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FROM IDEOLOGICAL ANTAGONISM TO 'STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP': SAUDI-CHINESE RELATIONSHIPS (1949-2006)

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By

Abdulwahab Abdulrahman Aborhmah

Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International
Relations

2010

School of Government and International Affairs
Durham University



23 FEB 2011

'To understand today, one needs to know history; and to know the future, one needs
to review the past'

A Chinese Maxim

Declaration

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Dedication

With great respect, love and appreciation
for my teacher,
HRH Prince Dr. Faisal Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz
to whom I am deeply indebted and grateful

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Praise be to Allah, the Almighty God, without whose blessing this work could not have been accomplished.

I would like to thank my beloved father Major General/ Abdulrahman Saeed Aborhmah and my beloved mother Jawaher Al-Ghamdi, who taught me that patience, determination and persistence are the main keys to success. I would like to extend my thanks as well to my beloved wife, Hana and sons, Abdulrahman and Laith for their love, encouragement and patience during the long hours I spent in the library and away from them.

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- HE Ambassador Dr. Yousef Al-Saadon (Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic and cultural Affairs).
- HE Ambassador Dr. Jamil Merdad (Head of Islamic Department).
- HE Ambassador Dr. Raaed Qarmali (Saudi Foreign Ministry, Head of West Europe Department).
- HE Dr. Saleh Al-Namlah (Deputy Minister of Culture and Information for Foreign Information).
- HE Dr. Saleh Al-Namlah, Deputy Minister of Culture & Information for Foreign Information).
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- Mr. Jaser A. Al-Jaser (Al-Jazirah Daily).

May God bless them all

Abstract

This study attempts to offer the first full-length account of the major dynamics and factors that contributed to shaping the Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period between (1949-2006). The Riyadh-Beijing relationship offers an unusual example in International Relations field since it has undergone various phases that started by a mutual political enmity and went through an extended process of confidence building with a reciprocal drive to construct a complementary strategic partnership. These phases have been divided throughout this study into eight distinctive periods. This study argues that Sino-Saudi relationships during the 57-year period were subject to the influence of various factors including those of systemic-security, normative ideological and economic complementary nature. It has been argued that the 41-year Saudi-Chinese political rupture was a product of a combination of systemic-security and identity-ideological factors that worked together to prevent Saudi Arabia and China from having diplomatic relations between (1949-1990). It has been, also, argued also that the reforms of 1978 as well as the pragmatism of China's foreign policy, the improvement of the conditions of Chinese Muslims along with the resumption of Chinese *hajj* missions, and the indirect Sino-Saudi cooperation in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and then the arms deal in 1986 have played an important role in normalising Riyadh-Beijing political relationship. It has been emphasised that the emergence of the potential strategic partnership between the two countries was a natural outcome of their economic, political and security complementary relationship that surfaced since the middle 1990s and that such relationship has benefited from the deterioration of US-Saudi relationship in the aftermaths of 9/11. Saudi-Chinese relationship in the 21st century, it was argued, offers a comprehensive strategic partnership in all fields after two sides have found that what combines them is far more than what divides them and that they could be of much importance for each other in the years to come. This promising relationship would probably enhance China's political and strategic presence and role in the Middle East and might negatively influence the Western traditional predominant position in this important region.

List of Abbreviations

- AFP	Agence France Press
- ANM	Arab Nationalist Movement
- AP	Associated Press
- CCP & CPC	Chinese Communist Party
- CIA & IAC	Chinese Islamic Association
- CMC	Central Military Commission
- CR	Cultural Revolution
- CPPCC	Chinese People Political Consultative Conference
- CSCCI	Council for Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- DCA	Dhofar Charitable Association
- DSO	Dhofar Soldier's Organisation
- FLD & DLF	Front for the Liberation of Dhofar
- GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
- GSFMO	Grain Silos and Flour Mills Organisation
- KACST	King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology
- KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- MNAC	Minorities Nationalities Affairs Committee
- NDFLOAG	National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman
- NLF	National Liberation Front
- OIC	Organisation for Islamic Conference
- PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
- PFLO	Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman
- PFLOAG	Popular Front for the Liberation of Occupied Arab Gulf
- PLA	People's Liberation Army
- PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
- PRC	People's Republic of China
- PRSY	People's Republic of South Yemen
- ROC	Republic of China
- SAGIA	Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority
- SANLF	Saudi Arabia National Liberation Front
- SCMP	South China Morning Post
- SPA	Saudi News Agency
- SSTC	State Science and Technology Commission
- STC	Saudi Telecommunication Company
- WOT	World Trade Organisation
- WML	World Muslim League
- YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to offer the first full-length historical pursuit of the rise and evolution of Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period between (1949-2006). In doing so, it fills a gap in the literature of the field of International Relations (IR). It seeks to develop a better understanding of Sino-Saudi relations through identifying and examining the main determinants that contributed to shape their dialectic bilateral ties throughout a relatively long period.

The 57-year timeframe (1949-2006) was chosen for a number of reasons. On the one hand, the year 1949 marked the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) following the Maoist revolution and hence started the Saudi-Chinese political rupture and antagonistic relationship. On the other hand, the year 2006 was set as the end of the study timeframe since it coincides with two reciprocal and important state visits made by Saudi and Chinese heads of state as a culmination of their strategic partnership. Yet, between the stage of bilateral antagonistic political rupture and the stage of strategic partnership at the other end, relations between Riyadh and Beijing have fluctuated and undergone different phases that will be thoroughly explored in this study. Through establishing a full comprehension of the dimensions of Saudi-Chinese relationship during (1949-2006), this study would perhaps increase political analysts' capability to explain and predict the future course of Sino-Saudi relationship.

This study, also, aims at achieving a number of detailed objectives. First, understanding the negative impact of ideological factor on Saudi-Chinese connection during the period (1949-1978). Second, demonstrating the negative impact of systemic-security factor on Sino-Saudi relationship during (1949-1978). Third, explaining the positive role the systemic-security factor along with post-1978 domestic and foreign policy Chinese changes have played in improving Saudi-Chinese relationship. Fourth, examining the dimensions and motivations of the Saudi-Chinese arms deal in the mid-1980s.

Fifth, exploring the conditions under which Chinese Muslim communities lived and the significant impact of such matter on Sino-Saudi connection; and

explaining the positive role which Chinese *hajj* missions and Saudi-commissioned World Muslim League delegations have played in bridging the confidence gap between Beijing and Riyadh throughout the period of their political rupture. Sixth, examining the emergence and impact of the economic interdependence factor in Saudi-Chinese relations since the late 1990s especially in the petroleum field. Seventh, explaining the role that summit diplomacy has undertaken between (1998-2000) especially in shaping the principles of the emerging strategic partnership between the two countries. Eighth, understanding the nature of the multi-dimensional Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership and exploring how this partnership positively benefited from strain US-Saudi relations in the aftermath of the 9/11 incidents.

In order to fulfil these objectives, this study raises three main questions that it attempts to answer throughout the following chapters:

1. Why did Saudi Arabia refuse to establish official relations with the PRC until 1990; or in other words what were the main obstacles on the way of establishing diplomatic relations between Beijing and Riyadh during the period between (1949-1990)?
2. How did the two countries enhance their emerging political relationship to reach the state of strategic partnership in the late 1990s; and what was the role that summit diplomacy has played in this regard?
3. What were the impacts of post-9/11 US-Saudi relations on the Sino-Saudi strategic partnership; and what are the main features of this strategic partnership?

1.2. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The Saudi-Chinese relationship represents an important topic for students and researchers of IR as it combines the interaction of two important states in the international system, a potential superpower and a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council as well as the second largest economy in the world after the US, on the one hand, and a key regional power in a significant area such as the Middle East and a leading Islamic country and one of the most important and influential states in international energy market. On the other, the Riyadh-Beijing relationship remains a relatively under-studied topic and there is relatively little academic research on its development.

This study, therefore, is a pioneering attempt that seeks to comprehensively chart the rise and evolution of ties between Saudi Arabia and the PRC during the 57 years since the establishment of the latter in 1949. By shedding light upon the main determinants of such important bilateral interaction between two influential states, this study attempts to fill the existing academic gap. Apart from a couple of works that discussed this topic either at only a certain historical stage (Shichor 1988) or very briefly (Bin Huwaidin 2002) or even without an analytical framework and with lots of historical omissions (Ahmed 2004), no real academic effort has been devoted to comprehensively discuss the evolution of Saudi-Chinese relationship from the stage of antagonism and political rupture during (1949-1978) and then through détente and rapprochement periods during the 1980s, and finally until normalisation and building strategic partnership during the 1990s and the mid of the 1st decade of the 3rd millennium.

In the absence of any other study that has comprehensively dealt with the Saudi-Chinese relationship during (1949-2006), this study provides the first full-length attempt to explore the determinants and dimensions of the Saudi-Chinese relationship both during and after the Cold War era.

1.3. LITERATURE SURVEY

Apart from relatively few studies, not much scholarly effort has been dedicated to discussing the historical evolution of the Saudi-Chinese relationship especially during the second half of the 20th century. One of the principle scholars in China's foreign policy in the Middle East, Yitzhak Shichor (1988), contributed to this topic by attempting to track the origins of the Sino-Saudi DF-3 (*Dongfeng*, or East Wind) strategic missile deal during the mid 1980s. Though Shichor's work is one of the rare studies to address such an important topic and to offer a historical chronology for that epoch of Saudi-Chinese relations, its scope was limited to the bilateral developments that took place during the period between (1979-1988). It, also, did not offer an understanding of the Saudi-Chinese relations during the preceding period of (1949-1978). Shichor's work focuses only on the Saudi-Chinese interactions during that period without taking into account the influence of systemic regional factors such as the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the 1979 Iranian Revolution, on the Riyadh-Beijing relationship. Shichor's work, offers, neither a conceptual framework to approach Saudi-Chinese relationship at that time nor a discussion of the nature of

Saudi or Chinese foreign policies in general. Neither does it an elaboration of the Chinese or Saudi motivations to make the arms deal and the bilateral debates or even the secret meetings that preceded it, and which probably became available after the date of publication. The study, does not offer a comprehensive coverage of the Saudi-sponsored visits of the Muslim World League (WML) to China and more particularly he makes no reference to the visits that were made in 1984 and 1987.

In his study that discusses Beijing's foreign policy towards Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula states, Bin Huwaidin (2002) very briefly discusses Saudi-Chinese relations during the period (1949-1999). Besides allocating a small section for discussing ties between Riyadh and Beijing during that period, Bin Huwaidin adopts a Neorealist systemic framework to explain China's behaviour in the Middle East. Such an approach could be useful to comprehend China's regional policy in general. However, adopting this approach that focuses only on systemic and security factors as a sole technique is, arguably, not enough to establish a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the factors that impacted on the evolution of Saudi-Chinese relations.

Ahmed (2004) is another contribution to this topic especially the period of the 1990s. However, it is based on a small number of secondary academic references. While promising to offer a study of *Saudi-Chinese relations 1949-1999*, this study suffers some historical omissions of some important events such as the Chinese intervention in Dhofar and Yemen and its implications on Saudi national security; the details, motivations and implications of the Saudi-Chinese missile deal; paying no attention to discussing the influence of some important incidents on the bilateral ties such as the Iranian Revolution, Soviet-Afghani War, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the Gulf War 1990. Ahmed (2004) offers no theoretical framework to provide a comprehension of the factors that affected Saudi-Chinese relations. It also fails to provide an explanation of the main determinants of the foreign policies of both Beijing and Riyadh during this long period along with overlooking the changes that occurred on both Chinese and Saudi foreign behaviour throughout this long period and the influence of such transformations on their bilateral relations. Finally, it neglects the influence of regional and international factors on the Saudi-Chinese relationship throughout this long period.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that there is some academic attention to discussing the Chinese foreign policy towards the Middle East in general. These

studies have occasionally and indirectly touched on some aspects of Sino-Saudi relationship such as Shichor (1979) *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy 1949-1977*, Behbehani (1981) *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World: Three Case Studies*, Abidi (1982) *China, Iran and the Persian Gulf*, Calabrese (1991) *China's Changing relations with the Middle East*, and Harris (1993) *China Considers the middle East*. These studies have been consulted where appropriate during the preparation of the early chapters of this study.

There was a flurry of short studies on Saudi-Chinese ties especially in the post-2002 period as a result of some considerable progress on the Saudi-Chinese petroleum ties. These studies such as (McMillan et al. 2002; The Gracia Group 2002; Luft & Korin 2004; Calabrese 2005; Al-Otaibi 2006; Pant 2006; Tu 2006 and Alterman & Garver 2008) lack the historical background of the evolution of this relationship, offering no holistic understanding of determinants of Saudi-Chinese relations and focus mainly on one side or another of the current developments that took place between Beijing and Riyadh especially in the petroleum field.

1.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology term refers to tools and frameworks used to conduct scientific research. Remenyi et al. (1998: 28) suggest that it is the 'procedural framework within which the research is conducted'. Murray and Lawrence (2000: 218) similarly describe it as the 'Techniques ... used in an orderly manner to reveal the dimensions of reality'. Its task, according to Walker and Monahan (1988: 885), is to clarify 'how social scientists go about answering factual questions'.

