

# MULTI-DOMAIN DIPLOMACY MADE IN CHINA: AN OPPORTUNITY TO RISE IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

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### MULTI-DOMAIN DIPLOMACY MADE IN CHINA: AN OPPORTUNITY TO RISE IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

As an era marked by increasing competition, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has shown how the global structure is being transformed. In the middle of this transformation, China appears with its meteoric rise. Gradually emerging from an economic regional actor to a global influence, China's strategy ranges among many domains. During the past few decades, China consciously deliberated significant efforts to enhance its global position. The Chinese foreign policy has been expanding by moving from simple trade agreements toward futuristic multi-domain diplomacy. Not only participating in the international system but rather pointing at its structure. The concept of multi-domain diplomacy refers to how China simultaneously tends to use different domains such as technology, economy, and diplomacy to construct a long-lasting global position.

This analysis adopts the nature of the contemporary Chinese diplomacy, seeking to reveal its multifaceted essence, specifically how Beijing amalgamates separate sectors such as space, conflicts, and high-tech into a single purpose. The diversity of these sectors enables this analysis to show how the Chinese multi-domain diplomacy moves from direct military confrontation to constructing a long-term strategy. Necessarily, the main question motivating this analysis is how China's strategy of expanding its diplomacy across diverse domains enhances its global presence and potential power within a fragmented world? That is to say, each domain is not isolated but rather contributing to a unified strategy.

The logic of this topic stems from the growing complexity of dynamics in international relations. As power is no longer measured only by GDP or military capabilities, it becomes necessary to look at power's other dimensions. The way China is doing this by projecting its power from most of its angles, such as capabilities in space, control over the global semiconductor supply chain, and the ability to act as a 'neutral' mediator in conflictual regions. The understanding of the Chinese vision towards the world allows the analysis to move beyond descriptive aspects. As prevailing forms of diplomacy are being questioned, analyzing the new Chinese 'multi-domain' diplomacy model becomes necessary for predicting the fate of its position in a fragmented world. Consequently, the following sections should be read as an interconnected dynamic that manifests a unified logic.

This analysis purports to synthesize the Chinese strategic repositioning by organizing it into four main sections. Firstly, examining the Chinese global engagement particularly on space diplomacy. Secondly, analyzing China's balancing Act towards regional conflicts. Thirdly, examining the Chinese strategic expansion in MENA. Finally, examining the competitive dynamics in emerging technologies.

#### Space Diplomacy

China sought to actively utilize space as an ideal high ground to start projecting power globally and gradually construct an independent structure from the West, making space power projection one of the important pillars of China's multidimensional strategy. In "Chapter 7: The Final Frontier: China's Ambitions to Dominate Space," the U.S.-China Economic

and Security Review Commission explains how Beijing is implementing a “whole-of-government” campaign to distinguish its space power relevance in the world. China views space superiority as an important factor for overcoming the “informationized” conflicts. In order to achieve this, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has considerably worked on enlarging its track by launching over 1,000 satellites for global force projection along with evolving counterspace weapons. As it is highlighted in the review *“China’s civil space ambitions go beyond science and technology and are a means to gain long-term strategic advantage. In addition to accumulating an impressive list of achievements, China has articulated ambitious plans to establish itself as the global leader in space technology and exploration, sought to reshape rules regarding international space governance, and aimed to position itself as a strategic rival to the United States”* (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2025, pp. 402-403). In this sense, it can possibly be understood why China seeks to influence the “global commons” by integrating its own norms. Its technological dependencies with partner countries, particularly in the Global South shows that China is motivated to expand its contributions to the emerging standards in satellite and space governance.

