance with Russia.

Despite China's favorable relations with Russia, its stance on the Russia-Ukraine situation has been so far neutral, advocating for a peaceful resolution and non-interference in domestic issues (Kozyrev, 2023; Yuliantoro & Bromokusumo, 2023). This position aligns with China's core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the imperative for stability in Europe, a vital region for Chinese trade and investment. Since the conflict began, China's relationship with Russia has become increasingly crucial. China provides vital economic assistance to Russia via trade and energy accords that mitigate the effects of Western sanctions. Nonetheless, China has demonstrated prudence in not overtly backing Russia's military actions, which could jeopardize its relations with Europe and other global powers.

China has maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with Ukraine and the West, abstaining from partnering with Russia in its dispute with NATO and the EU. Its burgeoning trade links with European nations and investments in Ukraine have sustained diplomatic communication. On 18 February 2023, speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Wang Yi states that "on the Ukraine issue, China's position boils down to supporting talks for peace" (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2025). In March 2023, China presented a 12-point peace proposal for Ukraine, promoting an immediate ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and the



resumption of peace talks (Bekkevold, 2023; Mathers, 2023; Parley Policy Initiative, 2023). President Xi has claimed that China's ideas as presented in the proposal are a "constructive" approach to resolving the situation. Still, he has also stated that "complex problems do not have simple solutions" (Al Jazeera, 2023). China's peace measures in Ukraine have generated a range of skepticism and support globally. Russia has provisionally recognized China's position as a mediator, although Ukraine and Western countries have expressed concerns about China's neutrality.

China's diplomatic evolution from a historically insular nation to a global power has been marked by strategic efforts to maintain neutrality, advocate for peaceful resolutions, and augment its influence through economic and political engagements. Through its mediation in the Middle East and involvement in the Russia-Ukraine issue, China has positioned itself as a crucial player in the quest for global stability, leveraging its growing economic power and diplomatic skills to shape international relations.

### **China's Mediation and Its Strategic Goals: Motivations for Mediation**

China's mediation efforts in international conflicts, particularly in energy-rich regions such as the Middle East and Central Asia, are driven by its economic interests (Reddy, 2023). The Middle East, with its substantial oil and natural gas reserves, is crucial to China's energy security in light of rising energy demands. The mediation efforts, illustrated by the 2023 peace accord between Saudi Arabia and Iran, aim to ensure stable oil supplies and strengthen economic partnerships. Resolving disputes among these states can prevent disruptions in oil supplies, thereby improving China's energy security. Its ambitious BRI projects also bolster China's commercial relationships in the region. A stable Middle East is essential for the development of the BRI, and China has a considerable interest in promoting peace in the region.

China's mediation efforts are also driven by political aims to enhance its geopolitical influence, particularly in regions traditionally controlled by Western powers (Legarda, 2018; Shinji, 2023). China's increasing involvement in Middle Eastern peace processes signifies a shift in regional dynamics, which the US previously dominated in conflict resolution. Through this initiative, China aims to supplant the United States as the primary mediator and foster improved relations with other countries. China aims to enhance its influence in Europe's global geopolitics by positioning itself as an alternative partner to the US and the EU. By resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict or fostering stability in other European regions, China seeks to enhance its position as a global diplomatic leader. China's political motivations for mediation align with its aspirations to influence international institutions and norms, thereby challenging the dominance of the US and the EU in shaping international peace processes. By implementing mediation activities, China might gain significant political influence within international institutions such as the UN and the G20.

Ultimately, China's international mediation aims to promote multipolarity, a global order characterized by the distribution of power among multiple international

entities, including itself (Eisenman & Heginbotham, 2019; Aluf, 2023; Tianyi Wu, 2023). This objective stands in opposition to the unipolar world that emerged after the Cold War, characterized by the significant influence of the US and its European allies. China's diplomatic strategy aims to subvert this order by positioning itself as a leader in peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Its role in fostering communication between Saudi Arabia and Iran, together with advocating for a peaceful conclusion to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, illustrates this ambition.

China seeks recognition as a responsible global power in promoting peace without resorting to military force or hegemonic dominance. In influencing global peace initiatives, China's challenges the traditional supremacy of the US and EU, advocating for a more inclusive and diverse diplomatic approach. Despite this, China's mediation strategy has elicited criticism and debate, particularly from Western nations apprehensive about the consequences of the country's ascendant influence.

### **Challenges and Criticisms of China's Role as a Mediator**

China's role as a mediator is complex (Chaziza, 2018), influenced by diverse biases and conflicting interests that impact its approach. The Russia-Ukraine issue raises questions about China's neutrality, as its diplomatic efforts could be viewed as biased if the settlement process favors Russian interests. China's economic interests in the Middle East, particularly in terms of energy resources and commercial partnerships, may influence its mediation tactics. Critics argue that China's desire to maintain strong connections with Saudi Arabia and Iran may lead it to prioritize economic advantages over achieving a fair resolution to regional conflicts.

China faces the challenge of being perceived as an impartial mediator in conflicts characterized by significant ideological divides. The Saudi-Iranian conflict, marked by contrasting political ideologies and religious affiliations, hinders the resolution process. China's policy, which emphasizes dialogue over action, may be regarded as insufficiently assertive or biased, particularly by entities associated with the US or other Western countries.

Western countries have expressed apprehension regarding China's long-term objectives as a mediator, questioning its commitment to peace and stability in contrast to its potential intention of enhancing geopolitical and economic dominance through mediation initiatives. This skepticism is particularly pronounced in the US, where there is a perception that China's actions are driven by self-interest rather than a commitment to global peace (Silver, et al., 2023; Andornino & Caffarena, 2024).

Humanitarian concerns endure regarding whether China's strategy favors peace over justice for affected populations, particularly in the Middle East, where conflicts often result in severe humanitarian crises. China's rise as a mediator is reshaping global diplomacy; however, it faces substantial challenges and dissent. Nonetheless, China's approach of directly addressing international conflicts has had profound implications for contemporary international relations.

## **Implication for International Relations: Shifting Power Dynamics in Global Diplomacy**

The global power balance is shifting, characterized by the diminishing influence of Western states, particularly the US and the EU, in certain areas of international diplomacy. This transition is chiefly due to China's increased engagement in global diplomacy, economic growth, assertive diplomacy, and peacekeeping efforts. China's mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, together with its involvement in the Russia-Ukraine issue, has enhanced its standing in the global arena (Hong Yu, 2024), challenging the West's conventional role as the primary mediator in international conflicts. This matter goes beyond simple rivalry for power and represents a broader ideological shift within the global framework. Western diplomacy often emphasizes democratic ideals, human rights, and intervention in conflict zones, while China's approach prioritizes sovereignty, non-interference, and negotiation. This strategy applies to various nations, particularly those in the Global South, which have historically opposed Western-led initiatives. As China assumes the role of mediator, Western governments must skillfully navigate the evolving diplomatic landscape, where their power is increasingly eclipsed by a rising global order characterized by a strengthened Chinese presence.

Although the United States and European Union have traditionally influenced global diplomacy, the progressive move towards China's approach has resulted in significant changes. The successful mediation by China of the 2023 Saudi-Iran peace pact indicates a substantial shift in geopolitical domains. Furthermore, the BRI has strengthened China's diplomatic influence, particularly in the Global South. China's alternative diplomatic paradigm—focusing on sovereignty, non-interference, and negotiation—contrasts sharply with the Western model that prioritizes democracy and human rights. This ideological transformation has significant ramifications for the global order. Global South nations, which have traditionally been hostile to or disadvantaged by Western-dominated norms, perceive China's model as more respectful of their sovereignty and growth trajectories, thereby cultivating a new coalition of diplomatic backing for Chinese initiatives (Reeves, 2025).

The rise of China as a mediator and alternative power broker is essential to its strategy of positioning itself as a global leader (Huotari, et al., 2017), offering alternatives to the traditional Western-dominated international system. China has strengthened its economic influence and positioned itself as an alternative political and diplomatic power broker. China's involvement in the 2023 Saudi-Iran peace accord marked a significant milestone in its diplomatic ascent. It positioned China as a neutral and constructive entity that provided a forum for negotiation, perceived as an alternative to the influence of the US and its allies.

China's role as a mediator exemplifies its growing ambition to shape global diplomacy, advocating for a multipolar world order where no single power, especially the US, dominates (Eisenman & Heginbotham, 2019). This shift in diplomatic procedures across global organizations may necessitate the United Nations and other international bodies to reassess their diplomatic strategy, particularly in areas where the US and EU have historically exerted considerable influence. China's

expanding economic and political clout may lead to a rearrangement of power within the UN, where its position as a permanent Security Council member could enable it to play a more substantial role in shaping global peace and security discussions.

China's growing economic and political prominence leads to shifting power relations within global governance frameworks (Beeson & Fujian Li, 2016). This could lead to changes or new alliances, thereby diminishing the conventional Western dominance in international security. Power relations have undergone significant transformation, affecting both concrete geopolitical results as well as the foundational concepts and institutions that govern global diplomacy. The emergence of China's alternative strategy signifies a substantial shift in influence from Western unipolar supremacy to a more complex, multipolar landscape (Runde & Hardman, 2024), characterized by diplomacy conducted through multiple perspectives and alliances.

### **Impact on Regional Alliances and Global Stability**

The peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran has a profound influence on the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East (Jash, 2023). The agreement's potential to reduce tensions may lead to significant changes in regional alliances and affect the broader geopolitical landscape. China's role in facilitating the peace agreement has substantial implications (Parsi & Aljabri, 2023). Initially, it may help stabilize the Middle East by reducing sectarian violence and fostering cooperation between two of the region's most powerful states. If successful, the deal might promote a more collaborative environment, enhancing economic and security cooperation that may advantage the entire region. Conversely, the accord also has the potential to reorganize existing regional alliances. Countries like the US, a traditional ally of Saudi Arabia, and Israel, which views Iran as a primary adversary, had approached China's involvement with skepticism. This incident could lead to a reconfiguration of alliances in the Middle East as countries reassess their relationships with China, the US, and one another.

China's engagement in the Middle East is transforming the region's geopolitical landscape (Eslami & Papageorgiou, 2023; Yasmin, Gill & Mustafa, 2024), especially concerning its relationships with significant nations such as Russia, the US, and Israel. Although Russia and China have engaged in diplomatic cooperation on various matters, a more assertive China may constrain Russia's capacity to assert its influence in the region, especially in domains of mutual interest.

China's efforts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine have significant global implications, particularly for energy markets and security frameworks (Mingsong Sun, 2024). The conflict in Ukraine has had a profound impact on international energy markets, particularly regarding oil and gas supplies. Sanctions have significantly impacted Russia's trade relations with Europe, while China has strengthened its ties with Russia, ensuring a stable flow of energy resources from Russia to China. Should China effectively facilitate a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine, it may alleviate tensions in Europe and pave the way for

enhanced collaboration between Russia and the West, especially in the energy sector. China's policy may transform global energy supply chains and mitigate volatility. China's mediation initiatives may indicate a transformation in global security frameworks since its increasing participation in peace processes could diminish the West's authority in determining future security structures. This transition challenges conventional Western-dominated security frameworks and signals a shift towards more multipolar security configurations.

### **Future Prospects: China's Role in Global Peace and Security**

China has been increasingly asserting its influence in global diplomacy and international mediation. Historically noted for its non-interventionist stance and emphasis on sovereignty, China has embraced a more assertive role in global matters, participating in economic projects and mediating international crises (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023). This transformation is anticipated to continue as China seeks to enhance its influence and reshape its role within the global framework.

A significant reason for China's increased involvement in global diplomacy is its growing economic might. As the world's second-largest economy, China has the resources and influence to engage in diplomatic attempts across several nations, especially in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. China's involvement in conflict settlement has become increasingly significant, particularly in situations where it can utilize its economic and political influence. Besides the Saudi-Iran and Russia-Ukraine conflicts, China has endeavored in peace negotiations over the North Korean crisis and the peace accord between the Taliban and the Afghan government, in conjunction with other regional powers (Rubin, 2024). China's prospects for success in future crises will hinge on the specific context of the conflict, its capacity to maintain a nuanced equilibrium between economic interests and diplomatic impartiality, and the perception of its diplomatic interventions as authentic efforts to foster peace rather than as instruments for furthering its geopolitical aspirations.

China's growing influence in international peace negotiations is anticipated to provoke varied responses from global powers, particularly the US and its allies. Western powers have historically harbored doubts about China's objectives and viewed its rising influence as a threat to the existing international order. China's growing influence in global diplomacy can be perceived as both an opportunity and a threat, depending on the particular issue at hand (Sullivan & Brands, 2020; Tench, 2023).

The United States is expected to maintain skepticism towards China's growing diplomatic influence, cautiously evaluating its mediation efforts, particularly in sensitive geopolitical issues. China's increasing involvement in the Middle East and its potential role in shaping peace agreements, including those concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iran nuclear deal, may provoke the US, which may fear that China will leverage its mediating role to further its interests or destabilize the Western-centric order. There is an opportunity for collaboration, as China's diplomatic efforts align with Western aims, particularly in promoting global



security and economic development. China's expanding influence on global and regional institutions will increasingly shape its diplomatic trajectory in the future. China's growing influence in these organizations may challenge Western hegemony, leading to changes in global governance structures (Sutter, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

China's growing influence in global diplomacy is evident through its involvement in major international peace initiatives, such as the Saudi-Iran peace accord and its role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These instances exemplify China's evolving diplomatic strategy and increasing influence in managing global crises, challenging traditional Western-led approaches.

The Saudi-Iran peace deal represented a significant development in Middle Eastern geopolitics, facilitated by China, resulting in a historic agreement to restore diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This mediation by China affirmed its commitment to peacebuilding and highlighted its growing significance as a global mediator skilled in navigating complex regional dynamics. In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China has sought to position itself as a peace broker, urging discussion and calm while maintaining its relations with Russia and advocating for global stability. These diplomatic measures demonstrate China's ambition to shape the discourse on international peace initiatives and enhance its stature during critical geopolitical crises.

China's mediation approach demonstrates its extensive global ambitions, signifying its desire to transform the international system. Historically, global diplomacy and peacebuilding efforts have been orchestrated mainly by Western powers, particularly the United States and European nations. China's increasing involvement in these processes indicates a shift toward a more multipolar world, characterized by a more equitable distribution of power across diverse domains.

Mediation in China's terms is distinctive in several respects. It emphasizes pragmatism over ideology, focusing on economic and political stability rather than promoting a particular set of values. This technique is evident in its efforts to mediate crises, such as the Saudi-Iran accord, where China's economic ties with both nations enabled it to promote peace without imposing ideological conditions. Furthermore, China's commitment to preserving national sovereignty allows it to engage with a diverse range of nations, including those with differing political systems or human rights records.

China's growing diplomatic influence is expected to have a profound impact on future global crises and peacebuilding efforts. The country's expanding influence in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia will significantly alter the global political landscape. In the long term, China's increasing engagement in peacebuilding may yield a more diverse and inclusive approach to managing international crises.

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