While Walker and Monahan (1988: 885) suppose that this concept is based on two main components 'how information is gathered' and 'how information, once gathered, is interpreted', this process for Murray and Lawrence (2000: 218) is more complicated and include 'research design, theoretical frameworks, the selection and analysis of literature relevant to the nominated topic, and justifies preferences for particular types of data gathering activities'. Consequently, one could conclude from the previous definitions that research methodology refers to the systematic way in which a scientific research will be carried out.

King et al. (1994: 3-4) divide research methodology into two different styles, quantitative and qualitative. While a quantitative approach 'uses numbers and statistical methods' and is 'based on numerical measurements of specific aspects of

phenomena', a qualitative approach, conversely, does not rely on numerical measurements. Qualitative approach, rather, 'tends to focus on one or a small number of cases, to use intensive interviews or depth analysis of historical materials, to be discursive in method, and to be concerned with a rounded or comprehensive account of some event or unit'.

Owing to the nature of this study that examines the historical evolution of Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period (1949-2006) as a case study and due to the nature of the historical material collected and then analyzed during the process of the preparation of this research, this study will adopt the qualitative approach as a research methodology. Because of strict the restrictions on classified official documents both in Saudi Arabia and the PRC, the author resorted to some alternative open and accessible official Chinese and Saudi resources to collect the data the of this study. In this regard, this study draws heavily on primary official resources such as New China News Agency (*Xinhua*), state-controlled *Beijing Review* as well as Saudi Press Agency (*SPA*). The researcher also reviewed and inspected public statements made by officials of both countries and official communiqués made by both governments after talks or key bilateral visits during the period that this study covers.

Also the researcher frequently consulted Chinese and Saudi news dailies including *China Daily*, *South China Morning Post*, *Beijing Morning Post*, *People's Daily*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Okaz*, *Al-Jazirah*, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, *Al-Hayat*, *Saudi Gazette*, *Arab Daily*, and *Al-Watan*. Also some specialist data were derived from some specialist Chinese, Saudi and international institutions such as *China Business News*, *China Economic Review*, *China Energy Newswire*, *China Energy Report Weekly*, *China Energy Weekly*, *Saudi Chambers of Commerce & Industry*, *Oil & Gas Journal*, *Petroleum Economist*, *Platt's Oilgram News*, *Platt's Petrochemical Report*, and *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*.

The researcher also derived some of the primary data of this study from some international news agencies and dailies including the *BBC Summary of World Broadcast (BBC/SWB)*, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, *China (FBIS)*, *Associated Press*, *Agence France Press*, *Middle East Economic Digest (MEED)*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*.

The researcher made a fieldwork visit to Saudi Arabia in Spring 2008 and managed to interview a number of Saudi dignitaries, officials and academicians.

Despite making a considerable effort in this regard, a visit to China was not possible due to practical reasons, such as visa requirements. The researcher sought to interview the Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh during his fieldwork in the Kingdom. Yet, despite repeated requests, he was given an interview with Mr. Yuan Yuan, *Attaché* at the Political Section in the Embassy, instead.

In order to deal with collected data from various sources, the researcher adopted a chronological approach within which the 57-year period between (1949-2006) was divided into eight distinct periods according to key developments on the course of Saudi-Chinese relationship starting from the political rupture during the period between the 1950s and the 1970s; and passing through *détente* and rapprochement in the 1980s; and until finally forming a strategic partnership in the late 1990s and afterwards.

A periodisation approach was used for several reasons. First, the ability of this approach to provide sufficient answers to raised research questions. Second, the long historical period that this study covers was subject to many transformations either at the level of the structure or the agents. Periodisation was, therefore, adopted in order to provide a modus by which the researcher could detect any changes that took place either systemically or domestically and then explore their impacts on the dynamics of the bilateral relationship.

Third, in the case of Saudi-Chinese relationship, it was not suitable to divide the 57-year period into only two main eras, one for the Cold War and the other for the post-Cold War because this could result in depicting an inaccurate image of a fixed and coherent Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War era either towards the entire international community or towards Saudi Arabia in particular¹. In fact, not only China's foreign policy behaviour during that era was subject to several changes that needed to be thoroughly traced and emphasised, but also the impact of these transformations on Saudi-Chinese connection were to be fully explored and examined especially given that Sino-Saudi interaction has been governed to a large extent by a Chinese action and a Saudi reaction. To clarify this point, it might be enough just to indicate that after a period of alliance with Moscow against the West during the 1950s

¹ For example, such approach could be suitable when discussing Soviet-Saudi relationship as Moscow's foreign policy towards Riyadh has been characterised by steadiness during the Cold War era.

and early 1960s, Beijing made a fundamental shift in the early 1970s and aligned itself closely with the West against the Soviet Union this time.

Fourth, a two-period method was also ruled out as an option because it might result in wrongly depicting an image of tense Saudi-Chinese relationship during most of the second half of 20th Century as a product of merely systemic-security factors and neglecting the impact of Islamic factor on Saudi foreign policy which was obvious during that era. To exemplify how the identity factor was important in shaping Saudi foreign behaviour at that time, one should note that Riyadh, despite its robust alliance with Washington against world and regional Communist threat during the Cold War, had paradoxically imposed an oil embargo on the US during the 1973 War. Similarly, despite the Sino-American rapprochement and alliance against Moscow since 1978, Riyadh refused to normalise relations with Beijing until 1990 due to various considerations one of which was religious in nature. Hence, a two-period technique was excluded since it could have resulted in neglecting some of the aspects of Saudi or Chinese foreign policies toward each other and this, in turn, could have affected the comprehensive exploration of the dimensions of this relationship.

Fifth, it was considered that it is not suitable to allocate individual chapters to illustrate the influence of a given factor, be it systemic-security or identity-ideological or economic interdependence, on bilateral relations in isolation of its historical context and without taking into account its origins. Also, this was inappropriate because not only has the impact of any of these factors greatly fluctuated in coincidence with changes that took place in the international environment or in strategic thought of Chinese and Saudi leaders but also due to the fact that these factors have sometimes worked in isolation and at other times worked collectively. For example, it was only in late 1990s that the impact of the economic interdependence factor on Saudi-Chinese relationship began to take shape. Also, while Beijing was a threat to Saudi national security during the late 1960s, it became an asset for Saudi national security since mid 1980s.

Sixth, periodisation, it is argued, allows researcher to trace and underline the main normative and ideational changes that occurred in Chinese and Saudi perspectives either towards each other or towards the international environment in general and, therefore, identify and examine their reflections on the pace of their bilateral relationship from the era of political rupture until the stage of building strategic partnership. Seventh, through periodisation and treating each distinct

historical period in detail, allowed the researcher to highlight the influence of systemic-security, identity-ideological and economic-interdependence factors either individually or collectively as per the nature of Sino-Saudi relationship at a certain historical stage.

Against this background, each of these historical periods was analysed in depth with the purpose of establishing a broader understanding of the main determinants of Saudi-Chinese relationship during each period and after that paint a holistic picture of factors impacting Saudi-Chinese relationship in general and during all phases studied. To undertake such a mission, the researcher resorted throughout this process to a combination of approaches including historical event analysis and content analysis. Likewise, and in accordance with the assumption that Saudi-Chinese relationship was generally affected by these three main factors above-mentioned, an integrated-theoretical framework that is based on three IR theories that tackle the impact of such factors in international relations including Neo-realism, Social Constructivism and Economic Interdependence was used.

1.5. OUTLINE OF THESIS

This study is divided into ten chapters. Chapter one comprises the objectives and questions of the study. It also deals with issues such as the significance of the study and the research methodology and the study outline. Furthermore, it introduces a theoretical framework that will be adopted as a main guideline for this study.

Chapter two discusses briefly the origins of the age-old relationship between China and the Arabian Peninsula (most of its territory came to be known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). It also traces the short-lived diplomatic relationship that linked the Kingdom and republican China during (1937-1949). It, furthermore, examines how the Cold War as well as ideological and identity differences between Riyadh and Beijing led to a Saudi-Chinese political rupture during (1949-1964) following the Communist assumption of power and the establishment of the PRC and the Saudi decision to recognise Taiwan in 1957 as the legitimate representative of Chinese people.

Chapter three examines the worsening and tense Saudi-Chinese relations during the period (1964-1972). It illustrates how the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and the oppression Chinese Muslims were subject to have contributed to depict the Communist political regime in Beijing as the 'foe of Islam'

among the Islamic states including Saudi Arabia. It also clarifies the negative impact of the predominance of ideology and radicalisation on China's foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution period on Saudi-Chinese status as a result of Beijing's decision, within the context of its regional competition with Moscow, to support leftist-revolutionary movements in Yemen and Dhofar and, thus, pose a tangible threat to the Saudi southern flank. It clarifies, on the other hand, how the Saudis counterattacked by adopting an anti-Communist and anti-revolutionist foreign policy that was crystallised in King Faisal's world view, entering into a strong alliance with the US to combat Communist threat in the Middle East and supporting Taiwan financially and diplomatically.

Chapter four focuses on the Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period (1972-1978) in which China's foreign policy was subject to a key shift towards pragmatism and abandoning support of radical movements in the area along with seeking to establish state-to-state relations and becoming supportive of US policies in the region. This chapter highlights the changes that led to the transformation of China's perception of world political realities and its position in the international arena. It will then discuss the implications of such changes for China's foreign policy in the Gulf. In turn, it sheds light upon the Saudi decision to impose an oil embargo in 1973 as a political watershed in the Saudi foreign policy that had its impacts on both the Saudi-U.S. and the Saudi-Chinese relations. It, also, touches on China's unsuccessful efforts to persuade Riyadh to open a new chapter in their relations and establish formal diplomatic contacts between them. This chapter concludes with the main reasons that pushed Riyadh to ignore Chinese attempts and efforts to court it.

Chapter five highlights the fundamental positive changes that occurred in China's domestic and foreign policies after the arrival of the Chinese reformist leader Deng Xiaoping to power in late 1978 and their positive reflections on a Saudi-Chinese relationship. It discusses also how key regional developments between (1978-1982) such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution led to a Saudi-Chinese *détente*. It illustrates how Beijing resorted again to using its Muslim communities as a bridge to rectify the confidence crisis with the Kingdom by inviting several Saudi delegations to China to inspect Muslims conditions there after 1978. It demonstrates the Saudi-Chinese guarded rapprochement during (1982-1985) through *hajj* diplomacy, the birth of bilateral commercial exchange and mutual recognition of each other's role in the international and regional politics. It, ultimately, discusses the

Chinese main motivations for establishing diplomatic ties with Riyadh and the Saudi justifications for not doing so at that time.

Chapter six traces Saudi-Chinese relationship during 1985-1990 at the end of which the two countries succeeded in establishing political relationships. It starts by examining the determinants of China's new economic-motivated 'independent foreign policy for peace' and its reflections on Beijing's objectives in the Middle East. It, moreover, discuss the motivations that led Saudi Arabia to approach Beijing with the intention of buying CSS-2 missiles. It, furthermore, sheds light on the Chinese motivations to provide the Kingdom with strategic missiles. Then it concentrates on major religious and economic developments that took place on the pace of the two countries relationship during this era. Finally, the ultimate touches that preceded the normalisation of Saudi-Chinese relations and the establishment of diplomatic ties in July 1990 are described.

Chapter seven assesses the emerging Saudi-Chinese official political, religious, economic and petroleum relations during 1990-1997. Firstly, it considers what motivated the two countries to boost their relationship during this era. It, then, discusses in detail the impact of the 1991 Gulf War to liberate Kuwait on Riyadh-Beijing relations and its role in the emergence of a kind of political coordination between the two capitals for the first time. After that, it highlights the military aspect in the two sides' relationship with special attention paid to the issue of the alleged Sino-Saudi nuclear cooperation during this stage. Next, it underlines the positive improvements that occurred in the religious dimension of the relationship between Riyadh and Beijing and its reflections on Chinese Muslims as a result of the progress in the official relationship between the two sides. Last but not least, it focuses on the rise of economic interdependence factor as a crucial part of Sino-Saudi relationship during the mid 1990s as a result of the huge progress the two countries managed to make in their two-way trade exchange and the launch of their petroleum nexus.

Chapter eight explores the seedbed of Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership following active bilateral summit diplomacy between (1998-2000) and as a result of growing economic and petroleum interdependence between the two countries. It, also, examines the primary strategic, political and economic determinants that dominated the calculated attitude of both Beijing and Riyadh towards each other at this stage. Furthermore, it shows how summit diplomacy has undertaken a key role in paving the way for the evolution of strategic partnership between the two countries in all fields.

This chapter also pays attention to discussing the strategic dimensions of the official visits of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz to China in 1998, President Jiang Zemin's state visit to the Kingdom in 1999 and finally the official visit of Saudi Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Defence Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz in 2000.

Chapter nine discusses the golden age of Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership in political, petroleum and economic fields especially following the deterioration of US-Saudi relations following the 9/11 incidents and their aftermath. It highlights the main systemic and domestic motivations that prompted both Beijing and Riyadh to enhance their partnership including their mutual desire to coordinate their political efforts against US political pressures, China's desire to secure energy supplies and the Saudi desire to open new markets for its petroleum products. Then it highlights the main achievements that both sides managed to accomplish during this era in all fields including political coordination, continuing their military cooperation, enhancing their cultural ties, furthering their petroleum cooperation and intensifying their economic cooperation.

The final chapter, offers a brief review of the arguments raised throughout the thesis. The dimensions and determinants of Saudi-Chinese relations during (1949-2006) and the impact of ideological, systemic-security and economic interdependence factors are reassessed and reasserted.

1.6. AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Building a conceptual framework in the International Relations (IR) field is not an easy task due to the uncertainty and problematic nature that characterises the phenomenon under study. Theorists of IR agree that this field suffers from what they call the 'level-of-analysis problem' related to whether to decide to concentrate upon the whole or upon the parts, upon the system or upon the components, upon the structure or upon the units. This chronic agent-structure difficulty or 'Gordian Knot' as some like to call it in IR literature has sparked a heated debate among IR theorists about whether structure (i.e. international system) or agents (i.e. nation-states, nongovernmental actors, norms, ideas) should be taken into consideration while analysing and explaining actors' foreign behaviours and international interactions. Such division shaped the way through which they perceive political realities in the international realm. Likewise, this methodological or conceptual confusion about whether to choose the micro or macro-level of analysis was demonstrated in the

theories that have been produced to offer a better understanding of dynamics of phenomenon in the IR field (Singer 1961: 77-92; Wendt 1987: 335-370; Hollis & Smith 1990: 7-9, 99-101; Hollis & Smith 1991: 393-410; Wight 1999: 109-142; Bieler & Morton 2001: 5-35).

Accordingly, while there are a variety of theories within the literature of International Relations (IR) field, 'Every theory leaves something out. No theories can claim to offer a picture of the world that is complete. No theory has exclusive claims to the truth. Theories in international politics offer insights into the behaviour of states' (Lamy 2005: 221). Halliday, an eminent scholar in IR and Middle Eastern politics, confirms such notion and suggests that conducting area studies and 'engaging with any region, be it the Middle East, East Asia or Western Europe, in terms of the general analytic and theoretical categories of the academic discipline International Relations is always difficult: in a positive, creative way, such an engagement challenges both regional studies and IR theory alike' (Halliday 2005: 13-14).

Hinnebusch (2003: 1-3), another prominent scholar in Middle Eastern politics, asserts that such theoretical dilemma is more applicable to some certain regions including the Middle East, where Saudi Arabia is situated. In this regard, he posits that due to the Middle East's unique characteristics, no single conceptual approach can be solely used as a theoretical framework to understand, explain or capture this region's reality.

In harmony with the previous statements and in order to overcome this dilemma and put together an integrated conceptual framework that deals with systemic-security, identity-ideological and economic-interdependence factors together with the purpose of providing an understanding of the main dimensions and determinants of Saudi-Chinese relationship from the time of the establishment of the PRC in 1949 until the establishment of bilateral strategic partnership in 2006, the researcher will utilize the notions and perceptions of three of the paradigms of IR field: Neorealism, Constructivism and Economic Interdependence.

Yet, one must say that while benefiting from these theories' assumptions on international politics, this study will neither adopt nor get into the heated and deep inter-paradigm debate about the contradicting ontological and epistemological points

of departure of rationalist/problem-solving (i.e. Neorealism & Neoliberalism) and critical/constitutive (i.e. Social Constructivism) theories².

1.6.1. Neorealism

Neorealism or (Structural Realism), one of the mainstream and dominant theories of IR, is a refined version of Morgenthau's classical Realism that regards nation-states as the central rational actors in international politics. Proceeding from conservative assumptions of human nature, Realism assumes that moral principles have nothing to do with a state's behaviour. While it strictly defines the concept of power in terms of military capability, it also considers power politics among nation-states as the main determinants of their foreign behaviour. Due to the absence of a higher global government, Realism assumes that international politics is governed by anarchy and that the state of War and conflict is the regular condition in such self-help environment. It, therefore, concludes that international politics is a struggle for military power and that security issues including national security, survival and the balance of power are the key to understanding the nature of relations between nation-states and operations in the international system (Morgenthau 1967: 5; Burchill 2001: 77-83; Viotti & Kauppi 1993: 5-7 & 81; Dunne & Schmidt 2005: 162-169).

In his book *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Kenneth Waltz, the most important theorist of Neorealism, basically accepts most of the hypotheses posed by Morgenthau's Realism including the three main notions that the state is the main actor in the international politics, the international system is anarchical and self-help and ultimately that survival represents the main objective of sovereign states (Dunne & Schmidt 2005: 172-176). Yet, he re-articulates and revises the concept of power to include all sorts of capabilities including 'size of population and territory, economic capabilities, military strength, political stability and competence' instead of the former assumption that confines it to military capability (Waltz 1979: 131). Contrary to Morgenthau as well, he also ignores the impact of human nature, ethics of the statecraft, state leaders and their intentions on external behaviour of states towards

² While some believe that Social Constructivism represents an outgrowth of Critical Theory (Reus-Smith 2003: 215), others regard it as a middle ground between rational/foundationist and critical/constitutive and hold that the antifoundationist/critical/constitutive category comprises various schools of thought in IR including Post-modernism, Feminist Theory, Normative Theory, Historical Sociology and Post-colonialism. For further details about such debate, see (Smith & Owens 2005: 273-275; Waver 1996: 1149-185; Smith & Baylis 2005: 7).

each other (Jackson & Sorensen 2003: 84; Hollis & Smith 1990: 37; Buzan 1996: 49-50).

Instead, he seeks to bring in a 'more theoretically refined systemic or structural account of international relations' and 'rectify Realism inability to deal with economic issues' (Hollis & Smith 1990: 36). By underscoring the resemblance of foreign policy behaviour of great powers during the Cold War despite their diverse political systems and contrasting ideologies, Waltz asserts that international system and more particularly its structure (whether Unipolar, Bipolar, Multipolar) rather than the attributes of the domestic composition of the states is the 'force that shapes and shoves the units' and explain their behaviour and guide the outcomes of international relations (Waltz 1979: 72; Waltz 1988: 617; Waltz 1990: 34).

Within this context, he stresses the explanatory capability of structure and systemic factors and argues that they have the upper hand in determining the nature of the foreign policy behaviour of the state since they 'interpose themselves between states and their diplomatic conduct' (Burchill 2001: 88-90; Waltz 1988: 617; Evans & Newnham 1998: 364; Hollis & Smith 1990: 36). He avers that, 'systems-level forces seem to be at work' and as such 'similarity of outcomes prevails despite changes in the agents that produce them' (Waltz 1979: 39 & 64).

While Waltz differentiates between theories that reflect on the impact of structure on international relations as 'systemic' and others that overlook its impact as 'reductionist', he insists that outcomes of international interactions between states cannot be explained 'reductively' since they are directed by the systemic attributes (Waltz 1979: 60-79; Burchill 2001: 91). He holds that, 'a system theory of international politics deals with forces at the international and not at the national level' (Waltz 1988: 618).

Neorealists perceive international politics as a system with a precisely defined structure that controls, constrains, frames and offers a better comprehension of international political interactions (Waltz 1990: 29-30). In order to make differences between variables at the level of the system and those at the national level of the state, a Neorealism definition of the structure omits the features of states including the types of political statesmen, social and economic institutions and ideological commitments that states may have (Waltz 1979: 79-80).

Waltz maintains that this precisely defined structure is based on three prime characteristics. First, as a self-help milieu, the 'ordering principles' of the

international structure are decentralisation as well as anarchy and thus the ultimate end states seek to achieve is securing their survival. Second, since the constraints of structure direct the 'characters of units' in the system, these units are functionally similar and will be 'duplicating one another's activities' regardless of their domestic differences such as ideology or form of government. Third, despite performing the same functions, what states strongly and unevenly differ in terms of is the 'distribution of capabilities' (Waltz 1979: 88-97). As he puts it, 'states behavior varies more with power than with differences in ideology, in internal structure of property relations, or in governmental form. In self-help systems, the pressures of competition weight more heavily than ideological preferences or internal political pressure' (Waltz 1986: 329).

1.6.1.1. The systemic-security factor in the Saudi-Chinese relationship

Neorealist perception of international relations helps to develop an understanding of the impact of systemic and security factors on Saudi-Chinese relationship both during and after the Cold War era. This approach explains how systemic-security factors have once negatively affected Saudi-Chinese and also how they later positively impacted the same relationship.

Neorealist perception of international relations clarifies how the bipolar system and state of international polarity have negatively overshadowed Riyadh-Beijing relationship during the period (1949-1978). The PRC's debut appearance on the Middle Eastern political theatre was in the context of the Cold War and inherent to the 'Sino-Soviet entente'. At that time China decided to align itself closely with the Soviet Union and to 'lean to one side' under the leadership of Moscow. This Chinese regional role between (1949-1957) was mainly subordinate and complementary to the Soviet quest to fighting colonialism, undermine Western imperialism and monopoly in the region (Calabrese 1990: 863-864; Harris 1994: 323).

Due to China's traditional fears of encirclement and foreign domination, the Middle East has generally and traditionally been vital for China's national security as a 'barrier' between China and Europe (Simmonds 1970: 147-148). Mao Zedong, thus, assumed that the critical international situation was accurately demonstrated by the situation in the Middle East which due to its strategic location and huge oil reserves was considered to be a 'crucial link' in Western endeavours to form a 'ring around China, the Soviet Union and the people's democracies' (Shichor 1977: 158).

Riyadh, for its part, perceived regional aspirations of Communism and Communist camp during the Cold War as a threat against its national security and consequently aligned itself closely with the Western camp, namely the US. Against this background and due to the impact of security and systemic factors, it was expected that tension would mark Riyadh's relations with both of the main powers in the Communist camp, Soviet Union and the PRC (Al-Kurdi 1991: 32). As China managed to strengthen its relations with some radical Arab governments after the Bandung Conference, it was natural as well that Riyadh 'grew closer to the ROC' (Goldstein 1999: 18).

Given that Saudis have been preoccupied during the Cold War era by survival and national security issues³, Neorealist assumptions helps to explain the impact of systemic-security factor in shaping tense Saudi-Chinese relations especially after China became a real threat to Saudi national security when it decided to enter into a competition with the Soviet Union for leadership of the Communist camp and influence in the region following the Sino-Soviet disputes in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Behbehani 1981: 6; Scalapino 1974: 354; Abir 1974: 131; Scalapino 1979: 51-52; Calabrese 1990: 864). At this stage, China's own perspective on the Middle East started to take shape as it thought that the region could be 'an arena in which to play out its own version of revolutionary commitment. And the Third World states as potential allies in this struggle' (Harris 1993a: 79).

Beijing, as a result, adopted a hard-line radical foreign policy in the region during the 1960s and supported the 'people's armed struggle' and radical-Communist movements in Dhofar and Yemen against the Western imperialism (Dutt 1966: 152-154; Hinton 1966: 180-184; El-Rayyes and Nahas 1973: 88; Yodfat 1977: 3; Harris 1994: 323). Such escalation in the Chinese foreign behaviour made Beijing a real challenge to Saudi Southern flank. Saudis, in return, enhanced their political and economic ties with Taiwan. Saudis also gave up their abstention on the issue of China's seat in the UN and adopted an active diplomatic effort to prevent the PRC from assuming the Chinese permanent seat in the UN Security Council at that time.

This Chinese threat to Saudi national security continued until China decided to put an end to its support of revolutionary-leftist movements in the region in early 1970s and to seek establishing state-to-state relations with existing political regimes

³ About the impact of security and stability factor in shaping Saudi calculations and foreign policy, see for example (Dawisha 1979; Tahtinen 1979; Safran 1985).

in the area. Beijing's rising fear of Moscow during the 1970s have formidably dominated and overshadowed the trend of China's foreign policy. It, therefore, led to a Sino-US détente in 1972 which was favourably reflected in China's support towards Washington's policies in the Middle East with the purpose of reining in Moscow's regional advances and aspirations.

Chinese advocacy of a strong American involvement in the region stemmed from its new perception of the USSR as their 'principal enemy' and Mao seemed to be planning to exploit the contradictions of the bipolar international system to weaken both the Soviet Union (the chief enemy) and then the US (the secondary enemy) (Tretiak 1971: 219; Scalapino 1974: 355, 360; Dillon et. al. 1977: 459; Meng-hsuan 1978: 8-12 & 15-17; O'Leary 1978: 203; Shichor 1979: 161-164; Yahuda 1981: 105; Zhang 1998: 247).

Yet, the Saudi-Chinese relationship was not positively affected by such structural change and it took both sides eighteen years to rectify their ideological differences and confidence crisis. Whereas systemic factors and Neorealism could explain Sino-American détente and then normalisation of their political relations during the 1970s over their common security interest in confronting Soviet threat despite their ideological differences, Neorealist theory fails to explain the Saudi constant refusal to normalise political ties and establish diplomatic relations with the PRC despite the fact that Beijing since 1978 had become supportive of the US regional policies, it was no longer a threat to Saudi national security, sharing the same anti-Soviet stance and cooperative in terms of supplying arms to Saudi's allies both in Afghanistan during the USSR-Afghani War as well as to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, and supplying arms to the Kingdom since the mid 1980s. Such a breakthrough in Riyadh-Beijing official connection was only achieved in July 1990.

Similarly, a Neorealist approach and systemic account cannot offer an explanation for the Saudi political decision in 1973 to impose an oil embargo on its closest security ally in countering Communist threats at that time, the US. Neorealist school of thought falls short of understanding and explaining the impact of domestic factors in shaping the nature of relations between Riyadh and Beijing including the negative influence of ideological difference and conditions of Chinese Muslims during the Mao's era.

Also, it does not provide an account of the reason that prompted China to exploit its Muslim minorities to bridge its political rupture with the Kingdom and gain

its trust, nor clarifies how Chinese *hajj* missions and inspections visits of the Saudi-commissioned World Muslim League's delegations to China have played a key part in this direction during the 1980s. In order to explain the influence of ideological and religious factors on Sino-Saudi relations, this study will, in the third section of this framework, utilise some assumptions of the Social Constructivism paradigm that focuses on the influence of normative and identity issues on IR.

One must say that the systemic assumptions of Neorealism continue to be useful to establish a good understanding of the impact of some structural factors including the Iranian Revolution 1979, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) on the détente that took place between the Kingdom and China during the 1980s. The security account of Neorealism is helpful in accounting for the impact of the strategic missile arms deal between the Kingdom and China, in bringing them closer and maximizing the chances of the normalisation of their relations.

Neorealist assumptions are, also, helpful in terms of clarifying how structural-security factors during the post-Cold War era, including the Gulf War in 1991 to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi invasion, the Unipolar international system which was marked by US dominance both globally and in the Middle East in particular and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and their negative aftermaths on US-Saudi relations, have positively contributed to bring Beijing and Riyadh closer.

From a neorealist perspective, Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership at this era can be seen as coming up against the background of their common desire to resist the US regional dominance and coordinate their international attitudes in issues such as US pressures and criticisms of both of them in matters related to political reforms as well as alleged violations of human rights and political and religious freedom. Furthermore, the Sino-Saudi strategic partnership reflects the concerns of both sides on the US dominant role both globally and regionally. Where Saudis want to use China as a shield and a counterweight against American regional dominance and pressures for western-styled political reforms, the Chinese want to strategically secure their energy supplies against any possible US blockage or sudden rupture.

However, when it comes to understanding the context within which economic-interdependence factor in the Saudi-Chinese relationship has emerged for the first time in the mid 1990s and took its full shape during the early stages of the 3rd Millennium with the rise of the Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership, security-oriented

Neorealist assumptions go away from realising reality. As such, this study will use the premise and ideas of Neoliberal Institutionalism in the following section of this conceptual framework to explain the theoretical dimensions of this factor and how it evolved to become one of the main driving forces for Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership since the late 1990s.

1.6.2. Neoliberalism

While Neorealist tradition has greatly contributed to the provision of a valid and coherent account of the impact of structural-security factors on international relations, considerable academic effort from different schools of thought in IR -including Neoliberalism- has been directed towards criticising its overemphasis of systemic-security factors, the concept of power and how it can be measured, Waltz's inaccurate notion of a system and its explanatory capability. It was, furthermore, criticised for its underestimation of domestic and unit-level characteristics, limited comprehension and inability to offer a complete picture by overlooking of non-state actors, institutions, international interdependence, norms and rules established (Keohane 1986: 168-169 & 190-197; Ruggie 1986; 151-152; Keohane 1989; Hollis & Smith 1990: 111-115).

Neoliberalism (also called Neoliberal Institutionalism or Interdependence liberalism) derives its origins from the Liberalist school of thought in IR, which is closely connected with the emergence of the modern liberal-constitutional state. While descending from the same rationalist family as Realism does, Liberalism offers a more optimistic view of human nature. Unlike Realism, however, Liberalism foci is not power and conflict but rather on the possibility for 'human progress' in modern civil society and capitalist economy. While state is the main concern of Realists, individuals and achieving their satisfaction and progress occupy the main interest of Liberalists (Jackson & Sorensen 2003: 106-107)

Based on its positive perception of human nature and profound convention in 'human reason' along with the applicability of rational principles to international affairs, Liberalism believes, on the one hand, in the attainability of achieving mutually beneficial 'collaborative and cooperative social action, domestically as well as internationally' and, on the other, in the possibility to avoid war and conflict. Liberalists attach great importance to the process of modernisation as an instrument

that persistently boosts the range and the call for cooperation between actors based on their mutual interest (Jackson & Sorensen 2003: 106-107).

Interdependence Liberalism is an IR school of thought that is based on the work of Robert Keohane and Josef Nye (1977) *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. They start by criticising the Realist assumptions about international politics as preoccupied by the notion of the struggle for power and the usability of force as an effective tool of statecraft, their hypothesis about a hierarchy of the agenda of issues in world politics that gives 'high politics' (military and security) topics priority over the 'low politics' (economic, welfare and social affairs) themes (Keohane & Nye 1977: 23-24).

Instead, Neoliberals sought to offer a new explanatory model by arguing that the post-war (2nd World War) world, and unlike the simpler pre-war one, has become characterised by a 'complex interdependence' (Keohane & Nye 1977: 23). By this they mean that the number of actors taking part in international interactions had increased and we are living in a more pluralistic world and, as such, these actors had become more and more mutually dependent (Lamy 2005: 213).

Keohane and Nye contend that when the 'complex interdependence', the world has come to be characterised by three main attributes. First, the emergence of both *interstate* and *transnational* 'multiple channels' that link societies including *formal* and *informal* connections between governmental and non-governmental elites, foreign office, international organisations, NGOs and multinational corporations. By emphasising the existence and importance of trans-governmental connections, they refute the Realist assumption that states are the only units and that states act coherently.

Second, the multiple-issue agenda of the *interstates* relationships is marked by an absence of hierarchy among its issues. This means that no supremacy is granted to 'high politics' issues over 'low politics' and that the importance of economic and social affairs is persistently rising. Not only that but these issues are tackled in different government departments not just the foreign ministry and also various levels. Third, the erosion of the significance of military force as an appropriate and expensive instrument of international statecraft in favour of more cooperative multilateral instruments including international institutions, negotiations and economic tools conducive to achieve cooperation among actors in the system (Keohane & Nye 1977: 24-29).

1.6.2.1. The economic-interdependence factor in the Saudi-Chinese relationship

While Neoliberalism is not useful and probably of no significance to explain the political rupture between Saudi Arabia and the PRC during the Cold War era, this paradigm strongly asserts its relevance and explanatory power when it comes to understanding the economic progress that took place in the Saudi-Chinese connection in the late 1990s as a result of the Chinese constant economic modernisation and growth along with rising domestic energy demand and the Saudi desire to open new Asian markets away from its conventional Western markets. Since 'Free trade and the removal of barriers to commerce is at the heart modern interdependence theory' (Burchill 2001: 39), Neoliberalism provides an understanding of the Saudi-Chinese relationship especially during the post-Cold War era from a new angle, that of economic interdependence.

It can be said that whereas the existence of the Soviet Union as a security threat to world stability has given prominence to Realist and Neorealist tradition, its collapse in the early 1990s has furthered the influence of liberal theories of international relations within this academic field (Burchill 2001: 30). The collapse of the Soviet Union has paved the way for the prevalence of the conditions of 'complex interdependence' that Keohane and Nye has heralded in 1977. Under these conditions, peace, cooperation, free trade and the removal of barriers of commerce will dominate the *interstate* and *transnational* agenda as actually happened since mid 1990. For Neoliberals, the current state of 'Globalisation' which began since the early 1990s offers a good example and an ideal case for the rising transnational connections, multiple channels for interactions and the number of connections (Lamy 2005: 213). Such a peaceful and cooperative international environment that gives priority to issues of 'soft politics' over 'high politics' was undoubtedly reflected in a positive way in the Saudi-Chinese mutual desire to enhance their economic cooperation.

On the other hand and in accordance with Neoliberal assumption about the importance of the process of modernisation in increasing the scope and prospects for economic interdependence between international actors, the Sino-Saudi relationship hugely and positively benefited from the Chinese economic reforms and modernisation programme introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. This conclusion is derived from the fact that unless such reforms and modernisation process took place,

the PRC could not have achieved the exceptional economic growth that it managed to score consistently since that time.

In an attempt to trace the evolution of Saudi-Chinese economic interdependence, one must also underline that the Chinese adoption of the 'independent foreign policy for peace' in the mid 1980s was also an asset for the Chinese economic modernisation programme and an indication the Beijing is willing to continue its focus on economic growth and modernisation⁴. Such unprecedented economic growth in Mainland China attracted the attention of the Saudi foreign policy makers in the mid 1990s and prompted them to think of China as a huge market for their petroleum (oil & gas) and petrochemical products. Chinese policy makers, for their part, paid considerable attention towards enhancing commercial ties with the Kingdom as they saw it, on the one hand, as a capable and reliable source to meet their growing petroleum needs since they became a net importer of oil in 1993, and on the other, as a very big regional market that could consume Chinese various goods and as a result reduce the deficit in trade balance if China imported energy from a small country that is rich in terms of its energy resources but has a small population or a limited consumptive capability.

In harmony with the assumptions of Neoliberalism, Saudi-Chinese 'complementary' partnership offers an excellent example of a mutual interdependence relationship in which both sides benefit from each other and achieve cooperation and mutual interest. In order to enhance such win-win partnership and allow it to gain the necessary momentum, senior political leaders of both countries have engaged in active summit diplomacy during the period (1998-2000). This joint top-level effort has borne fruit and starting from the end of 1998 Saudi Arabia became the largest trade partner of China in West Asia and North Africa. The two sides, likewise, signed several agreements to encourage two-way commercial exchange and enhance their energy ties.

The Sino-Saudi economic interdependence was furthered after the two sides agreed in 2004 to give a foothold for each other in the upstream and downstream sectors of the energy field. According to this agreement, Chinese companies secured a toehold in the Saudi upstream sector following being granted the right a concession to

⁴ This move was seen by many political analysts as an indication that the PRC has reached the point of no return in taking out ideology from its foreign policy and that economic modernisation based on Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy was the driving force of the country's agenda (Sutter 1986; Walsh 1988; Kim 1989; Cumings 1989; Bachman 1989; Gittings 1990; Hamrin: 1990).

explore and produce natural gas in around 40,000 square Kilometres block in the desert of the *Rub Al-Khali* (Empty Quarter). Also, Chinese companies announced their desire to enter the profitable Saudi downstream sector where raw materials are at abundant and supplied at competitive prices. This according to Chinese officials in Chinese energy and petrochemical companies will help them to implement their strategy of 'going overseas' (*Xinhua Economic News Service*, January 25, 2006).

For their part, Saudi companies were allowed to gain rights in the Chinese downstream sector and shares in a number of huge Chinese refineries and petrochemical plants along with rights to market their products in the Chinese huge market. This will secure larger shares for Saudi oil and petrochemical exports to the Chinese promising market and will give Saudi companies relative advantages in this regard.

On the other hand and with Saudi support, China also entered into negotiations with Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council to reach a free trade agreement, since 2005, the accomplishment of which will be reflected positively on the volume of two-way trade. As a result of these efforts to enhance the state of economic interdependence between Saudi Arabia and China, Saudi Arabia became by 2006 the largest exporter of crude oil to China with nearly 500,000 barrel/day and this number is likely to double after a joint venture between the two countries start to work fully (*Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2006). The commercial exchange, on the other hand, between the sides jumped from only USD 400 million in 1990 to reach a new height of USD 16 billion by the end of 2006.

Finally, today the private sectors in both countries are linked through strong ties after the establishment of several joint committees and bodies in which their members are represented and this matter will definitely help to strengthen the economic interdependence relationship between both countries. This concurs with the Neoliberalist assumption about the existence of both *interstate* and *transnational* 'multiple channels' that link societies including *formal* and *informal* connections between governmental and non-governmental elites along with a strong rule for non-governmental actors in creating the state of 'complex interdependence' between international actors.

However, one must note that in the Saudi-Chinese economic interdependence both governments are the driving forces to such a strong partnership as they control a vital and strategic part of it, the energy sector. Despite that the private sectors both in

China and Saudi Arabia are playing an important role in reinforcing bilateral interdependence between the two sides, the role Saudi and Chinese governments undertake in motivating their partnership especially in the energy field is predominant due to the fact that this sector is under an exclusive supervision of both states and that even the main energy companies in both countries (Sinopec & Saudi Aramco) are state-owned. This means that the impact of bilateral political relations between both governments in Riyadh and Beijing will continue to influentially overshadow Saudi-Chinese 'economic interdependence' relationship especially in the energy field either positively, as happening now, or negatively.

1.6.3. Social Constructivism

Among the main critics of Neorealist assumptions in international politics is Alexander Wendt, an important theorist of Social Constructivism, which represents a relatively new IR theory that emerged in the late 1980s and gained more prominence during the mid 1990s due to the end of the Cold War (Smith & Baylis 2005: 6-7). Wendt rejects the neorealist hypothesis about anarchy in international relations and argues that security and survival objectives are not the only driving forces to understand the behaviour of states. He defies the assumption of rationalist schools that the identities and interests of actors (both agents and the international system) have a predetermined and rigid nature or 'exogenously given', as he puts it (Wendt 1992: 391-425). Instead, he emphasises that concepts such as 'interests', 'sovereignty' and 'anarchy' are not perpetual or unchallengeable but actually were created, constructed and given meaning by actors themselves (Viotti & Kauppi 2007: 24-25).

Social Constructivism pivots around three main assumptions. First, unlike Neorealism that holds that material structure of balance of military power shapes the behaviour of nation-states, Constructivism argues that normative or ideational structures are just as important as material structures in shaping the behaviour of social and political actors since 'systems of shared ideas, beliefs and values [ideas about identity, the logics of ideology, knowledge, norms and rules] also have structural characteristics, and that they exert a powerful influence on social and political action'. Attention to these normative and ideational structures stems from the following considerations. On the one hand, the structure of shared knowledge in which material resources are embedded is the only basis of their meaning for human

action. On the other, ideational structures contribute to determining the social identity of political actors and in other words the social identity of the sovereign states are shaped in accordance with the norms of the international system (Reus-Smith 2003: 215-217).

Second, for Constructivists, non-material structures (i.e. identities and ideologies) determine interests and as a result dictate the nature of actions required (Reus-Smith 2003: 217). As Wendt succinctly puts it, 'Identities are the basis of interests' and actors 'define their interests in the process of defining situation' (Wendt 1992: 398). Katzenstein's work, *The Culture of National Security*, represents a qualitative addition in this regard as it argues that changing identities influence the actor's definition of political interests, which, in turn, affects national security policies (Katzenstein 1996: 25). Third, from a constructivist perspective, agents and structures are mutually constituted and reciprocally remake and redefine each other (Reus-Smith 2003: 218).

This study, thus, benefits greatly from the Constructivist assumption that awareness of norms and states identities could enhance our understanding of the way through which international actors define their interests and hence reveal some significant issues overlooked by both Neorealism and Neoliberalism. Constructivists conclude that such issues must be incorporated in order to produce superior explanations for the under study phenomenon (Barnett 2005: 257-258). This study will follow the advice of Barnett (2005: 264) that 'Although Constructivism and rational choice are generally viewed as competing approaches, at times they can be combined to deepen our understanding of global politics'.

While Social Constructivism was the only approach that provides a systematic and thorough treatment of the influence of the ideational as well as normative factors on the actors' foreign behaviour, there has been a considerable body of scholarly works in the IR field that place emphasis on the impact of factors such as the type of political regime, cultural, religious and ideological differences -especially those of radical and revolutionary character- in shaping foreign-policy making and hence the nature of relations between political units in the international system (Huntington 1993: 23-49; Cassels 1996 1-8; Hill 1996: 2-9; Wittkopf & McCormick 2004: 4). Holsti (1991: 100-102), for example, argues that the impact of ideological differences could drive states to enter into wars against each other.

More particularly, scholars admit that in a region like the Middle East, 'state or sub-state levels are at least as important as the system level in shaping state behaviour' (Hinnebusch 2003: 2). They also agree that identity, ideological and religious factors play a key part in influencing the external behaviour and alliance formation of the Middle Eastern states⁵ including Saudi foreign policy especially towards the Baghdad Pact 1955, during the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, GCC membership 1981 (Dawisha 1977: 55-56; Curtis 1981; Kimball 1992: 29-48; Barnett 1996: 418-419; Barnett 1998: 5; Telhami & Barnett 2002: 16-19; Ye Qing 2004: 183-192; Hinnebusch 2005: 151-170; Gause, III 2005: 271). This study as a result contends that the insights of Social Constructivism provide an indispensable understanding and explanation of the influence of ideological and normative factors on Saudi-Chinese relationship especially during the period between (1949-1990).

1.6.3.1. The identity-ideological factor in the Saudi-Chinese relationship

The constructivist approach can help to incorporate the impact of values, norms, identity and ideology for the sake of offering a comprehensive account of the dynamics that worked together to shape Saudi-Chinese relationship especially during the Cold War and especially during the period between (1949-1978) in which ideological considerations notably guided China's foreign and domestic policies.

In accordance with Wendt's above-mentioned assumptions about the influence of identity on actors' interests as well as actions and taking into account Katzenstein's hypothesis that 'Definitions of identity that distinguish between self and other imply definitions of threat and interest that have strong effects on national security policies' (Katzenstein 1996: 18-19), one could logically understand the ideational origins of Saudi-Chinese political rupture and how ideological differences between these two ideationally contradictory political systems have destructively impacted their relationship. While the PRC used to define itself between (1949-1978) as Marxist, progressive and revolutionary, the Kingdom has been regarding itself as Islamic, monarchical and conservative. Also given that the Saudi ruling political elite derives its legitimacy from adopting Islam in the country in which it was revealed and believes that protecting Muslim minorities all over the world is one of its functions to

⁵ The impact of ideational and identity factors is not confined to Middle Eastern states but it is in fact extended to include wide range of nation-states all over the world. For more details in this regard, see for instance (Myers 1986; Jongsuk Chay 1990; Krause & Renwick 1996; Fawn 2004).

get domestic legitimacy and international prestige⁶, it became inevitable that relations between Riyadh and Beijing would be marked by tensions during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in which central authorities in Beijing harshly abused its Muslim communities and attempted to erase their religious identity.

To elaborate further in this issue, one could say that the natural contradictory relationship between Islam and atheist Communism made it difficult for both Riyadh and Beijing to approach each other since Communism believes in Marx's indictment of religion as the 'opiate of the people'. Besides being a nonbeliever ideology, Communists hold that the state should be the focal point for obedience as well as direction and unable to accept the existence of any ideological system which demands a loyalty transcending loyalty to the party and the state. Muslims, however, believe that the only force that could direct them is God/Allah to whom they must show complete obedience so that they may join his Creator in Paradise (I-jan 1957: 10-11; Winters 1979: 27, 47).

Constructivism explains how Mao's doctrines governed China's reading of world politics and the nature of its relations with any country. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s when China was allied with Moscow, Mao used to depict a quadripartite world⁷. These world divisions were ideologically based on Mao's perception of world politics which was, in turn, inspired by Chinese traditional culture, China's tragic experience with Western colonisation especially throughout the 19th and 20th centuries when China faced the external invasion and unbalanced treaties, Mao's adoption of Marxism-Leninism along with its political as well as economic applications and the painful time Chinese have experienced while establishing the Chinese Communist Party. Proceeding from this system of belief, Mao accepted the inevitable East-West conflict along with the Communist notion of class struggle and that 'imperialist superpowers' represent the biggest international exploiters and oppressors of the people of the world and hence revolutionary armed struggle against them is a must (Chu 1954: 2-3; *Peking Review* November 4, 1977 p. 20; Simmonds 1970: 150; Khalili 1970: 82; Fidah 1980: 26).

Constructivist assumptions about the influence of 'systems of shared ideas, beliefs and values' helps an understanding of how ideological considerations

⁶ About Saudi support of Muslim minorities all over the world as part of the Saudi foreign policy, see (Al-Rawwaf 1999: 17-21; Al-Sharief 1999: 11-33; Merdad 1999: 257-303).

⁷ This division was altered to a tripartite world during the 1970s following the Chinese-Soviet cleavage.

overshadowed China's vision of Saudi Arabia between (1949-1972) as a 'theocratic and feudal kingdom' that is ruled by a 'reactionary' regime which was not only 'extremely hostile to communism as well as to the soviet Union' (during the Sino-Soviet honeymoon) but 'closely associated with the United States' (Shichor 1993: 2) and 'subservient to British imperialism ... and unworthy of any serious attention' (Abidi 1982: 195). Not only that, but proceeding from such norms, China was mistakenly convinced that Riyadh, against its people's will, refused to recognise Beijing as a result of being under US pressure (Chu 1954: 2-3). Constructivism, also, explains how ideological considerations attracted China during the period between (1949-1972) to direct its efforts to develop ties with certain Arab countries that belong to the same radical and socialist camp such as Egypt of Abdunasser (El-Rayyes and Nahas 1973: 86).

On the other hand, the Social Constructivist approach helps to explain how the Islamic identity of the Kingdom, on the one hand, as the spiritual heartland of Islamic creed where Islam was revealed and that houses the most prestigious shrines for Muslims in Mecca and Al-Madina. On the other hand, as a state that was formed on the basis of a traditional alliance between the ruling Royal Family and the religious *ulama* made the Saudi political elite committed before the religious establishment to defending faith and protecting Muslim minorities all over the world as a key component of its political legitimacy.

Through constructivist assumptions one could recognise the normative and spiritual importance that Islam bestows upon Saudi political elite and that Saudi Monarchs' official adoption of a title that bears some religious implications, *khadim al-haramayn al-sharifayn* (the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques) and how, on the one hand, it gives them domestic political legitimacy and foreign respectability, and on the other, compels them to assume more responsibilities towards the faith and its protection (Humphreys 1981: 294-296; Goldberg 1984: 261; Korany 1991: 315-322, 329-332; Gause, III 1994: 12, 29-30; Alam 1998: 171-202; Champion 2003: 54-63; Sheikh 2003: 44-45; Ansari 2004: 8; Steinberg 2005: 11-34; Niblock 2006: 23, 29-34; Korany & Fattah 2008: 355-360).

In line with Constructivist assumptions about the influence of identity of a given actor on its definition of interest and required actions; and given the Islamic identity of the Saudi political system and state, Saudi attention to the situation of Muslim communities in China becomes understandable. In this regard, Bin Huwaidin

(2002: 213) and Ahmed (2004: 15) agree that Saudi refusal to recognise the government of the PRC could have stemmed from Riyadh's strong economic and political interests and ties with western countries especially given China's rigid perception of the world as classified into two camps, the East and the West, and its firm alignment to the former under the lead of Moscow minimised its fortunes to gain substantial progress in the political recognition issue.

Yet, Bin Huwaidin and Ahmed simultaneously admit that Saudi decision was based on deeply rooted religious hostility against communism among both the Saudi elite and public especially following the cruel treatment of Chinese Muslims received after the Chinese effort to mould and homogenize all ethnic minorities into one national identity in the early 1950s and also during the notorious Cultural Revolution era (1966-1976). In explaining such decision, they admit that the influential role of religious circles in the Kingdom -as one of the important groups in making the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia in issues related to Islam and Muslim minorities across the world- must not be overlooked as they were annoyed by the severely Marxist-oriented and 'anti-Islam' government of Beijing.

Constructivist notions about the influence of systems of shared beliefs and values clearly show the impact of religious considerations on Saudi first impressions about China, which 'were of prejudice and fear of the atheistic socio-economic ideology' (Abidi 1982: 195). It helps, in addition, to know the way through which conflicting Saudi Islamic and Chinese Communist identities led Riyadh to be worried about the 'spread of atheistic communism, threatening the Islamic character of the region' (Badeeb 1993: 130). In this regard, Al-Sowayyegh points out that 'Apart from Faisal's fundamental anti-Zionist foreign policy which ran deep in his religious loyalty, another policy that was just as important was his staunch resistance to Communism' (Al-Sowayyegh 1980: 203).

Social Constructivist premise on the influence of identity on the state's definition of interest and threat, helps us to understand how the deeply rooted Islamic beliefs of King Faisal guided his world view to assume that Communism, Zionism and Imperialism were the major threats, not merely to Saudi Arabia, but to the entire Arab and Islamic worlds (Lackner 1978: 114). Whereas to the core of his world view was both the Arab and Islamic Worlds (see figure 1), to the margin was the Western free world which approximately conformed with the Islamic concept *ahl al-Kitab* 'People's of the Book'. Faisal, for instance, discerned the West in general and the

United States in particular as a ‘Christian nation’ that ‘had a moral obligation as well as a political interest to protect and defend the entire free world, including the Muslim world’ (Long 1975: 179).

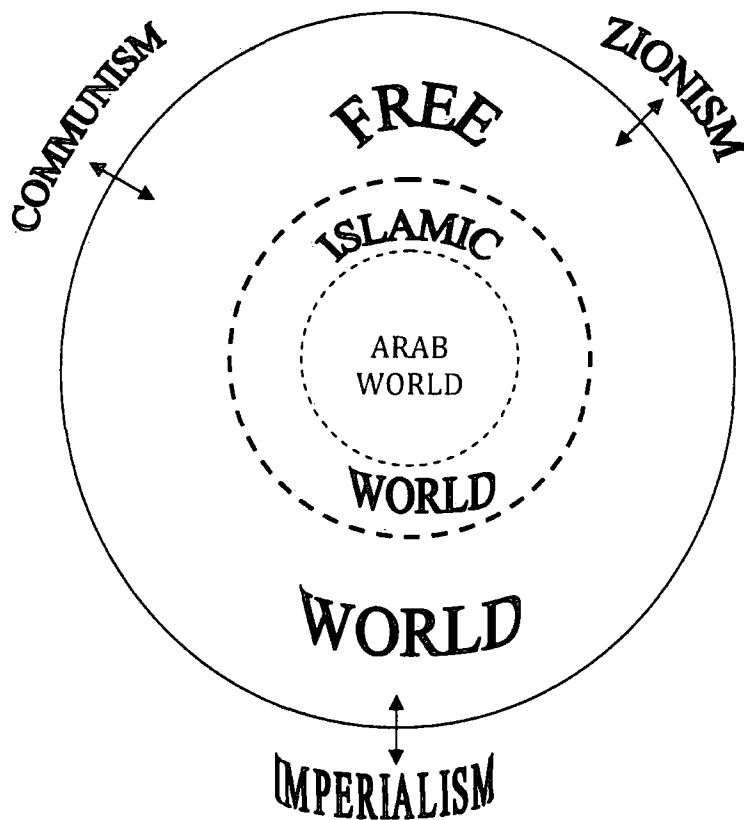


Figure 1: King Faisal's World View (Adapted from, Long 1980a: 180).

While Faisal's world division, from a Neorealist and strategic point of view, was a 'compromise between his country's strategic security needs, which required reliance on a foreign power [the US], and the security risks emanating from anti-monarchist Arab Nationalism' (Yizraeli 1997: 178-179), it is seen by Constructivists as consistent with his religious perspectives as the Saudi sovereign was willing to ally with free world countries 'against atheistic and antireligious states espousing communism and kindred radical ideologies' (Long 1980b: 105).

Even when Chinese strategists thought that there were some regional opportunities for Beijing to be exploited by creating some normative analogy between the Chinese and Arab experiences with Western semi-colonialism and through assuming that Chinese and Arabs alike share the same anti-Western sentiments (Hinton 1966: 178), these assumptions were incorrect about the Saudi case in particular as the country was not subject to direct Western colonization and, hence, their endeavours bore no fruit⁸.

In accordance with Wendt's hypothesis about the impact of identities on interests and, consequently, on actions, it can be noted that the transformations that occurred in China's domestic and foreign policies in late 1978 including its abandonment of ideological and radical slogans, its adoption of the independent economic foreign policy that focuses on attracting capital and technology, its adoption of an ambitious economic modernisation programme and its improved treatment of its Muslim minorities and recognition of their religious identity and rights, China had redefined itself and produced another image of itself as a regular and decent state that respects international norms. Such matter has contributed to change the Saudi previous perceptions and definition of China as a radical and dangerous 'foe of Islam' and this change in the normative level led Saudis to redefine the PRC and to accept its new identity and hence normalise their political relationship in 1990.

⁸ It can be said that whereas such Chinese argument is both applicable and useful to illustrate anti-Western trends in most of the Arab countries which happened to pass through the experience of being under direct Western colonial rule, it does not fit to the Saudi experience which was neither characterised by direct presence nor Western antagonism or hatred. This might be due on the one hand to the early rise and establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 as one of the first independent Arab Countries and on the other because of the way this country was formed as a result of an enormous effort to unify several dismantled territories under the lead of King Abdulaziz (well known in the West as Ibn Saud). Moreover, as the country has not interested the world conquerors up to recent years, Saudi Arabia has no national independence day as most of the Third World countries have (instead there is a national day (23 September) that marks the unification of the country by the founder of the 3rd Saudi State, King Abdulaziz. Therefore, Saudi leaders and people at that time had no such sensitivity towards the Western colonial experience since the country was not exposed to a direct foreign occupation in the modern times and the notion of foreign occupation has thus no insistent presence in the sentiments of both the Saudi leadership and people. Scholars such as, Meshary Al-Nuaim, Ghassan Salamé and David Long draw attention to such fact. For instance, Long asserts that 'Western colonial expansion never extended to central Arabia. Saudi Arabia and its precursor, Amirate of Najd, never felt the yoke of foreign rule for more than brief and fleeting periods'. Long, elsewhere, persists that 'In Faisal's eyes, contacts with the West were on the whole beneficial to Saudi Arabia. Thus, while he often recognized imperialism as a major threat to Saudi Arabia and to the Arab and Islamic worlds, his concept of imperialism incorporated far less Western xenophobia than that of Arab contemporaries from countries which had experienced a Western colonial Past' (Long 1980a: 177, 178) (See also McLaurin et. al. 1982: 213, 215; Al-Nuaim 1997: 218-219; Salamé 1980: 34-40).

From a constructivist point of view, China's leaders' realisation of the importance of Islam and Muslim minorities for Saudis prompted them to utilise their Muslim minorities as a messenger to bridge the confidence crisis between them and to change the Saudi vision of it and create a Saudi positive mood among political and religious circles supportive of establishing diplomatic relations with it and they have succeeded in this matter as we will discuss later on. This transformation of Saudi perception of China has occurred through a process of communication and interaction that took place through *haji* missions and religious Saudi delegations that visited China throughout the 1990s to inspect the new Chinese identity.

Whereas a systemic explanation of Neorealism falls short of providing an explanation to the Saudi constant refusal to normalise its political ties with Beijing during the period between (1972-1990) despite Beijing not being a security challenge to Saudi Arabia since 1972, the constructivist account based on ideational and normative considerations gives a convincing account to such a Saudi stance.

According to Constructivist assumptions, Riyadh, could have seen establishing diplomatic ties with Beijing as a contradiction to its announced official stance against Communism ideology in general and against having official political ties with any Communist countries regardless of these countries' position from the Kingdom. It is true that Beijing since 1972 became no national security threat to the Kingdom. However, establishing diplomatic relations with it, could result in shaking the Saudi credibility in the Islamic world, depicting a negative image of Riyadh as an opportunist and accusing it of adopting double standards in its announced war against Communism especially while it was deploying all effort to confront Soviet regional aspirations during the War against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan during the 1980s. Hence, it was necessary that Riyadh waited until the war in Afghanistan is finished and the prevailing mood of the Cold War changed to be able to establish political relations with Beijing.

In addition, where Neorealist assumptions about the systemic factors cannot explain the Saudi decision to impose an oil embargo on the US in 1973, the Constructivist accounts for this Saudi behaviour through emphasising the importance of identity factor in shaping Saudi reaction to US support of Israel against two Arab countries Egypt and Syria that along with Saudi Arabia belong to the same Arab World and share the same ethnic and cultural background.

1.7. CONCLUSION

In sum, the theoretical framework of this thesis will draw upon the insights of several different approaches to International Relations, in order to capture and explain the long-term evolution of the China-Saudi relationship, and in particular the tendency to reverse the logic of the systemic-security, identity-ideological, economic-interdependence factors so that what once cast them as antagonists now encourages them to be strategic partners in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 2

CONFLICTING IDENTITIES: SAUDI-CHINESE RELATIONS (1949-1964)

The origins of the Saudi-Chinese relationship can be traced back to the centuries-old commercial liaisons that linked merchants in both the Arabian Peninsula (most of its parts came to be known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and traditional dynastic China. The advent of Islam, moreover, in 651 AD contributed to the equation of bilateral relations. In fact, it added another cultural component and a human dimension to historical commercial ties because it has created a permanent Muslim community, though relatively small, within the Chinese mainland.

Starting from the 15th Century, contacts between the Arabian Peninsula and China began to lessen and ultimately ceased because of changes in world politics at that time. However, the Chinese Republican Era (1912-1949) saw the first establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia in 1937. The Sino-Saudi official relationship represented the first Chinese diplomatic relationship with an Arab state. This relationship was mainly driven by Islamic necessities related to the Chinese Muslim minorities. However, following the Communist assumption of power and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Saudi Arabia preferred to maintain its relations with the government of the Republic of China which fled to Taiwan and refused to recognise the Communist government. The Saudi formal recognition of China, ironically, was very late, in July 1990, as the last Arab state to do so.

This chapter will firstly trace the longstanding historical origins of the Saudi-Chinese relationship during the early ages by pursuing the development of relations between the Arabian Peninsula and traditional Dynastic China. It will, also, shed light on the importance of commerce and Islam as the two main links between those regions. Moreover, it will discuss the establishment of diplomatic relationships between Saudi Arabia and China in the 20th Century during the Chinese Republican Era. It will, then, discuss in detail the tense relationship between Riyadh and Beijing following the establishment of the PRC in 1949 until the dismantling of the Imamate Movement of Oman in 1964.

2.1. ENGAGING HISTORY: RELATIONS BETWEEN REPUBLICAN CHINA AND THE SAUDI MONARCHY, (1937-1949)

History is the mirror of the future, and understanding the nature of present bilateral relations between any two countries may entail tracing their historical origins. The relationship between the KSA and the PRC is no exception to that rule and hence it may be in the interest of a proper exposition of its current status to establish the historical context within which it has evolved.

It can be said that three key factors have mainly shaped longstanding ties between traditional China and the Arabian Peninsula. The first factor was a Chinese strategic perspective towards the region as both barrier and bridge between China and the West⁹ (Harris 1993a: xv, 68). Second, was a commercial bond that linked those geographically remote regions as of the 2nd century B.C. through sea trading routes and what came to be known as the old Silk Road¹⁰ (Al-Hafnawi 2001: 5; Ahmed 1999: 130). Third, was a religious and cultural dimension after the advent of Islam in China in the 7th Century during the reign of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), which in turn spiritually connected those Chinese Muslim communities to Saudi Arabia as the birthplace of Islam¹¹.

Yet, bilateral relations between Saudi Arabia and China in the modern age, and more particularly after the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the start of the China's 'republican era' (1912-1949) and the foundation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932¹², should be described as very modest and confined to religious connection, namely the annual *hajj* (Harris 1993a: 59). The diplomatic encyclopedia of the founder of Saudi Arabia indicates that early official contacts between the governments of the emerging Kingdom and the Republic of China date back to 1932

⁹ For more details in this regard, see (Chi Win 'undated': 159; Fairbank & Teng 1961: 145; Abdulhafiz 1992: 30-31; Al-Rabitah 1994: 10; Jiang & Jia 2002: 2; Shu & Jia 2002: 2).

¹⁰ For more details in this respect, see (Hirth 1885: 64-65, 169; Yang 1957: 2; Chau Ju-Kua 1966: 4; Al-Nasser 1980: 114; Al-Zaile'i 1981: 177, 181-182; Huwaidi 1981: 17-28; Jun-Yan 1983: 92; Yang 1983: 68; Al-Maqdesi 1987: 97; Aliksan 2001: 8-9; Shu & Jia 2002: 2).

¹¹ For more details in this regard, see (Yang 1957: 2-3; Shung 1960: 14; Fairbank & Teng 1961: 181, 191-192; Hinton 1966: 179; Chau Ju-Kua 1966: 124-126; Al-Samer 1977: 46; Winters 1979: 7; Abidi 1982: 2-3; Guangde 1987: 785; Yuan 1991: 83; Abdulhafiz 1992: 31; Al-Alewi 1993: 27; Harris 1993a: 47-50; Al-Rabitah 1994: 10; Ahmed 1999: 140, 163-165, 151; Hoor 2000: 42; Jiang & Jia 2002: 1-2; Hussein 2004: 17; Al-Otaibi 2006: 149).

¹² Though the 3rd Saudi State was officially established in this date, its origins date back to the 18th Century.

when China sent a 'Vice Consul' to Jeddah to supervise China's Muslim pilgrims. The Chinese official was not granted a diplomatic status, however, during that trip¹³.

Kainan Yusuf Ma, a Chinese scholar, argues that the idea of establishing some sort of official relations with Saudi Arabia besides setting up a Chinese official agency with the purpose of taking care of Chinese annual *Hajj* missions was born in March 1937 following the return of a Chinese *Hajj* mission under the leadership of the Governor of Qian, Ma Lin (Ma 1988: 27-34). A Chinese source¹⁴ argues that diplomatic relationships between Saudi Arabia and republican China was established in 1939 when the latter opened its first general consulate in the newly founded Kingdom. A former student at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and a fluent Arabic-speaker, Abdulraheem Wang (Wan Shih-Ming) was appointed in 1939 as the first Chinese official 'Vice Consul' to Jeddah, according to King Abdulaziz's Diplomatic Encyclopaedia.

However, official Saudi resources indicate that it was only in 1942 that negotiations between Saudis and Chinese started to establish diplomatic relationships. Those negotiations and contacts took place in different places including Cairo, London and Baghdad, and were ultimately culminated on November 15 1946 by the signature of a Treaty of Amity in which both sides agreed to establish friendly diplomatic and commercial relations¹⁵. Whether official ties between the two countries were set up in 1939 or 1946, Saudi Arabia by that time had become the first Arab country to have such official ties with China.

2.1.1. Chinese Muslims as a Genuine Component of the Chinese National Texture

Muslims in China have been recognised as a 'national' minority both under the Republic (1911-1949) and next under the Communist rule (since 1949). Yet, the PRC government decided to keep them atomised under their various ethnic appellations (Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, etc.) (Israeli 2002: 282). During the republican era, Chinese politicians were obsessed by their domestic problems especially the need to create a harmonious nation, and this led to the attempt to integrate China's Islamic communities. Though the policy was aimed at assimilating and incorporating China's

¹³ موسوعة تاريخ الملك عبدالعزيز الدبلوماسية (King Abdulaziz's Diplomatic Encyclopaedia). 1999, p. 430.

¹⁴ Chinese Ministry of Information Comp. (1975) *China Handbook 1937-1945: A Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China in Eight Years of War*. New York.

¹⁵ موسوعة تاريخ الملك عبدالعزيز الدبلوماسية (King Abdulaziz Diplomatic Encyclopaedia), 1999, p. 430.

various minorities, it 'was not anti-religious in nature' (Yang 1957: 3). In this sense and in parallel with this orientation, China thought that one of the means to gain the confidence of its local Muslim minorities would be to cultivate good relations with the country that was regarded as the origin of Islam and the centre of the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia had had a relative international importance as its rulers consider themselves 'Guardians of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina' since at least the 1930s and it represents a 'titular head' and a religious authority in the world of Sunni Islam especially after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the breakdown of the Turkish Sultanate in 1924 (Harris 1993a: 58-59).

In recognition of the Chinese Muslim community and by the necessity of winning their hearts and support for resistance to Japan, the Nationalist government determined, in February 1939, to integrate the study of the Islamic culture into the Chinese Universities curriculum as a regular part (Yang 1957: 4). Chinese Muslims, in turn, were loyal to the Nationalist government, which under the command of Muslim generals acquired four essential military triumphs between the period 1935-1947 in Gansu, Ningxia and Shaanxi (Winters 1979: 27).

In his memorial book, *تكريات السنوات التسع في مصر* (Memories of the Nine Years in Egypt) Pang Chi Qian shed light on one of his visits to Saudi Arabia. Pang mentioned that during his study at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, he was asked by the government on February 18, 1939, to head a 28-student mission to Mecca to perform *hajj*. He, indicated that after performing *hajj*, the student mission was generously received on March 4, 1939 by the then Saudi monarch, King Abdulaziz (also known as Ibn Saud; the founder of the KSA), who listened to a speech delivered by the *chef de mission*, Mohammed Makin (Ma Chien), one of Pang's colleagues. Besides thanking the Saudi King, the speech indicated that China will resist the Japanese aggression on their homeland and requested the Monarch to allow the opening of a sort of Chinese official agency to take care of China's *Hajj* missions; the King, then, replied favourably and accepted their traditional Chinese gifts (Pang 1988: 120-121).

Ma emphasises that the genuine reason behind urgently sending the 28-student delegation to Mecca was actually to put the Saudi leadership in the picture of what was happening during China's resistance war against Japan; as the latter was attempting to deceive the Saudi leadership by sending a five-Chinese-Muslim *Hajj* mission to Mecca to convey a misleading and false information about the situation of China's Muslims during the Japanese occupation (Ma 1988: 32-33). The importance

assigned to the student *hajj* mission revealed not only an explicit Saudi attention towards Muslims communities both in China and all over the world but it, also, indicated that Chinese Muslims probably were the major motivation behind the Saudi acceptance to establish diplomatic relations with China in 1939.

It can be said that contacts between Saudi Arabia and China have preceded the establishment of an official relationship. In fact, Chinese Muslims had frequented Saudi Arabia not only for religious purposes but for political ones as well. For example, it was reported that Wang Tseng-shan led a five-man mission across the Islamic World including India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Trans Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey during the era between (1937-1940) in order to raise a political, financial and public support to the Chinese struggle against the Japanese invasion. In Mecca, the Chinese delegation met King Abdulaziz and the minister of finance, Abdullah bin Suleiman, both of whom had shown their sympathy and support towards the delegation's demands (Ma 1988: 28-29; Ahmed 1999: 165; Ahmed 2004: 9).

During the 1930s and 1940s, China's *hajj* missions were active and relatively large in number. For instance, in 1938 around 7000 Chinese Muslims travelled to Mecca to perform *hajj*. Saudi Arabia, furthermore, hosted a small group of Chinese Muslims, most of whom were Uyghurs from Chinese Turkestan who settled in Mecca as businessmen and their mission was basically to oversee and meet the demands and needs of Chinese pilgrims (Harris 1993a: 60). One can conclude from this brief review that relations between Riyadh and Mainland China during the republican era were good though very simple and mostly confined to the religious dimension.

2.2. SINO-SAUDI RELATIONSHIP IN THE WAKE OF THE COMMUNIST ASSUMPTION OF POWER IN 1949

In 1949 the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established under the lead of Mao Zedong. The proclamation of the PRC under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was a negative turning point in the history of the youthful Saudi-Chinese relationship as it started a new chapter of reluctance and obstacles in the Saudi-Chinese relationship (Ahmed 2004: 13). And one of the main symptoms of such deterioration was the closure of the Vice-Consulate in Jeddah in March 1950 (Ma 1988: 57).

2.2.1. Saudi Arabia: The Spiritual Homeland

Regardless of their nationality, many Muslims consider Saudi Arabia as their spiritual homeland. From this perspective and even before the end of the republican era, the number of Chinese emigrants to Saudi Arabia witnessed a considerable increase¹⁶ due to political unrest and communist persecution. However, no exact numbers were provided but estimates have ranged between several hundreds to around 10,000¹⁷. One political scholar, likewise, refers to Rahmatullah Turkistani, a Saudi citizen of the Muslim World League in Mecca, who believes that the total number of Chinese Muslims in Saudi Arabia by 1992 was 1,000 Hui and 8-10,000 Uyghurs.

One of those who chose to move to 'his spiritual homeland', Saudi Arabia, in 1949 following the communist takeover was Ma Pu-fang, the former Governor of Qinghai in 1938 and one of the four distinguished generals, known as 'The Four Great Horses', who controlled Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and parts of Xinjiang for the three decades that precede the communist conquest. In his trip to Saudi Arabia, Ma Pu-fang was accompanied by his family, brother and ten generals of his warlord armies. After one year, Ma Pu-fang moved to Cairo and his entourage including his son moved to Taiwan. He stayed in Cairo until Egypt established its formal relations with the Peoples Republic of China in 1956. As a consequence of his loyalty and the rejection of to deal with an envoy, Ma Pu-fang was appointed ambassador of Taiwan to Saudi Arabia where he died in the late 1980s (Ma 1988: 62; Harris 1993a: 64, 66).

2.2.2. Saudi Arabia in Mao's Doctrine

Mao Zedong, the Communist Party Chairman, argued that 1949 represented a fresh start for 'New China'; a start that entailed conducting an appraisal and rebuilding of its foreign relationships and outside contacts including those with the Middle East. Mao's Middle Eastern perspective during the whole 1950s and up to the eve of the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in the mid 1960s was part of his own theory of the quadripartite division of the whole world. The Middle East was part of the Second group that comprises the colonial or semi-colonial states that have already attained

¹⁶ There is an inaccuracy about the number of Chinese Muslim immigrants who choose to flee to Saudi Arabia at that time. While Harris mentions that the number of those immigrants is no more than hundreds (Harris 1993: 79), Mufti points out that the number is roughly 17000 refugees (Mufti undated 21).

¹⁷ Author's interview with one of the members of the second generation of those Chinese immigrants who settled in the Kingdom and became Saudi citizens. Jeddah, March, 2008.

their national independence or were involved in the liberation struggle for achieving such purpose.

According to Mao's ideas, this category contains countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the peoples of those countries and the people of China have had the same tragic experience of agony, oppression and exploitation of imperialism. Mao, also, deeply believed that while many of these countries had recognised the PRC, still there are many of them that refused to do so, and against their people's desire, under pressure from the US. When the government of Saudi Arabia refused to announce recognition of the PRC, it became one of these countries according to this vision. The major problem with this classification is that it was employed to govern China's relations with that country and hence Sino-Saudi ties were accordingly doomed to tension (Chu 1954: 2-3).

In accordance with China's perception of itself as the 'Middle Kingdom' that occupies the heart of the world and due to China's traditional fears of encirclement and foreign domination, the Middle East has occupied a special importance in Mao's perspective as a 'barrier' between China and Europe (Simmonds 1970: 147-148).

Beijing assumed that the critical international situation was accurately demonstrated by the situation in the Middle East which due to its strategic location and huge oil reserves was considered to be a 'crucial link' in Western endeavours to form a 'ring around China, the Soviet Union and the people's democracies' (Shichor 1977: 158). Also, Mao posits that the globe would be split into two contradictory groups one of which is the western imperialists and the other is the world of revolution. He believes that China along with other non-imperialist countries including those of the Middle East could create the anti-imperialist 'United Front' to confront the Western imperialism (Simmonds 1970: 150-155; Harris 1993a: 66). Yet again, the Saudi government had no intention at any time to join Mao's efforts to create a counter imperialist front and hence it became regarded as a virtual opponent.

The PRC's debut appearance on the Middle Eastern political theater happened to be in the context of the Cold War and at a time when China decided to align itself closely with the Soviet Union (Calabrese 1990: 863-864). Due to these ideological considerations, it was no surprise that China was attracted more to direct its efforts to develop ties with certain Middle Eastern countries that belong to the radical and socialist camp (El-Rayyes & Nahas 1973: 86).

While security motivations and encirclement fears have shaped Beijing's vision about the Middle East in general, ideological considerations played a significant role in determining Beijing's perspectives of the outside world in general including the Gulf Arab states in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. It can be said that for Chinese leaders, Saudi Arabia during this period was considered as a 'reactionary' regime, a 'theocratic and feudal kingdom' which was not only 'extremely hostile to communism as well as to the Soviet Union'¹⁸, but also 'closely associated with the United States' (Shichor 1993: 2). Hinton points out that 'Naturally enough, the CPR [PRC] has not established diplomatic relations with any Middle Eastern country while it was allied with the West' (Hinton 1966: 179).

2.2.3. The Saudi Negative Response: Conflicting Identities

As ideological considerations played a significant role in determining Beijing's perspectives of the outside world, the Saudi first impressions about China 'were of prejudice and fear of the atheistic socio-economic ideology' (Abidi 1982: 195). In response to the radical Chinese approach and rhetorical phraseology and proceeding from their Islamic and religious values, Saudi senior leaders used to publicly show their resentment and rejection of Communism. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, for example, openly and directly expressed his antagonism towards Communism as an alien ideology that, on the one hand, fundamentally contradicts with Islam and, on the other hand, invites instability and promotes radical change (Quandt 1981: 64).

Saudi Arabia, moreover, preferred to establish official relationships with the government of Taiwan and ruled out the notion of recognising the new revolutionary regime of Beijing¹⁹. In fact, Riyadh regarded the new communist regime in Beijing at that time as 'atheistic and oppressive' because it had, illegally, overthrown the legitimate government by force (Shichor 1989: 1-2). Consequently, the Saudi government since 1950 kept a persistent abstention in the United Nations (UN) votes regarding the question of PRC representation (Al-Ashaal 1983: 194).

It seems that the Saudi non-recognition of the PRC was, in addition, significantly influenced by the news coming from Chinese Muslim immigrants, who

¹⁸ Especially during the Sino-Soviet honeymoon during the 1950s.

¹⁹ Despite the fact that the ROC's diplomatic mission to Saudi Arabia was temporarily closed in 1949 at the request of the latter, Riyadh officially recognized the Republic of China (ROC) as the only legitimate Chinese government and maintained diplomatic relationships with it since 1957 (Harris 1993: 81).

fled to the Kingdom and later on became Saudi citizens, about the harsh and ruthless way in which the central government treated them (Shung 1960: 16; *The Times*, June 30, 1982; Harris 1993a; Dillon 1999: 163; Mufti 'undated': 21). Consequently, it can be said that the already negative image of the PRC as a 'foe of Islam' among Saudis and Muslims of the Middle East was extremely enhanced.

In this regard, the 'Turkestani community' in Cairo complained to King Abdulaziz in 1950 that the communist invasion of Xinjiang 'had been accompanied by chaos and a large-scale offensive against the Muslims' (Shichor 1989: 1-2). The 'Turkestani Circles', in addition, responded to a wave of trials and executions of Chinese Muslims by accusing the Communist government of adopting extremist measures to quash the 'independence movement' such as closing Muslim schools and appointing new indoctrinated Communist *Imams*, let alone compelling women to unveil (Shichor 1984a: 308).

It would seem that these developments have made Saudis suspect about Chinese intentions to exploit the annual *hajj* season for political goals such as propagating communism among Muslim pilgrims (Ahmed 2004: 14). As a matter of fact, the Saudi authorities refused to grant visas to the first Chinese *hajj* mission in the wake of the establishment of the PRC, even though they had reached Pakistan. This precautionary measure could be a reflection of Riyadh's sceptical view especially when one knows that *Hajj* season was during the following decade perceived by Riyadh as a an appropriate forum for condemning Communism as well as other atheist and subversive doctrines (Long 1979: 115; Shichor 1989: 3).

2.3. THE PRC'S QUEST TO GAIN THE SAUDI RECOGNITION: WIELDING CHINA'S MUSLIM²⁰ CARD

The PRC leaders realised the Saudi suspicions and, consequently, sought to assure them. It can be said that the Chinese position towards Saudi Arabia since 1953-4 began to gradually shift especially after Beijing discerned some global changes including the failure of 'Western imperialist aggression', the reinforcement of the socialist camp and a seedbed of national resistance in Asian and African countries against outside intervention and encroachments. Moreover, Beijing noticed that its confrontational approach with the Middle East in the early 1950s produced no

²⁰ Exploiting the Muslim minority as a tactical instrument to beautify the Chinese state's image across the Islamic World is a common tactic among Marxist states, for more details see (Bennigsen et al. 1989: 3-56).

productive relationship and hence perceived the magnitude of considering a 'Sino-Arab peaceful coexistence' (Shichor 1977: 37).

At this phase, it seems that Beijing realised that the best strategy to abort the US plan to contain it was through cooperation with the Socialist bloc under the command of the Soviet Union, and also the cultivation of friendly relations with Asian, African and Latin American countries bearing in mind that variations in social and political systems should not be regarded as impediments in the way of developing such peaceful and cooperative relations (Chu 1954: 4).

Accordingly, despite the fact that China's leaders tended to suspiciously discern the Saudi monarchy as a 'reactionary' regime, it would seem that they realised the strategic importance of revising their policies towards Riyadh and mitigate the tensions between the two countries in order to gain its goodwill during that critical period for several reasons. Firstly, given that the PRC during the 1950s comprised, it is estimated, around ten million Muslims allocated in various significant spots such as Xinjiang, Beijing sought to avoid offending its own Muslim minorities who were tied to their spiritual homeland and sought to gain the good will of other Islamic countries, inside and outside the Middle East (Shichor 1989: 2). Likewise, the PRC's leaders valued Riyadh's insistence on maintaining its independence, despite its association with the United States in a number of situations all of which exemplified for Chinese Riyadh's autonomy and free will. For instance, the Saudi refusal to join regional and military blocks (i.e. the Baghdad Pact 1955), its distinct determination in its boundary dispute with Britain over the Buraymi Oasis (as will be later on discussed) and its steady abstention in UN votes regarding the question of PRC representation (Shichor 1989: 2-3; Shichor 1979: 29-31, 221; Shichor 1982: 106).

One of Beijing tactics to improve its image in the Islamic world and approaching the Saudis was by taking advantage of its Muslim community. Thus, it decided in 1953 to found two important bodies, the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) and the Minorities Nationalities Affairs Committee (MNAC), both of which were, allegedly, foreign policy tools to advocate Communism among Chinese and Middle Eastern Muslims (Harris 1993a: 80). Beijing also thought that by requesting the permission of the Saudi Government to allow Chinese pilgrims to perform *hajj* in Mecca, it could use them as a channel through which it could exert some influence on Riyadh. The Chinese endeavour failed to make any progress on the Saudi side until

after the Bandung Conference which, however, provided a rare occasion for the PRC to conduct its first contact with a senior Saudi official (Hinton 1966: 181).

Bin Huwaidin sheds light on the Chinese awareness of the centrality of playing what he calls the 'Islam card'²¹ in order to beautify its political image before the Saudi eyes as a trustworthy Third World country that respect freedom of religions (Huwaidin 2002: 214). Harris, within the same context, points out that there was a serious intention among Chinese leaders to change their country's notorious reputation across the Middle East and they were 'alert of the possibilities of using Chinese Muslim pilgrims and members of cultural, political and business delegations as spokesmen for communism'. Not only that but their efforts encompassed a considerable expenditure on publications and films in order to portray an imputed happy life of Muslims in China under communism (Harris 1993a: 79-80).

Nasser-Eddine suggests that the PRC endeavored to offer itself to the Islamic and Arab World as a 'country where Islam flourished and was respected and recognized' and, therefore, Islamic states ought to 'identify with her more than with the non-Moslem European' (Nasser-Eddine '*undated*': 52). It was against this background that the PRC founded the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) and the Minorities Nationalities Affairs Committee (MNAC), both of which were to have significance in external relations with Islamic countries (Harris 1993a: 80).

A political commentator²² suggested that the Chinese Communist stand towards Islam is 'unequivocal in principle but tends to be discreetly lenient in practice'. Yang offered his explanation of such policy by emphasising the significance of the international considerations for China's policy makers. He argued that besides their independent spirit and history of rebellion and unrest, China could not afford to neglect the fact that its Muslim minorities are part and parcel of the Islamic world of South East Asia and the Middle East where both Beijing and its close ally the Soviet Union have political ambitions. He went on to clarify that

²¹ I would prefer to call it the Muslim card rather than the 'Islam card' because the Communist government in Beijing used its Chinese Muslim figures rather than China's Islam to facilitate and accelerate the process of gaining the sympathy and then the recognition of several Islamic (and Arab) countries. The content and the phraseology, moreover, of the Chinese messages to the Islamic World were never religious. Rather it was 'purely national-revolutionary'. For more details, see (Shichor 1984a: 312-313; Winters 1979: 47).

²² (Editorial) (1952) 'Communism and Islam: The Chinese Aspects', Current Background, July 25, 1952, P1.

suppressing Chinese Muslims 'at home would make it extremely difficult to improve relations with these areas' (Yang 1957: 20-22).

As a result, and in order to reinforce its credibility across the Islamic World (including Saudi Arabia), China conferred on its Muslim minorities considerable religious freedom. For instance, mosques have been reopened, Muslims were permitted to retain the land they had owned before 1940, Muslim customs and habits were protected by law and Muslims became spokesmen of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and wielded a central role in improving China's relation with the Islamic World (Winters 1979: 47).

It can be said that during the era that preceded the Cultural Revolution, the period between 1949-1966, Beijing was preoccupied with two major issues, security and acknowledgment, both of which were the main incentives and motivations of its foreign policy towards the developing countries. The 'peaceful coexistence' was the catchphrase of the PRC's foreign policy during this phase in order to break its isolation and gain the diplomatic recognition of as many Third World states as possible (Harris 1985: 25-28). Another scholar shares the same opinion and argues that following its arrival to power, the Communist government was isolated from the rest of the world and therefore it sought to create some friends in the international arena by several means. One of which was Islam, which they believed could become, if skillfully functioned, 'a foreign policy asset rather than a liability' (Shichor 1984a: 309).

Beijing, as a result, launched a propaganda campaign using eminent Chinese Muslims personalities such as Burhan Shahidi and Saifudin to address Muslims across the Islamic world, to deliver a message that Muslims of the Middle East and North Africa rather than Chinese Muslims were subjugated by evil imperialism against which China was battling. The campaign suggested that since both sides had a common interest, they should form a 'united front' against imperialism. Needless to say those Chinese Muslim figures were exponents and heralds of Mao's Doctrine of the international 'united front'²³ to the Islamic World (Shichor 1984a: 309; Adie 1967: 321).

²³ Mao's doctrine was developed since the early 1940s. Then, during the 1950s he was ambitious to gain control over the, at that time, world's 300 million Muslims through using Chinese Muslim personalities to propagate the creation of a united front of 'oppressed Muslims' against their imperialist masters. The argument has always been about either to work for the revolution more, on the one hand, through existing authorities 'bourgeois upper strata' or a reformed bureaucracy which represents a

2.3.1. The Bandung Conference and Chinese Diplomacy of *Hajj* Missions

The Bandung Conference²⁴ in April 1955 was China's first opportunity to launch a diplomatic offensive towards penetrating the Third World in general and the Middle East in particular. During this conference, Beijing sought to bridge geographical distance, dispel fears among the participants²⁵ of China's aggressive communist trends. It also wished to build a mutual understanding with the Asian and African countries by introducing itself as the leader of the developing nations of Asia and the Third World besides presenting its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence²⁶ along with giving a firm support to the Palestine Liberation Movement. China's ultimate objectives varied between widening the circle of its formal recognition and gaining the support of the developing countries for its entry into the UN, in addition to eradicating the Western 'imperialist' influence as well as presenting itself as a pro-nationalist and anti-colonial alternative. One of the main consequences of this conference was the Chinese diplomatic success to pave the way for establishing formal relations with some revolutionary Arab regimes such as Egypt (1956), Syria (1956), Yemen (1956) and Iraq (1956) (Khalili 1970: 9, 67-75).

Following Riyadh's refusal to allow a Chinese mission to perform *hajj* in 1953, the Chinese premier and foreign minister, Zhou Enlai, seized the opportunity to discuss this matter with the then Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz, on the sidelines of the Bandung Conference in April 1955. This meeting represented the first official contact between Saudi Arabia and the PRC. As a result of this meeting, the former accepted to allow twenty Chinese Muslims to perform *hajj* annually. Headed by two quite eminent Chinese Muslim leaders, Da Pusheng (who

'united front from above' or to choose to depend more on 'mass movements' (i.e. the Red Guard) which is regarded as a 'united front from below' (for more information see Adie 1967: 320-321; Harris 1993: 68).

²⁴ The Bandung Conference represents the first manifestation of the rise to diplomatic importance of the Third World. For more information, see (Evans and Newnham 1998: 45).

²⁵ For instance, with the aim of dispelling fears of Communist China across the Islamic World, the Chinese Premier extended an invitation to the Egyptian Minister of *Waqf* (Islamic Endowment) *Sheikh* Hassan Al-Baquri to visit China and find out what conditions are like for Chinese Muslims. The Egyptian Minister visited China and came back to Cairo with a positive impression (Agwani 1969: 200). Shung, however, stressed that the Egyptian minister was deliberately deceived by the Communist leaders who used to 'fool the outside world by window dressing' and 'puppet Muslim organizations to propagate the regime's "good government" and "religious tolerance" abroad' (Shung 1960: 19).

²⁶ Which include the principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference with internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence (Gittings 1974: 211).

had accompanied Zhou Enlai to Bandung) and Ma Yuhuai, the first Chinese *hajj* mission few months later departed for Mecca on July 19, 1955²⁷.

During the period (1955-1964), the Chinese Islamic Association sent ten *hajj* missions comprising 132 pilgrims to Mecca (Jiang & Jia 2002: 137). Restrictions and suspicions of both sides, according to Harris, represented an instantly recognizable obstacle in the way of allowing bigger groups of Chinese Muslims to perform *hajj* between 1955-1962 (Harris 1993a: 81).

In 1956, the Chinese *hajj* mission comprised 37 members and was led by Burhan Shahidi (Bao Erhan), the head of the Chinese Islamic Association, who participated in the highly respected ceremony of the ritual washing²⁸ of the *Kaaba* at Mecca and, was after performing *hajj*, warmly received by King Saud of Saudi Arabia and the Finance Minister (Jiang & Jia 2002: 137). The Saudi leadership, indeed, was concerned about the way the Communist government treated its Muslim communities. Shahidi's major mission was to assuage these suspicions and to reassure Saudi leaders of the 'well-being' of Islam under communism (Harris 1993a: 80).

Considering that Shahidi's visit to Saudi Arabia was preceded by an extended visit to a number of Arab capitals including Cairo and Amman, Shichor comments on this meeting by asserting that 'it was the second mission in 1956 that set up the pattern, reproduced ever since, of using the *hajj* missions for promoting China's foreign policy objectives in and around the Middle East'. He went to draw attention to the fact that Burhan Shahidi was 'far from being simply a religious figure; he was deeply involved in China's foreign relations network'. Burhan continued to run and supervise Chinese *hajj* missions until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Shichor 1989: 3; Shichor 1979: 44).

There are three points to note here. Firstly, the Saudi abstention from both voting on the UN General Assembly Resolution 498 6V on 1 February 1951 to condemn China as an aggressor in the Korean War (1950-1953), and from the US-sponsored resolution to delay the consideration of any proposal to exclude Taiwan from the UN on 25 October 1952 were mistakenly perceived by the Chinese leadership as Saudi signs of acceptance and favourability (Bin Huwaidin 2002: 96-97).

²⁷ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, (the former *Director-General of the Saudi General Intelligence* (1977-2001)). Riyadh, May 2008.

²⁸ Only a small number of dignitaries and foreign diplomats are invited to take part in the ceremony that takes place twice a year.

Secondly, despite the Chinese earnest effort to improve its tarnished image in Saudi eyes and although *hajj* missions helped to expand Saudi government knowledge about the PRC, the Saudi government made no attempt to recognise the PRC and remained suspicious about its intentions in the region. It appears that the Saudi leadership was mindful of the real situation in China and it is likely that it was aware that the China Islamic Association and *hajj* missions, not to mention the Muslim official figures were part of China's window-dressing strategy and merely foreign policy instruments proficiently employed for political purposes to engender as well as portray an inaccurate and falsely bright image of the Chinese Muslim minorities under communism in order to assuage Saudi concerns about the PRC.

Thirdly, it can be said that the Chinese propaganda campaign launched to address Muslims of the Middle East and North Africa as suppressed by 'imperialism' was not welcomed in Saudi circles. Rather it seems that it contributed to the enhancement of the Saudi anti-Chinese attitude. