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**FORMATION OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER:  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

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**The “Arab Spring” as a New Challenge and a New Opportunity  
for China’s Middle East Policy**

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*As a result of the collapse of the USSR, the termination of the bipolar world order led to new geopolitical realities in a number of regions, creating competitive possibilities for countries that have aspirations for influence and hegemony in the new world order. Especially during recent decades, the relations with Middle Eastern (ME) and North African (NA) countries, based on non-intervention, have gained strategic importance for China, the undisputed leader among those countries. The article views the influence of the challenges and possibilities – caused by the “Arab Spring” – on China’s policy in the region.*

**Keywords**

China, Middle East, the “Arab Spring”, new world order, new policy

**China’s Place in the Arab World before the launch of the “Arab Spring”**

The United States (US) is Beijing’s main competitor in the region, which in itself, conditions the content and nature of the Middle East policy of the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC). The problem is that, notwithstanding the efforts towards differentiating energy import sources, 50% of the PRC’s oil demand required for its rapidly growing economy is imported from the ME (60% of which is from Iran and Saudi Arabia)<sup>1</sup>. According to the International Energy Agency, in 2015, instead of the current 50%, the PRC will import 70% of its oil demand from other

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<sup>1</sup> **Li Weijian**, Energy of the Middle East and Peaceful Rise, International Energy Security and Cooperation, SIIS, Shanghai, June 24-25, 2004, p. 121; **Bhadrakumar M.K.**, China Becomes Increasingly Involved in the Middle East, Power and Interest News Report, (10.03.2006), Available at: [http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view\\_report&report\\_id=455&language\\_id=1](http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=455&language_id=1)

countries, from the ME in particular<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, ensuring a strong position of Chinese oil companies in the energy sector of the ME countries is the priority of the PRC Middle East policy<sup>3</sup>.

However, the United States and other Western countries view China's "huge energy demand" as a threat to the stability of global energy markets and to the global geopolitical oil and gas balance, i.e., to vital interests of countries consuming a large amount of energy<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, China's dynamic economic growth is considered a cause of rising oil prices, the escalating struggle for energy resources, environmental pollution and global warming<sup>5</sup>.

It should be noted that China is the only permanent UN Security Council (UNSC) member to have close partnership relations with both the US' traditional partners in the ME – moderate Arab administration Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman and other countries on the one hand – and on the other hand, with countries having "difficult relations" with Washington, such as Syria, Sudan, Libya, Iraq and Iran<sup>6</sup>. Beijing has energy and trade-economic interests also in the Arab countries of NA<sup>7</sup>. The close political, economic, scientific, cultural, and technological – especially in the energy sector – cooperation established between the PRC and those countries contributes to the expansion of PRC presence and influence in a region of strategic importance to it<sup>8</sup>.

A significant number of the ME countries, both the US' allies and those having "difficult relations" with it, view China as a factor countervailing Washington's influence in the region. Along with Beijing, the latter share a common desire to limit the US' global hegemony and the

<sup>2</sup> **Lee Hudson Teslik**, What are the Implications of a Reemerging "Silk Road"? The Council On Foreign Relations, A, 04.06.2008. Available at:

<http://www.cfr.org/publication/16398/>

<sup>3</sup> **Blumenthal D.**, Providing Arms China and the Middle East, *The Middle East Quarterly*, 2005, XII, 2, Spring. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/article/695>

<sup>4</sup> **Zhao Hongtu**, New Features of Int'l Energy Security Situation, *Contemporary International Relations, Beijing*, 2005, 15, 7, pp. 23-35.

<sup>5</sup> **Ma Zhengang**, China's Responsibility and the "China Responsibility" Theory, *China International Studies*, 2007, Summer, pp. 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> **Guang Pan**, China's Success in the Middle East, *The Middle East Quarterly*, 1997, 4. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/373/chinas-success-in-the-middle-east>

<sup>7</sup> **Shinn David H.**, North African Revolutions and Protests Challenge Chinese Diplomacy, China Brief, Vol. XI, Issue 6, The Jamestown Foundation, 08.04.2011, p. 2, Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb\\_11\\_6\\_01.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb_11_6_01.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> **Lei Wu and Youyong Wang**, Comparative Analysis of China's Energy Activities in the Middle East and Africa, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Shanghai International Studies University, 2009, 3, 1, pp. 50-61. Available at: <http://mideast.shisu.edu.cn/picture/article/33/b7/b8/aca1fbd24175a68760eeb598408c/0252f54e-4ffc-4acd-8248-ebbb1b6ec13e.pdf>

Western influence in their internal affairs especially in issues such as allegations of human rights violations<sup>9</sup>. Beijing is ready to support the processes concerning the liberalisation of the economies of those countries, enabling the latter to avoid US pressure towards performing political reforms<sup>10</sup>. Beijing shares with ME countries the view that any democratisation and reforms of the Arab world should be on its own initiative, and the stance of Arab administrations to perform based on the Islamic value system, realities and national interests<sup>11</sup>.

The PRC seeks to develop relations with the region in both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic formats, cooperating with Arab countries in the framework of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum<sup>12</sup>, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. China develops stable bilateral relationships not only with countries of strategic importance to the region, but also with those of no energy or strategic importance to China. Beijing strives to as much as possible expand its economic presence in the ME through the development of commercial ties with the countries in the region. China is not only interested in making huge investments in ME countries – moreover, without political preconditions – but also encourages capital investments in its own economy by Middle Eastern – especially by Arab – countries.

Beijing is gradually expanding its abilities not only to strengthen its Middle East policy, but also in the issue of choosing its means of impact on the political processes in the region. Since the early 2000s, China has established close links with the leading ME countries – mainly for the purpose of achieving its long-term geopolitical ambitions<sup>13</sup>.

The PRC has achieved such political and economic success with minimal resources, meanwhile refraining from high rhetoric and demonstrative activities. In their initial assessments, Chinese experts attributed the causes of the events in NA and the ME since the start of 2011

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<sup>9</sup> The Sino-Saudi Energy Rapprochement: Implications for US National Security, The Gracia Group, New York, 2002, p. 2. Available at:

<http://large.stanford.edu/publications/coal/references/baker/testimony/docs/SinoSaudiStudyFinal.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> **Calabrese J.**, Saudi Arabia and China Extended Ties Beyond Oil, China Brief, Vol.: 5, Issue 20, The Jamestown Foundation, 31.12.2005, p. 3. Available at:

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=3895&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=195&no\\_cache=1#.UbmYDthtbXQ](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=3895&tx_ttnews[backPid]=195&no_cache=1#.UbmYDthtbXQ)

<sup>11</sup> **Yao Kuangyi**, Arab Countries; Reform and Development of China-Arab Relations, China International Studies, CIIS, Beijing, Winter 2005, pp. 90-92.

<sup>12</sup> **Yao Kuangyi**, ..., p. 103:

<sup>13</sup> **Mordechai Chazisa**, The Arab Spring: Implications for Chinese Policy, The Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center, 04.08.2013, p. 74.

Available at: <http://www.gloria-center.org/2013/08/the-arab-spring-implications-for-china-policy/>

mainly to the NA and ME political systems and social contradictions, as well as to the hard economic and employment situation, cultural and religious issues, foreign interference and other factors. According to Chinese experts, that “explosion”, along with long-accumulated problems, disclosed the trends and inevitability of the development model transformation in the region<sup>14</sup>.

China faced rapidly changing developments and was therefore forced to rethink its foreign policy. Still, Beijing was concerned about not only problematic prospects of its relations with those countries, but also the infectious reflection of Middle Eastern developments in its own country<sup>15</sup>. Beijing feared that through the international community, the possibility of intervention – formulated as humanitarian in the Arab countries – would turn into a precedent to interfere with China’s internal affairs<sup>16</sup>. For that reason, Beijing’s reaction to the events had two components: immediate measures were taken to prevent possible developments within China and to ensure internal stability and security, as well as towards saving its growing economic and political interests in the Arab world and the reduction of possible economic losses of the PRC<sup>17</sup>.

In February, 2011, during his meeting with provincial and ministerial-level officials, the PRC President Hu Jintao demanded to solve “the existing problems (connected with the rising prices of housing taxes, food and energy), which may endanger the harmony and stability of society,” to deliver more qualified social services to the people and to improve the information management of the Internet “in order to guide public opinion”<sup>18</sup>. The problem was that through the Internet, the residents of the country were

<sup>14</sup>Влияние беспорядков в ближневосточном регионе на Китай, (04.03.2011). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31520/7308133.html>

<sup>15</sup> **Parello-Plesner J.**, China and the Arab Spring: External and Internal Consequences and Implications for EU-China Cooperation, Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale, (ISPI), Analysis, No. 53, (May 2011), p. 1. Available at: [http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis\\_53\\_2011.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis_53_2011.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> **Kandil A.**, China and the “Arab Spring”: A New Player in the Middle East? Brief N. 47, European Institute of the Mediterranean, (05.07.2012), p. 1. Available at: <http://www.euromesco.net/images/briefs/euromescobrief47.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> **Jing-Dong Yuan**, The Arab Spring and China’s Evolving Middle East Policy, Arab Spring, Global Repercussions, *World Politics Review*, 20.12.2011, p. 8. [http://www.relooney.info/SI\\_FAO-Africa-2012/Africa\\_7.pdf](http://www.relooney.info/SI_FAO-Africa-2012/Africa_7.pdf); **Baker R.**, Dispatch: Middle East Unrest and China’s Resource Interests, Stratfor, (23.02.2011). <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20110223-dispatch-middle-east-unrest-and-chinas-resource-interests#axzz2VYX7rMnB>

<sup>18</sup> China Tries to Stamp out 'Jasmine Revolution', *The Washington Post*, (20.02.2011). Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/feb/20/china-tries-stamp-out-jasmine-revolution/>

called to realise the “Jasmine revolution,” demanding of the authorities requirements for “food, housing, labor, justice, freedom, democracy, political reform, multi-party system and others”<sup>19</sup>.

In February, the Chinese law enforcement officials had to disperse unauthorised protests in over a dozen Chinese cities – including Shanghai and Beijing – during which more than a hundred activists were arrested. The authorities restricted the news flow regarding street protests from countries massively beset by complaints<sup>20</sup>. Undoubtedly, there were many commonalities between the complaints in the abovementioned countries and those made by Chinese protesters, but Beijing managed to set strict control over the media, the Internet and other forums, which created difficulties in organising mass demonstrations<sup>21</sup>.

Obviously urging the masses not to succumb to the provocations of the West, renowned Chinese research centres came up with famous “warnings concerning Western conspiracy aimed to weaken developing China by instituting Washington’s strategic levers – value system and soft power”.

Indeed, in NA and the ME, the protests and revolutions also became a serious challenge to China’s foreign policy, which was based on the principle of non-intervention<sup>22</sup>. Beijing considers that principle the cornerstone of its foreign policy (not only in the ME), considering it a major warranty of regional and global stability, at the same time keeping in mind its claims on Taiwan and Tibet-related issues regarding “non-intervention in China’s internal affairs”<sup>23</sup>.

That is why, in the beginning of the “Arab Spring”, Beijing pursued its traditional “sit and wait” strategy, seeking to avoid any assessment as much as possible, and confined itself to only calling conflicting parties to sign a treaty and to restore peace. Beijing preferred to stay away from any active participation in the ME reorganisation process and from the possibility of direct confrontation with the US. Meanwhile, Beijing’s initial passivity

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<sup>19</sup> **Richmond J.**, Dispatch: China’s ‘Jasmine’ Rallies, Stratfor. Available at: <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/20110228-dispatch-chinas-jasmine-rallies>

<sup>20</sup> **Parello-Plesner J., ...**, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> **Jing-Dong Yuan**, ...

<sup>22</sup> African Revolutions Challenge Chinese Diplomacy, *Intelligence Quarterly*, (11.04.2011). Available at: <http://www.intelligencequarterly.com/2011/04/north-african-revolutions-challenge-chinese-diplomacy/>

<sup>23</sup> **Пахомова М.**, КНР: к вопросу о «политике невмешательства во внутренние дела», Политбюро. Available at: <http://www.inomnie.ru/debate/11903/>

was due to both the region's remoteness and Beijing's insufficient potential to influence current processes<sup>24</sup>.

To Beijing, ME and NA events simultaneously became both a challenge and an opportunity in terms of maintaining and strengthening its position in the region.

### **China's Response to the Launch of the "Arab Spring"**

At the beginning of the "**Tunisian Spring**", Beijing, unlike the West, was mostly reluctant to make any interpretation or assessment. Moreover, during the first period of the unrest, the problem did not receive special attention, partly due to the lack of a clear understanding of the developments in the country.

After Ben Ali left Tunisia, Beijing officially announced that "Tunisia is a friend of China. China is concerned about the events in Tunisia and hopes that stability will be restored in the country as soon as possible."<sup>25</sup> In early March, China's deputy foreign minister arrived in Tunisia for the purpose of establishing and strengthening cooperation with the new government<sup>26</sup>. Beijing officially released statements of respect for the Tunisian people's choice, developing traditional friendly relations with Tunisia, as well as statements regarding the intent to provide 6 million USD non-refundable donations for the purpose of Tunisia's further development<sup>27</sup>.

The reaction was adequate and quite favourable for China. In early June, 2012, during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, the Tunisian prime minister noted that in the new international situation, Tunisia puts much more importance on China's role and the strategic, mutually beneficial, and "highly complementary" cooperation between the two countries, at the same time promising to create a favourable environment in Tunisia for Chinese companies' investments<sup>28</sup>.

As for Beijing's stance on the "**Egyptian Spring**", before the coup carried out by the Egyptian opposition, the Chinese press criticised the Egyptian anti-government speeches, characterising them as a "street

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<sup>24</sup> Unease from Afar, The Brookings Institution, (18.11.2011). Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2011/11/18-arab-awakening-china-polack>

<sup>25</sup> China Hopes Stability in Tunisia Restored: FM, *China Daily*, (15.01.2011). [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/imqq/china/2011-01/15/content\\_11868329.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/imqq/china/2011-01/15/content_11868329.htm);

<sup>26</sup> China Respects Choice of Tunisian People, *China Daily*, 08.03.2011. Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/08/content\\_12134764.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/08/content_12134764.htm)

<sup>27</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, 07.03.2011.

<sup>28</sup> China, Tunisia Confident in Prospect of Bilateral Ties, (02.06.2012). Available at: [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2012-06/02/content\\_2151509.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2012-06/02/content_2151509.htm)

democracy”<sup>29</sup>. China expressed confidence in Cairo’s ability to settle the situation with their own efforts, without outside intervention, at the same time expecting that Chinese-Egyptian relations would not suffer as a result of the disturbances<sup>30</sup>. Beijing criticised the US’ repressions of Hosni Mubarak that forced the latter to leave government<sup>31</sup>. The problem, however, was not the resignation of Mubarak and his regime. The Chinese authorities did not consider the use of the “Western democracy model” in developing countries effective. The Chinese media wrote that American and European institutions and norms cannot match the reality in Africa and the Middle East, especially considering that “colour revolutions” have never led to a real democracy. In Egypt and neighbouring countries, in case of democratic elections, a possible result is that of Islamist leaders – which not only “ignore the American democracy, but also threaten to stop oil shipments” to the USA – coming to power. It was pointed out that after Iran’s Islamic revolution, in almost all Muslim countries – as a result of democratic elections – regimes hostile to the West and Israel had come to power<sup>32</sup>. China initially treated with scepticism the possibility of ME democratisation as a result of the “Arab Spring”; Beijing was more concerned about the processes related to the radicalisation of Islam<sup>33</sup>.

On the other hand, Beijing believed that the “Islamist centrism” – struggling against the Western “Islamic threat” theory and internal extremism and terror – can play a positive role in the review of the notion regarding Islam. The expansion of, and the moderate and party-political course of Islamist centrist forces, in some sense indicated that the main characteristic of these forces is the rejection of extremism and harsh radicalism and the search and implementation of new development ideas and ways according to their national characteristics and realities<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> **Bodeen C.**, China, Wary of Arab Spring, Hosts Egypt's Morsi, *The Jakarta Post*, (29.08.2012). Available at: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/08/29/china-wary-arab-spring-hosts-egypts-morsi.html>

<sup>30</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, (10.02.2011).

<sup>31</sup> **Kandil A.**, ...

<sup>32</sup> **Lam W.**, Beijing Wary of “Color Revolutions” Sweeping Middle East/North Africa, *China Brief*, Vol.: XI, Issue 3, The Jamestown Foundation, 10.02.2011, pp. 2-3. Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb\\_11\\_3\\_04.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb_11_3_04.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> **Shichor Yitzhak**, Storm in a (Jasmine) Teacup: China’s Response to the Middle East Upheavals, Paper prepared for the German Marshal Fund’s China Forum, Stockholm, 09.06.2011, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> **Yao Kuangyi**, The Upheaval in the Middle East and China’s Middle East Policy, *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* (In Asia), Shanghai International Studies University, 2012, 6, 3, pp. 5-14. Available at: <http://mideast.shisu.edu.cn/picture/article/33/5e/9c/9fc0f54c4453bbeca59f4f718aa2/3c548194-582d-4ce6-8b55-268a5eaebea8.pdf>



Beijing did not confine itself to mere statements but quickly undertook practical diplomacy. In March, 2011, and May, 2012, high-ranking Chinese diplomats made productive visits to a number of Arab countries (Algeria, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia), including Egypt. Beijing expressed support for Cairo in overcoming upcoming difficulties<sup>35</sup>, at the same time emphasising Beijing's policy of non-intervention in the course of Egyptian developments<sup>36</sup>. Beijing congratulated Mohammed Morsi on being elected President of Egypt, and expressed the PRC's respect to the people of Egypt in view of making an independent choice<sup>37</sup>.

At the end of August, 2012, Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi's visit to China served further to restore relationships between the two countries<sup>38</sup>. It was notable that only after visiting the PRC was the President of Egypt going to visit the US – New York and Washington – to participate in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session and to negotiate with US' high-ranking officials<sup>39</sup>. Since taking presidential office, this was M. Morsi's first official visit beyond the scope of the ME and Africa, which signalled the importance of China for Egypt as a permanent member of the UNSC and as a strategic partner, as well as a main trading partner and a vital investment source. The visit was also seen as a reorientation – of the strong focus of the Egyptian foreign policy on the US – towards the PRC<sup>40</sup>. According to the Chinese official media, the Egyptian party wanted to rethink its foreign policy – too dependent on the West – and to show a balanced approach in its relations with the East and West. Defining the PRC as an important country in preserving balance in the world, M. Morsi believed that it played an extremely significant role for the settlement of Syrian crisis – a key focus of the international community – and other

<sup>35</sup> Очередная пресс-конференция 10 марта 2011 г. у официального представителя МИД КНР Цзян Юй, Посольство Китайской Народной Республики в Республике Армения, (10.03.2011). Available at: <http://am.chineseembassy.org/rus/ztlm/fyrth/t806056.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Пахомова М., ...

<sup>37</sup> Очередная пресс-конференция 25 июня 2012 г. у официального представителя МИД КНР Хун Лэя, МИД КНР, (25.06.2012). Available at: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/xwfw/fyrth/lxjzhzhdh/t945889.shtml>

<sup>38</sup> Китай предложил Египту программу развития отношений между странами, РИА Новости, Available at: <http://ria.ru/world/20120828/732406506-print.html?ria=022j2vaa411rvpne6b5humapudfh5d1g>

<sup>39</sup> Президент Египта М. Мурси 23 сентября совершит визит в США, Жэньминь Жибао. Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31520/7920893.html>

<sup>40</sup> Bodeen Ch., ...



issues<sup>41</sup>. Both countries considered military intervention in Syria unacceptable<sup>42</sup>, notwithstanding the Egyptian criticism of Syrian authorities and calls for Bashar Assad's resignation<sup>43</sup>. Calling China "a good brother, friend and partner", M. Morsi noted that "Egypt respects and appreciates the PRC's just position on major regional and international issues, and is willing to strengthen relations and consolidate efforts with the Chinese party for the purpose of confronting various challenges"<sup>44</sup>. Even the "China Daily" governmental newspaper wrote that "M. Morsi's visit to China can change ME political landscape"<sup>45</sup>.

According to the Egyptian media, the main objective of Morsi's visit was to increase Chinese investments and involvement in Egypt. China was able to help Morsi's government to implement their "renaissance project" of the country<sup>46</sup>. The parties signed eight agreements on agriculture, telecommunications, tourism, environment, and other sectors<sup>47</sup>. Overall, 4.9 billion USD worth of Chinese loans and investments were signed, including a number of those concerning a power station in Upper Egypt, and the construction of the "Cairo-Alexandria" free highway. It should be noted that in general, the Chinese aid to be provided to Egypt was an estimated 2 billion USD, which included 450 million Chinese yuan (equal to 70 million USD) as a non-refundable aid and a soft loan worth of 200 million USD to the National Bank of Egypt<sup>48</sup>.

It is noteworthy that after M. Morsi's return from China, the meeting – planned in September – between the US President Obama and the President of Egypt, did not take place. Previously, international media discussed the issue of the US' intention to pay Egypt's 1 billion USD debt. However, the USA announced Washington's lack of intention to pay Egypt's debts or allocating other financial aid<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Комментарий: Визит М. Мурси в КНР открывает новую страницу в китайско-египетских отношениях, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (29.08.2012). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31520/7927350.html>

<sup>42</sup> Bodeen Ch, ...

<sup>43</sup> Egyptian President Hails «Syrian Revolution» in Tehran Non-Aligned Summit, *Al-Arabiya News*, (30.08.2012). Available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/30/235082.html>

<sup>44</sup> Китай...

<sup>45</sup> **Подкопашва М.**, Египет между США и Китаем, *Dao Ke Dao*, (29.01.13). Available at: <http://www.daokedao.ru/2013/01/28/egipet-mezhdu-ssha-i-kitaem/>

<sup>46</sup> Комментарий: ...

<sup>47</sup> **Bodeen Ch.**, ...

<sup>48</sup> **Лузянин С.**, Политика Китая на Ближнем Востоке: "накормить волков и сохранить овец", *Голос России*, (7.12.2012). Available at: [http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012\\_12\\_17/Politika-Kitaja-na-Blizhнем-Vostoke-nakormit-volkov-i-sohranit-ovec/](http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012_12_17/Politika-Kitaja-na-Blizhнем-Vostoke-nakormit-volkov-i-sohranit-ovec/)

<sup>49</sup> **Подкопашва М.**, ...

In fact, the Chinese experts' initial forecasts and warnings concerning Islamists in Egypt coming to power – with unfriendly attitude towards the US – were not unfounded. Meanwhile, the process of Egypt's strengthening relations with the PRC not only was not halted by the "Arab Spring" but rather displayed yet deepening trends. Chinese experts found that "the time has come to reconsider formerly too peaceful and "soft policy" in the ME"<sup>50</sup>. According to the latter, China should reformulate its Egyptian policy and move the US out of the country – by providing financial support to the Egyptian Islamists. And if the PRC succeeds, the "Egyptian model" in the Arab East can become universal to the Chinese policy. In this regard, the President of Egypt's words – regarding his Chinese colleagues – during his visit to the PRC are noteworthy: "If you protect our interests, we will protect yours"<sup>51</sup>.

Some Western experts are inclined to think that China will try to obtain "freedom of action in the region" due to the active involvement of not only old and new partners, but also Iran within ME matters. It is hard to evaluate how real the possibility of forming an Iran-Egypt tandem against the US is; still, such efforts cannot remain unnoticed in Washington. Nevertheless, while China has sufficient means for strengthening its strategic position in the ME, the US has enough resources for destabilising the region as well.

Also noteworthy is that after his visit to Beijing, the President of Egypt, M. Morsi, participated in the Tehran summit on the "Non-Alignment Movement", August, 2012, which – after the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and the rupture of diplomatic relations between the two countries – was the Egyptian leader's first visit to Iran<sup>52</sup>. In his turn, President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was Iran's first president to visit Egypt after the foundation of the IRI and to participate in the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in February, 2013<sup>53</sup>.

It is not to be excluded that Beijing will use the aspirations of tense Egyptian-American relations and the Egyptian government's foreign policy reconsideration for the purpose of "strengthening its position in the region and gaining freedom of action".

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<sup>50</sup> **Лузянин С., ...**

<sup>51</sup> **Chen J.**, The Emergence of China in the Middle East, The Center for Strategic Research, The Institute for National Strategic Studies, SF No. 271, (December 2011), p. 6. Available at: <http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/StrForum/SF-271.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> После 30-летнего разрыва дипотношений иранский президент впервые прибыл в Египет с визитом, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (06.02.2013). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31519/8123732.html>

<sup>53</sup> **Qin Zhongwei**, Iran and Egypt in Landmark Meeting, *China Daily*, Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-02/04/content\\_16197104.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-02/04/content_16197104.htm)

In terms of the PRC's strategic interests, the favourable environment created in the ME and NA can contribute to it; the ME's authoritarian regimes, having witnessed Mubarak's fate and having lost trust in the US' promises, further on "can bet" in favour of Beijing, deepening cooperation with the latter<sup>54</sup>.

### The "Libyan Spring": Challenge for China's Non-Intervention Policy

Libya was the next country in the "Arab Spring" whirlpool, at the beginning of the anti-government protests of which, the PRC tried to avoid any assessment, confining itself to encouraging reconciliation to the conflicting parties, and, unlike the West, did not speak in favour of the removal of Gaddafi from power<sup>55</sup>.

From February 22 to March 5, 2011, Beijing organised – by land, sea, and air – the evacuation of nearly 36,000 PRC nationals from Libya<sup>56</sup>. It was the first time in the PRC history that the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy cruiser accessed the Mediterranean waters<sup>57</sup>, which was an important challenge for Chinese military expeditionary capabilities.

The PRC had to overcome numerous obstacles concerning the support and evacuation of its citizens. Beijing linked these obstacles to Gaddafi's inability to end the chaos in the country, which resulted in the violation of Beijing's most sacred principle – stability<sup>58</sup>. Perhaps for that reason, in late February, along with other members of the UNSC, the PRC voted in favour of Resolution 1970, which determined protection of civilians, embargo on the delivery of arms, a no-fly zone, a flight ban, and the freezing of Libyan assets<sup>59</sup>. In reality, Beijing was facing the difficult dilemma of conforming its position to that of the League of Arab States

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<sup>54</sup> **Mordechai Chazisa**,...

<sup>55</sup> **Шекоян И.**, Китай подбирается к Ливии, *Коммерсантъ*, 02 (4643), (08.06.2011). Available at: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1655949>

<sup>56</sup> Чудесная операция Китая по эвакуации своих граждан из Ливии получила одобрение широкой общественности, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (08.03.2011). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7311410.html>

<sup>57</sup> **Collins G., Erickson Andrew S.**, Implications of China's Military Evacuation of Citizens from Libya, China Brief, Vol.: 11, Issue: 4, The Jamestown Foundation, p. 8. Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb\\_11\\_4.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/cb_11_4.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> **Parello-Plesner J.**, Libya Shows China the Burdens of Being a Great Power, Economics, Politics and Public Policy in East Asia and the Pacific, East Asia Forum, (06.03.2011). Available at: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/03/06/libya-shows-china-the-burdens-of-being-a-great-power/>

<sup>59</sup> Мир и безопасность в Африке, S/RES/1970 (26 февраля, 2011), Available at: <http://www.un.org/russian/document/scresol/res2011/index.html>

(LAS), which was trying to resist its sanctions and requiring more vigorous actions against Gaddafi's government<sup>60</sup>.

Notwithstanding Beijing's negative stance on foreign intervention in Libya, the PRC (as well as Russia) did not use its veto power in March 2011 to prevent the UNSC adoption of Resolution 1973<sup>61</sup>. According to Li Baodong, the PRC Permanent Representative to the UN, although Beijing was concerned about the deteriorating situation in Libya, especially in view of the inadequate clarification – by the resolution's sponsors – of the nature of the no-fly zone, nevertheless, the PRC reckoned with the stances of the African Union member states (AU) and the Special Representative of UN Secretary-General in Libya<sup>62</sup>. Still, in late March, when the PRC President Hu Jintao openly criticised NATO's operations in Libya, the West perceived that the PRC and the West actually favoured opposing camps of the Libyan conflict<sup>63</sup>.

Beijing's passive stance on the "Libyan spring" was criticised both in China and abroad. Internally, it was connected with refraining from opposing the adoption of Resolution 1973, which, according to Chinese nationalists, yielded to the West and paved the way for NATO to carry out military operations against Libya. At the same time, that stance caused manipulations, accusing Beijing of a retreat from the principle of non-intervention. At the international level, the West and some Arab countries accused Beijing in not joining military operations against Libya, assessing it as the behaviour of "an irresponsible country"<sup>64</sup>.

Similar to internal and external accusations, doubts growing over the potential for Gaddafi's victory made Beijing activate diplomacy and negotiate not only with the government in Tripoli but also the opposition. Beijing took over the mediation for the Libyan conflict and officially announced its peacekeeping aspirations, launching active talks with both parties simultaneously.

On the level of Tripoli's and Benghazi's contacts and for "promoting peace talks", Beijing excelled other countries, including Libyan crisis

<sup>60</sup> **Zhang Yuwei, Ai Yang**, Libya Declares Cease-Fire after UN Resolutions Vote, *China Daily*, (19.03.2011), p. 8. Available at:

[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-03/19/content\\_12195541.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-03/19/content_12195541.htm)

<sup>61</sup> Положение в Ливии, S/RES/1973 (17 марта 2011), Available at:

<http://www.un.org/russian/document/scresol/res2011/index.html>

<sup>62</sup> **Zhang Yuwei, Ai Yang**, ...

<sup>63</sup> **Габуев А.**, У Китая к Ливии дело на \$19 млрд, *Коммерсантъ*, 111 (4652), (22.06.2011). Available at: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss/1664384>

<sup>64</sup> **Kandil A.**, ..., p. 3.

mediator Russia and the AU<sup>65</sup>. The problem was that Beijing – regardless of the confrontation outcome – needed protection of its business interests in Libya and was cautious lest the Libyan developments lead to irreparable economic losses for Chinese business circles. China National Petroleum Corporation's (CNPC) projects were implemented in the western Libya, under the control of Gaddafi's troops, and a number of infrastructure projects in eastern Libya – with China's participation – were under rebel control. In exchange for Chinese security project insurances, the PRC was ready to support Gaddafi in the UNSC and to provide the rebels with the necessary financial aid<sup>66</sup>. Numerous promises of lucrative compensation agreements in case of the support of the latter also contributed to a Beijing "retreat" from its principle of non-intervention<sup>67</sup>; especially as Beijing did not appreciate Gaddafi's threats to organise "Tiananmen" against the opposition<sup>68</sup>. The PRC was naturally also concerned about National Transitional Council (NTC) statements regarding restructuring the energy sector of the country, according to which, the latter intended to replace Gaddafi ally Chinese and Russian energy companies with Western companies that assisted the rebels<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, in early September, the head of the Libyan rebels' military committee accused Beijing of supplying weapons to Gaddafi's army and of efforts to prevent blocking Libyan accounts<sup>70</sup>. Still, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) denied the existence of any arms trade agreement – especially transportation to Libya – stressing that from the outset, Beijing has strictly followed the UNSC 1970 and 1973 Resolutions<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> China Says Libya Rebels as Important Political Force, China Military Power Mashup, (22.06.2011). Available at: <http://www.china-defense-mashup.com/china-says-libya-rebels-as-important-political-force.html>

<sup>66</sup> Габуев А., ...

<sup>67</sup> Ливия: Китай пытается поладить и с мятежниками, и с Каддафи, RTKORR.com, <http://www.rtkorr.com/news/2011/06/08/243487.new?ref=rss>

<sup>68</sup> Higgs A., For China, Relations with Libya a Balancing Act, *The Washington Post*, (26.08.2011). Available at: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/libya-policy-a-balancing-act-for-china-as-moammar-gaddafis-rule-collapses/2011/08/26/gIQAnlKKgJ\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/libya-policy-a-balancing-act-for-china-as-moammar-gaddafis-rule-collapses/2011/08/26/gIQAnlKKgJ_story.html).

<sup>69</sup> New Leaders May Expel Russia and China from Libyan Energy Sector, *World Tribune*, USA, (25.08.2011). Available at: [http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2011/me\\_libya10660825.asp](http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2011/me_libya10660825.asp)

<sup>70</sup> Серова Н., Китайская перестройка потрясет мир, *Центр Азия*, (08.09.2011). Available at: <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1315455420>

<sup>71</sup> Китайская сторона не экспортировала в Ливию военную продукцию – официальный представитель МИД-а, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (06.09.2011). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7589023.html>

Regardless, at the beginning of September, the PRC – with observer status – participated in the “Friends of Libya” conference held in Paris<sup>72</sup>. On September 12, Beijing officially recognised NTC as Libya’s only legitimate authority and the representative of the Libyan people, expecting that all the previously signed China-Libya agreements would remain valid and be implemented conscientiously<sup>73</sup>. Beijing promised to support the international community to restore peace and stability in Libya<sup>74</sup>. Immediately after the recognition of NTC, the PRC commenced strengthening its position in Libya, offering support for the country’s post-war reconstruction. Already in July, Beijing announced its decision to provide the Libyan people with 55 million Chinese yuan (7.7 million USD) worth of humanitarian aid<sup>75</sup>.

In February, 2013, during a meeting with Chinese diplomats in Libya, the Prime Minister of the Libyan interim government noted that the Libyan government and the people welcomed the return of Chinese enterprises to Libya as soon as possible and the resumption of Chinese companies’ interrupted production<sup>76</sup>.

Thus, during the “Libyan war”, the PRC’s regional policy underwent the largest challenge, connected with Beijing’s concept of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-intervention. In case the latter was pursued, the problem of not only deepening cooperation with Libya but also with NA, the realisation of its massive projects in the continent’s infrastructure, energy, telecommunications and other spheres, as well as the employment of hundreds of thousands of Chinese citizens would become more problematic for Beijing<sup>77</sup>. Undertaking an active mediation mission towards the advocacy of its regional interests, Beijing made a fundamental change in the concept

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<sup>72</sup> Китай будет в качестве наблюдателя принимать участие в конференции "друзей Ливии" в Париже, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (01.09.2011). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7585433.html>

<sup>73</sup> **Farge E., Turner L., Irish J.**, How to Win Business in Libya, *Fox News*, USA, Available at: <http://wincountry.com/news/articles/2011/sep/23/special-report-how-to-win-business-in-libya/>

<sup>74</sup> Своевременное регулирование политики Китая по отношению к Ливии свидетельствует о зрелом и стабильном дипломатическом стиле КНР, Available at: [http://russian.china.org.cn/news/txt/2011-09/13/content\\_23404709.htm](http://russian.china.org.cn/news/txt/2011-09/13/content_23404709.htm)

<sup>75</sup> Китай предоставит ливийскому народу гуманитарную помощь в размере 50 млн юаней, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (11.07.2011). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7435837.html>

<sup>76</sup> Правительство Ливии приветствует возвращение китайских предприятий в Ливию, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (06.02.2013). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31520/8123703.html>

<sup>77</sup> **Parello-Plesner J.**, China's Desert-Dance in Libya, European Council on Foreign Relations, (31.10.2011). Available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary\\_chinas\\_desert\\_dance\\_in\\_libya](http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_chinas_desert_dance_in_libya)

of non-intervention, consistently applied for decades. While previously China was a neutral country in the region, signing commercial transactions one after another, during the Libyan developments it became a country with a new international status of a mediator. The Libyan Civil War turned into an event that urged China to get out of its “shell”<sup>78</sup>.

The events of the “Arab Spring” showed that in the ME and NA, and especially in Libya, as a result of the lack of China’s political influence and military presence, Beijing had difficulties in ensuring its economic security and investment interests. Realising this “gap”, China sought to deepen cooperation with relatively stable Gulf States, expanding its’ naval presence in the Gulf of Aden, as well as in the Indian Ocean – reasoning with anti-piracy operations.

Moreover, in 2011, Beijing supported the procedure of building a military harbour in Pakistan’s Gwadar Port (where Chinese ships have a permanent parking right), which not only is a part of China’s strategy to suppress its regional rival India, but also draws the positions of Chinese naval forces close to the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. In fact, through the establishment of new bases, as well as through the acquisition of experience in anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden, Beijing seeks to expand its naval presence in the ME<sup>79</sup>.

### **The “Syrian Spring” and the Activity of Chinese Diplomacy**

Although it may appear that China does not have great interests in Syria, ever since the anti-government movement in the country, Beijing insisted that President Bashar al-Assad should not give up power under Western pressure. China has repeatedly dispatched special envoys to the region for the purpose of establishing connections between interested parties of the conflict, through negotiations with Syria and neighbouring countries and for the purpose of problem regulation through dialogue, as well as the provision of humanitarian aid<sup>80</sup>. Standing firmly in the position of Syria’s national sovereignty defence, China completely ruled out the possibility of an intervention in the internal affairs of the country on any ground, including

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<sup>78</sup> **Dresdner G.**, China, the Arab Spring, and Context, Institute of Strategic Thinking, (23.08.2011). Available at: <http://www.sde.org.tr/en/news/1612/china-the-arab-spring-and-context.aspx>

<sup>79</sup> **Parks A.**, She Waking Giant and the Arab Spring: China’s Middle East Strategy in the Wake of the Arab Revolutions, University Honors in International Studies, Fall 2012, pp. 36-37.

<sup>80</sup> **Zongze R.**, Responsible Protection: Building a Safer World, CIIS Time, (15.06.2012). Available at: [http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2012-06/15/content\\_5090912.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2012-06/15/content_5090912.htm)



human rights violations. According to Beijing, Syria's future should be decided by its own people, and solutions to internal disagreements and establishment of national stability in the country should be achieved through political dialogue<sup>81</sup>. Beijing also insisted that the Syrian issue should be solved according to the UN Charter and norms of international law, respecting Syria's rights to independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity<sup>82</sup>.

In June, 2011, Beijing and Moscow boycotted the UNSC meeting aimed to develop a resolution against Damascus (due to the government's hard pressure on Syrian opposition) impeding the possibility of adopting UN sanctions against Bashar al-Assad<sup>83</sup>. In Beijing it was strongly believed that B. Assad's resignation would not result in an end of violence in the country. Beijing did not intend to give preference to any of the parties of the Syrian conflict, viewing it as a struggle for power between different armed groups rather than a struggle between a dictator and rebels<sup>84</sup>. That is why China made a choice in favour of preserving the status quo in Syria rather than the unpredictable future of the country.

In October, 2011, placing a veto on the UNSC resolution condemning Syria in relation to anti-government pressure, the PRC and Russia practically threw a lifebuoy to B. Assad<sup>85</sup>. Beijing and Moscow were convinced that NATO members wanted to achieve the adoption of the resolution on Syria by manipulating the UNSC, which they managed during the adoption of the resolution on Libya<sup>86</sup>. Probably that was the reason

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<sup>81</sup> China Opposes Foreign Intervention in Syria: FM, *Xinhua*, Beijing, (24.05.2011). Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2011-05/24/content\\_12572110.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2011-05/24/content_12572110.htm)

<sup>82</sup> Use of Force not Solution to Syrian Crisis: Chinese Envoy, Institute of Strategic Thinking, (29.04.2011), pp. 1-2. Available at: <http://www.sde.org.tr/en/newsdetail/use-of-force-not-solution-to-syrian-crisis-chinese-envoy/2564>

<sup>83</sup> Россия и Китай бойкотируют переговоры ООН по Сирии, *AFP*, (14.06.2011). Available at: <http://inosmi.ru/asia/20110614/170670904.html>

<sup>84</sup> СМИ: Россия, Китай и Иран готовятся к учениям у берегов Сирии, *Военное Обозрение*, (02.08.2012). Available at: <http://topwar.ru/17199-kitay-reshil-napravit-k-beregam-sirii-svoi-voennye-korabli.html>

<sup>85</sup> **MacFarquhar N. M.**, With Rare Double U.N. Veto on Syria, Russia and China Try to Shield Friend, *The New York Times*, (05.10.2011). Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/world/middleeast/with-united-nations-veto-russia-and-china-help-syria.html?r=2&pagewanted=all>

<sup>86</sup> **Тавитов В.**, Почему Китай поддерживает Сирию? (30.09.2012). Available at: <http://modernpolitics.ru/2012/09/pochemu-kitajj-podderzhivaet-siriyu/>

Russia and China intended to prevent the repetition of such a scenario not only in Syria but also in the entire ME region<sup>87</sup>.

Moreover, in December, 2011, the PRC defended Russia's draft resolution on Syria submitted to the UNSC<sup>88</sup>. Furthermore, in early 2012, Beijing told the LAS leadership that it stood against putting the "Syrian folder" on UNSC judgment, and believed that the crisis should be resolved within the scope of the pan-Arab organisation<sup>89</sup>. In February, 2012, Russia and the PRC voted against the UNSC draft resolution containing military solution to the Syrian issue, proposed by the Moroccan delegation along with a number of Western and Arab countries<sup>90</sup>. Discontent was especially brought forth by a point of the resolution requiring President Assad to resign the Presidency and transfer power to his deputy throughout three weeks<sup>91</sup>.

It should be noted that Beijing rarely resorts to the use of the veto in the UNSC (since 1971, the PRC has used its veto power only eight times), the motives regarding which range from domestic political and economic considerations to geostrategic calculations. In Beijing it is believed that a limitation to the West's intervention in the region can serve their interests. By not compromising with the West, resorting to the use of veto and to the risk of facing serious criticism aimed at it, China actually sought to prevent Western influence on the formation of a new situation in the ME<sup>92</sup>. Beijing took such a position in conditions under which ME member states not only strive for the PRC's support on regional conflicts, but also saw the deepening of relationships with Beijing as a way to gradually decrease their dependency from Washington. According to Beijing, the events in Afghanistan and Iraq displayed that revolutions – under external pressure – of existing administrations do not lead to the desired result. That is the

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<sup>87</sup> **Swaine M. D.**, Chinese Views of the Syrian Conflict, China Leadership Monitor, No. 39, p. 5. Available at:

<http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM39MS.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> **Blanchard B., Mao S.**, China Says Supports Russian Resolution on Syria, *Reuters*, UK, (19.12.2011). Available at:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/19/us-syria-china-russia-idUSTRE7BIOIX20111219>

<sup>89</sup> Китай выступил против иностранного вмешательства в сирийский кризис, РИА Новости. Available at: [http://ria.ru/arab\\_sy/20120112/538005266.html](http://ria.ru/arab_sy/20120112/538005266.html)

<sup>90</sup> **Swaine M. D.**, ...:

<sup>91</sup> China Opposes Armed Intervention in Syria, *Chinadaily.com.cn*. Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-02/17/content\\_14628079.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-02/17/content_14628079.htm)

<sup>92</sup> **Caron T.**, Russia and China Challenge the West on Syria: What Implications for Iran? *Time*, USA, (06.02.2012). Available at: <http://world.time.com/2012/02/06/russia-and-china-challenge-the-west-on-syria-what-implications-for-iran/>

reason China did not want to abandon the role of a mediator in Syria talks, especially considering that B. Assad trusts China<sup>93</sup>.

China's vetoes also practically "saved" Moscow from international isolation, playing an essential role in maintaining balance of power in the ME. The "strategic understanding" between Moscow and Beijing suppressed the US, minimising the possibility of the latter imposing its decisions in ME issues<sup>94</sup>. Moscow and Beijing were convinced that the whole West, and the US in particular, nourished opposition movements in the Arab world in order to advance their own interests in the region. Therefore the stances of Moscow and Beijing increasingly grew closer to each other regarding the issue of preventing the possibility of powers – friendly to the West or under their patronage – coming to power<sup>95</sup>. Chinese experts even spoke of the creation of a "Beijing-Moscow axis", with a "historical mission of confronting the American empire". Perhaps for that reason, China was ready to support Russia on issues regarding Syria, important to it, and Russia on those regarding the Asian-Pacific region, important to Beijing. In Beijing it was believed that the fall of the Syrian administration could lead to more serious consequences than the existing political crisis. Assessing tens of thousands of civilian deaths as a great tragedy, Beijing assumed that the West underestimated the effects of radical Islamists coming to power or the occurrence of a possible power vacuum in the country<sup>96</sup>.

In the case of the Syrian crisis, Beijing was more flexible, effectively using the Libyan experience, establishing connections and starting negotiations with conflicting Syrian parties. China began to manifest itself as a great power, acting in support of the basic norms of international relations and participating in the affairs of global governance and taking responsibility.

Taking into account the calls – on social networks of various Arab countries – of Arab political activists to put an embargo on Chinese goods, Chinese diplomacy in Syria displayed unprecedented fervency towards instituting mediation efforts<sup>97</sup>.

In early February, Beijing hosted the delegation of the Syrian opposition, after which the PRC MFA declared about Beijing's willingness to maintain connections and contacts with appropriate Syrian opposition groups<sup>98</sup>. Beijing also refused to participate in a meeting with "country-

<sup>93</sup> **Sieren F.**, Die Spielregeln ändern, Handelsblatt, (10.02.2012).

<sup>94</sup> **Mordechai Chazisa**, ..., p. 79:

<sup>95</sup> **MacFarquhar N.**, ...

<sup>96</sup> **Тавитов В.**, ...

<sup>97</sup> **Kandil A.**, ..., pp. 3-4:

<sup>98</sup> **Belton C., Chaffin J., Fielding-Smith A.**, China Reveals Syria Opposition Visit, *The Financial Times*, (09.02.2012). Available at:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/8e905e1a-524c-11e1-a155-00144feabdc0?Authorised=>

friends of Syria”, scheduled for late February<sup>99</sup>. In response, the US State Department official said that “the international community will make a decision regarding Assad without Russia’s and PRC’s participation”<sup>100</sup>.

In early March, China made a six-point suggestion of a peaceful regulation of the Syrian conflict. It included a call to immediately stop the violence, to start political dialogue, to ensure provision of humanitarian aid, directed simultaneously to the Syrian government and the opposition. China’s readiness to support Arab countries and the LAS during the political regulation of the crisis was also mentioned<sup>101</sup>. Beijing had also made a decision to provide – through the committee of the Red Cross – the Syrian people with humanitarian aid worth 2 million USD<sup>102</sup>. Incidentally, China was one of the first countries to provide humanitarian aid not only to Egypt, Tunisia (5 million USD) but also to Syria<sup>103</sup>. In early July, 2012, Beijing refused to participate in the Paris meeting of the “Friends of Syria” either, arguing that efforts should be made towards the implementation of the agreement outcome reached at the Geneva meeting<sup>104</sup>. In Beijing, late October, during his negotiations with L. Brahimi, UN-LAS Joint Special Representative for Syria, the Foreign Minister of China declared that China played a consistent and stable role toward the Syrian crisis, speaking with a four-point suggestion<sup>105</sup>. According to the latter, phasic cessation of fire and all military activities was necessary in Syria, initially in the regions, and afterwards throughout the whole country. Supported by L. Brahimi and the international community, a participation of the representatives of all parties interested in preparing a “road map” for the transitional governing body, the support of the international community on the implementation of the memorandum regarding the Geneva “action group”, and activation of humanitarian aid provision to the Syrian people were also planned. The

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[false.html?ilocation=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2F%2F0%2F8e905e1a-524c-11e1-a155-00144feabdc0.html&ireferer=#axzz1lltG eqmU](http://false.html?ilocation=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2F%2F0%2F8e905e1a-524c-11e1-a155-00144feabdc0.html&ireferer=#axzz1lltG eqmU)

<sup>99</sup> КНР не будет участвовать в тунисской встрече «Друзей Сирии»,

*Телеграфистъ*, (23.02.2012). Available at: <http://telegrafist.org/2012/02/23/5070/>

<sup>100</sup> США считают, что мир донесет до Асада свою позицию и без РФ и Китая, *Телеграфистъ*, (24.02.2012). Available at: <http://telegrafist.org/2012/02/24/5073/>

<sup>101</sup> **Zongze R.**, ...

<sup>102</sup> Правительство Китая предоставит экстренную гуманитарную помощь сирийскому народу, *Жэньминь Жибао*, (10.03.2012). Available at: <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7754024.html>

<sup>103</sup> **Kuangyi Yao**, ..., p. 18:

<sup>104</sup> China not to attend Upcoming Syria Meeting, (05.07.2012). Available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/world/2012-07/05/content25828411.htm>

<sup>105</sup> Китай готов совместно с заинтересованными сторонами прилагать общие усилия для содействия скорейшему решению сирийского вопроса-МИД КНР, (07.11.2012). Available at: [http://russian.china.org.cn/china/txt/2012-11/07/content\\_27037487.htm](http://russian.china.org.cn/china/txt/2012-11/07/content_27037487.htm)

measures listed were supposed to be provided both by the authorities and opposition groups<sup>106</sup>.

In early January, 2013, the PRC MFA said that China would welcome any decision aimed at the cessation of violence adopted by conflicting Syrian parties<sup>107</sup>. Regarding the Syrian conflict, the PRC Foreign Minister had a telephone conversation with L. Brahimi, UN-LAS Joint Special Representative, expressing Beijing's strong support for his mediation efforts<sup>108</sup>. In Beijing, February, 2013, during a meeting between the PRC Foreign Minister and Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, all the parties of the Syrian conflict were called to begin a political dialogue as soon as possible, finding that the situation had reached a "critical stage". Before that, during a meeting with the president of the "National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces", the PRC Ambassador to Egypt expressed hope that all the parties of the Syrian conflict, on consistent and equitable basis, through consultations and negotiations, would reach a comprehensive political dialogue regulation<sup>109</sup>. Chinese diplomats also called the conflicting Syrian parties to lead the political transition process according to the spirit of the Geneva Action Group memorandum, adopted in June, 2012<sup>110</sup>.

It should be noted that because of disagreements regarding Syria, the aggravation of Beijing's and Moscow's ties with the UNSC permanent member Western partners "overshadowed" the Obama administration's efforts to isolate Iran – connected with Iran's nuclear programme; meanwhile it had a obvious connection with the Syrian problem.

According to Chinese experts, through diplomatic isolation, military containment and the spread of information networks, Washington sought to toughen sanctions against Iran's oil exports and financial system. The Iran-Syria Alliance is seen as a "threat" not only for the US' strategic ally Israel but also unsettles Gulf Arab states and Turkey. Therefore, the purpose of suppressing Assad is to break the "Shiite arc" and to isolate Iran<sup>111</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> Очередная пресс-конференция 1 ноября 2012г. у официального представителя МИД КНР Хун Ляя, Генеральное Консульство Китайской Народной Республики в г.Хабаровске, (01.11.2012). Available at: <http://www.Chinaconsulate.khb.ru/rus/fyrth/t985099.htm>

<sup>107</sup> China Welcomes Generally Accepted Solution for Syria, *China Daily*, Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-01/07/content\\_16092875.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-01/07/content_16092875.htm)

<sup>108</sup> Chinese FM Talks with UN-AL Envoy on Syria in Phone, *China Daily*, (08.01.2013). Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-01/08/content\\_16096603.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-01/08/content_16096603.htm)

<sup>109</sup> Beijing Calls for Syria Political Transition, *China Daily*, (07.02.2013). Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-02/07/content\\_16209754.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-02/07/content_16209754.htm)

<sup>110</sup> Swaine Michael D., ..., p. 3:

<sup>111</sup> Kuangyi Yao, ..., p. 14:

It is known that Syria and Iran play a central role in China's strategy to strengthen its geopolitical impact, in which Beijing is just as determined as the US. Still, unlike the US, China avoids military intervention. To Beijing, Syria is the shortest overland route to the Mediterranean Sea, and as a member of the Mediterranean Union, an additional access to the EU – in case of an application of trade barriers against the PRC<sup>112</sup>. According to Beijing, Syria's downfall can lead to the weakening of the pro-Iranian front (Iran, Syria, "Hezbollah"), simultaneously strengthening the pro-Western alliance (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, etc.), as well as Turkey – as a NATO member.

To the PRC, Iran is a major transit country at a geographic nexus of developing relationships with the Persian Gulf states, Central Asian, and Caucasian republics<sup>113</sup>. Tehran sees China as an alternative source of capital and technology involvement, as well as a protector of its national interests. This substantially aids China in advancing its interests in the region, especially in the context of the impending competition with the US. In this regard, the PRC former President Jiang Zemin's opinion – expressed as far back as 1994 – that the US' dominance should be resisted – by helping countries such as struggling Iran – remains up-to-date<sup>114</sup>.

It is no coincidence that while in the past, in its Middle East policy, Beijing took into account the US' presence in the region, now based on the need to secure its energy needs and realising its power as the world's second economy, it displays more freedom of action. For years, concerning the intensification of sanctions against Tehran, Washington has faced Beijing's resistance as a result of Chinese economic interests, – in particular huge energy interests, - in Iran.

Quite obviously, the West's indirect, and still one of its most important goals in the ME is to weaken Beijing energetically. The Syrian crisis and its consequences can have an extremely serious impact on China's energy security<sup>115</sup>. Beijing will try to prevent it in any possible way as it has already suffered huge losses because of the application of anti-Iran sanctions and because of issues in Libya, Sudan, and West Africa. Meanwhile military

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<sup>112</sup> Sieren F., ...

<sup>113</sup> Ögütçü M., Building a Turkish-Chinese Strategic Partnership In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Why and How? Presented at China Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of West Asia and Africa Studies, September 2000, Beijing, p. 6. Available at: <http://www.econturk.org/Turkisheconomy/ogutcu4.pdf>

<sup>114</sup> Власти Китая рассуждают о мире, но поддерживают террор, *The Epoch Times*, (17.11.2006). Available at: <http://www.epochtimes.ru/content/view/7786/9/>

<sup>115</sup> Сирийский кризис угрожает энергетической безопасности Китая: эксперт, Информационное агентство REX, (12.07.2012). Available at: <http://www.iarex.ru/news/27412.html>

actions against Iran – one of the PRC’s most important oil and natural gas suppliers – could bring China to the edge of an energy crisis.

This is perhaps the reason that by defending Syria, Beijing seeks to prevent the strengthening of the US’ position and Iran subsequently becoming the West’s next target. China will try to maintain a flexible policy in the future as well, based on the necessity to protect its geopolitical interests. The US’ assessment of China as a strategic rival also contributes to this, especially in the context of rapid PRC economic growth and the strengthening position of the latter in the ME region, in particular its relations with oil-producing countries.

As for Beijing’s predictions and worries associated with Islamic radicalisation processes in the beginning of the “Arab Spring”, subsequent developments displayed that they were not unfounded. Since May, 2012, “the East Turkestan Liberation Movement” combatants have moved to Syria in order to join “al-Qaeda” and other radical organisations in the fight against the Assad administration<sup>116</sup>. Beijing is highly concerned about the possibility of the Islamic extremist wave propagation to Central Asia and East Turkestan, which can be a serious threat not only to the PRC’s security along its western boundary but also to peace and stability in South Asia<sup>117</sup>. Perhaps that is the reason Beijing tightened its control over China’s Xinjiang Uighur autonomous region, inhabited by about 22 million Sunni Muslims, including 10 million Uighurs, among which Islamic radicals are indeed not few.<sup>118</sup> On the background of radicalism and extremism growth in the ME and CA, Beijing seeks to prevent and limit possible activity manifestations of Chinese Muslims – mainly Uighur separatists. It is noteworthy that in early September, 2013, at the Shangahi Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Astana, the President of China, Xi Jinping, not only expressed his support for Russia’s plan to disarm Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles, but also drew SCO members’ attention from Afghanistan to the Syrian problem. This was assessed as an attempt to create – in NATO’s traditional area of responsibility – a counterweight to the US’ and NATO’s security operations. Since 2012, Chinese military experts have begun calling the SCO “eastern NATO”, accusing NATO of causing “chaos and instability” in Afghanistan and Libya. Moreover, according to Chinese experts, China and Russia – as Asian-Pacific countries – should expand the SCO mandate in the

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<sup>116</sup> Uyghurs Fighting in Syria, *Al-Manar*, (29.10.2012). Available at: <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?eid=72711&frid=31&seccatid=91&cid=31&fromval=1>

<sup>117</sup> **Mordechai Chazisa**, ..., p. 73.

<sup>118</sup> **Shichor Yitzhak**, ..., p. 3.



aforementioned region, confining NATO's enlargement as a "centre of world security"<sup>1</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of China's stance on the "Arab Spring", as well as that of the developments resulting from China's role in the region shows that:

1. The "Arab Spring" intensified China-America strategic competition in the region and created new challenges and opportunities for the implementation of Beijing's geopolitical ambitions.
  2. In the first phase of the events, when they were unfolding in Tunisia and Egypt, Beijing continued operating based on the traditional concept of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-intervention. After Islamists came to power, Beijing managed utilising Egyptian-American tension and the objectives of the Egyptian new government to rethink their foreign policy, for the purpose of strengthening Chinese-Egyptian relations and expansion of influence in the region.
  3. During the Libyan war, it became clear that further implementation of that concept would not be effective, and in order to protect its regional interests, Beijing actively assumed a mediation mission, making a fundamental change in the foreign policy concept used for decades.
  4. In the course of Syrian developments, China's new foreign policy role – as a power supporting the basic norms of international relations and participating in global governance affairs and taking on responsibility, displayed that with regard to the events in Libya, Beijing's new foreign policy manifestations are a result of implementing new conceptual approaches rather than related to a particular case.
  5. In the scope of those approaches, for ensuring economic security and investment interests, Beijing also deepened cooperation with relatively stable Gulf States, ensuring Chinese naval presence – substantiated by performing anti-piracy operations – in the Gulf of Aden, as well as in the Indian Ocean.
  6. Beijing's geopolitical and economic position in the region strengthened due to both the application of new foreign policy approaches and the effective use of the atmosphere and mood emerging towards the US' policy.

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<sup>1</sup> **Zenn J.**, China and the SCO: Dead Wood but a Good Platform, China Brief, 13, Issue: 20, (10.10.2013), p. 9. Available at:

[http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/China\\_Brief\\_Vol\\_13\\_Issue\\_14.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/China_Brief_Vol_13_Issue_14.pdf)