China’s strategic repositioning in the world stems primarily from its strong opposition toward the U.S “hegemony”. This motivation is seen through cooperation with Russia. Although China seeks to mark its space power independently, cooperation with Russia at this stage are still needed. In the article “The Limits of the China–Russia Strategic Partnership in Military Space Cooperation” by Tahir Azad,

the nature of the cooperation between the two countries is shown. The Sino-Russian cooperation is motivated by a shared refusal of U.S domination, yet it is defined by “selective integration”. This partnership is reinforced by collaborative pillars like the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) and the integration of the BeiDou and GLONASS navigation systems. This cooperation seems real and practical in some areas, but both countries hold back in others especially when it comes to sensitive military domains. As emphasized by Azad, *“In Chinese strategic thought, space is becoming more and more important for “informatized” and “intelligentized” warfare, where strong networks, remote sensing, and positioning services give you a big edge. Working with Russia can be helpful, but China still values independence, redundancy, and variety more”* (Tahir Azad, 2026, pp. 3). In this context, it can be said that China seeks a strategical and useful cooperation that functions more as a political signal of alignment. This type of cooperation builds a powerful diplomatic counterweight to Western-led coalitions like the Artemis Accords. This logic reveals the strategy that China follows to mark its presence. This presence is marked carefully, remaining cautious with sanctioned Russia and avoiding overcommitment in order to preserve its image as a potential responsible and independent global actor. This strategy feeds the integration of the Chinese multi-domain diplomatic approach that seeks ways to project power and shape global norms.

### **China’s Balancing Act Toward Regional Wars**

China is being instrumentally neutral while being involved in contemporary regional

conflicts. This neutrality operates more as a strategic tool than an independent principle. The fragmented international system gives an opportunity to Beijing to maintain its relations while remaining politically neutral. This dynamic can be seen especially through how China adopts strategic behavior particularly in the Russian-Ukraine and the U.S.-Iran tensions and uses neutrality as a component of its multi-domain diplomacy.

China's involvement in the Russian Ukrainian war shows a cautious approach framed by strategic considerations. Through the 12-point peace proposal and the deployment of special envoys, China sought to project an image devoted to conflict resolution but through clear advisability. As it is highlighted by Nur Rachmat Yuliantoro in the article "China's Role in International Conflict Mediation and Its Implications for International Relations", China keeps advocating for peaceful resolution without necessarily being involved in internal issues. "*China has demonstrated prudence in not overtly backing Russia's military actions, which could jeopardize its relations with Europe and other global powers*" (Nur Rachmat Yuliantoro, 2025, pp. 8). In this context, the Chinese diplomatic behavior can be understood by preserving its benefits as Europe is a crucial region for trading and investing while Russia is a crucial partner for strategic cooperation ultimately drawing attention to its diplomatic ability as a strategically balanced conflict mediator. This stresses that China's involvement in regional wars is carefully constructed in order to balance its repositioning. China's mediation in conflicts reveals somehow its attempt to redefine influence beyond the western ways. Perhaps China's role is less about resolving the Russian-Ukraine war but

more about positioning itself within it. As emphasized by Nur Rachmat Yuliantoro "*The nation's expanding diplomatic influence, facilitating mediation in international conflicts, positions it as an attractive alternative for Western countries*" (pp. 4). This duality shows how neutrality, in the Chinese context, functions as a strategy rather than an absolute idea.

Meanwhile, China's response to the failure of the U.S.-Iran negotiations in April 2026 shows how diplomatic mediation is employed to influence the global perceptions of leadership. China stepped directly into the void left by the collapse of direct talks in Washington and Islamabad seeking to appear as a systematic alternative to Western interventionism. As noted in the article "China's position after the failure of the U.S.-Iran negotiations", by Nadia Helmi "*China positions itself as a more stable and rational international partner compared to the United States, with Chinese President Xi Jinping seeking to play the role of a peaceful mediator to fill the diplomatic vacuum left by the failure of Washington's talks with Tehran*" (pp. 1). In this context, the Chinese peace promoting profile is strengthened by the Five-Point initiative, that focuses on protecting energy infrastructure, by such means serving its material interests and appealing to a concerned global audience. China effectively transforms a crisis into an opportunity to demonstrate its viable diplomacy by asserting that stability can be approached through a shared future principle rather than maximizing pressure. This complements China's broader multi-domain strategy that seeks to maintain geopolitical alignments and appear as an alternative global leader.

## The Chinese expansion in Middle East and North Africa

The Chinese expansion in the Middle East evolved increasingly over the last decade. In the China's Arab Policy Paper (2016), which is the first official comprehensive document issued by the Chinese government, China introduced and defined its relations with the Arab world. Apart from the fact that this document seeks to deepen the partnership with the Arab nations in different sectors, it outlines the roadmap that China potentially prefers to construct in the Middle East. As it is highlighted in the Policy Paper "إن الصين التي تعتبر أكبر بلد نام في العالم، تعمل بكل طاقتها على تحقيق "الهدفين المنويين" وبناء دولة اشتراكية حديثة غنية وقوية وديمقراطية ومتحضرة ومتناغمة وتحقيق الحلم الصيني للنهضة العظيمة للأمة الصينية. ستواصل الصين رفع راية السلام والتنمية والتعاون والكسب المشترك، وتسلك طريق التنمية السلمية بلا تغيير، وتلتزم باستراتيجية الانفتاح القائمة على المنفعة المتبادلة والكسب المشترك بلا تزعر، سعياً إلى إقامة علاقات دولية من نوع جديد تتمركز على التعاون والكسب المشترك" (China, regarded as the largest developing country in the world, is exerting every effort to achieve the "Two Centenary Goals" and to build a modern socialist state that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious, as well as to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. China will continue to uphold the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, steadfastly pursue the path of peaceful development, and remain committed to a strategy of opening up based on mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, with the aim of fostering a new type of international relations centered on cooperation and mutual gain) (2016, pp. 2).

In this context, there is a clear emphasis on the "Chinese Dream" and the rebirth of the

Chinese nation. A nation that is willing to open up by promoting strategies on cooperation with the Middle East and ensuring common benefits under a "win-win" dynamic. Drawing from this policy paper is quite crucial at this stage to understand how the Middle East became gradually a central hub for the Chinese global strategy over the last years. In 2024, around \$39 billion was allocated to the region in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, followed by \$19.4 billion in the first half of 2025 alone. This expansion reflects the shift from transactional engagement to a more systematic approach on domains like interconnected energy, infrastructure, and financial agreements. This integration of different sectors into a single dynamic allows China to extend its influence well beyond traditional resource extraction. As the Chinese strategy of infrastructural power grows in the Middle East, China transitions from being only a commercial partner to an unignorable actor in the region's stability. Long-term pacts with countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq along with huge transport and ports projects across countries like UAE, Oman, and Iran, allow China to translate its physical construction into a solid diplomatic leverage.

In North Africa, the relationship is defined by structural asymmetry. China has become a requisite partner for the region's development, yet the region remains secondary compared to the global trade and investments. As highlighted by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) "Il existe une substantifique asymétrie dans les rapports entre l'Afrique du Nord comme région méditerranéenne et la Chine en tant que nation." (There is a substantial asymmetry in the relationship between North Africa as a Mediterranean

region and China as a nation). The cruciality of the economic power of China is largely seen in North Africa; however, the region's utility is reciprocated in a geopolitical purpose. North African states contribute indirectly to the construction of the Chinese multi-domain diplomacy dynamic especially through voting in international institutions such as the United Nations. In this context, China is able to double use its economic and investment weight into gaining global credibility too. Combining both, fundamentally grows China's gain not only "from" and "to" North Africa as a region but making use of a narrative that competes with Western dominance in an increasingly fragmented order. In the meanwhile, instability in the Middle East, specifically the recent disruptions affecting the Strait of Hormuz, has shown how China is ready to diversify its route strategy for energy imports. Algeria, for instance, emerges as a strategic partner with its hydrocarbon production especially between Sonatrach and Sinopec in oil, gas, and LNG sectors. The South China Morning Post opinion article on China's growing North African presence, that the Chinese expansion in North Africa is a complementary corridor for the reconfiguration of its economic geography. In this context, it is seen that China moves through a dual strategy especially in case of regional crisis. The Middle East engagements are maintained but simultaneously China has its "plan B" in North Africa. Even amid times of instability, the Chinese continuity in energy operations and profit generation remains essential for its long-term global positioning. This strategy explains how Beijing finds ways to keep flexible in transforming its North African partnerships into instruments of global power projection and contributing to the use of multi-domain diplomacy.

### Competition in Emerging Technologies

Technological sovereignty has become an essential instrument that China relies on in its foreign policy. China actively seeks to transform competition in emerging technologies into a way of strategic diplomacy. The semiconductor sector shows how China needs advanced chips and cannot deny the pivotal role that Taiwan plays in the global production specifically through TSMC. This dynamic transformed supply chains into a structure motivated by rivalry with the U.S. As shown in analyses by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Sino-American competitiveness is getting intensified as the control over semiconductor manufacturing is linked to both economic and military resilience. China, in response, focuses on pursuing a strategy highlighting its self-reliance. Initiatives such as *Made in China 2025* shows how the country gives priority to local innovation especially in AI, semiconductors, and telecommunications. The strong drive for a technological autonomous future as China prospers to gradually build and achieve, does not necessarily stem only from a defensive approach but also from an integrative and influential capacity. China integrates its technology into its diplomatic strategy such as in what scholars describe as a "Digital Silk Road", a digital extensive approach of the Belt and Road Initiative.

As highlighted by the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), China is seeking to exporting technical standards and influencing the architecture of emerging digital technologies, through global 5G infrastructure, AI, and surveillance technology. In this context, technological development can be seen as a way of "informatized diplomacy" by which the

Chinese standards and infrastructure influence are integrated. Eventually, the technological sovereignty of China works from both sides, as a shield against Western containment and a diplomatic “soft-hard” tool for power projection.

## Conclusion

As the geopolitical rivalries, technological competition, and regional instability, keep contributing to the fragmentation of the global order, China’s rise appear to be a careful articulation toward a transformative era showing how power can be diversely exercised. Throughout the analysis, it became quite visible that China seeks to combine isolated spheres by constructing multi-layered dynamic that serve a unified purpose. Combining space capabilities, regional expansion, technological advancement, and conflict mediation, allows China to construct a long-term path toward positioning itself globally. In this sense, China’s multi-domain diplomacy shows a clear reflection of moving beyond traditional forms of influence. China builds a more sophisticated model that goes hand in hand with its global ambition. In space, Beijing does not solely seek technological development for its sake but also magnets the ability to influence the governance of the global commons. In conflicts, the instrumental neutrality of China shows how it is able to preserve its strategic relations while pushing for appearing as a legitimate diplomatic alternative to the West. Across the Middle East and North Africa, the long-term political leverage is being reflected through China’s economic engagement and infrastructural expansion along benefiting from the gaps left by the fragmentation of the regional order. Meanwhile, emerging technologies show

how China’s dependency can be transformed to a way of self-reliance and projecting its standards beyond its borders such as the Digital Silk Road initiative.

What emerges from the Chinese strategy is not simply the accumulation of power itself, but the way of its integration. As each domain reinforces the other, China uses fragmentation not as a constraint, but as an opportunity to rise. The ability to build interconnected domains becomes an advantage, especially in a world where power is increasingly dispersed. However, as the Chinese strategy aims for an alternative global power, it also reveals inherent tensions. For instance, China’s pursuit that advocates for a full independent global capacity coexist with dependencies particularly in critical technologies. China’s neutrality in conflicts, while being strategic, remains unclear especially regarding its long-term goals. In a similar way, the Chinese expansion in MENA seems to be regenerating both cooperation and resistance. As it depends on how local actors perceive China’s role on the long-term. These limitations are not an undermining of China’s strategy, but rather highlighting the complexity carried out in order to sustain such approach in an evolvingly fragmented world.

Ultimately, the Chinese multi-domain diplomacy does not solely aim for increasing its presence, but to gradually integrate its norms that defines it. By combining economic power, technological development, and diplomatic flexibility, China is able to position itself not only as a member participating in global affairs, but as an alternative actor contributing to the redefinition of rules. In this matter, the fragmentation of the world does not limit China’s rise; it gives conditions through

which its strategic multi-domain diplomacy can consolidate its future global positioning.

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+90 216 310 30 40

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+90 216 310 30 50

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Merdivenköy Mah. Nur Sok. Business İstanbul  
A Blok Kat:12 No:115, Kadıköy/İstanbul

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Malek Boughzala** is a fourth-year student at Beykoz University, studying Political Science and International relations in English. Her main research areas include migration and human security. She is currently an intern at DİPAM, where she specializes in migration dynamics.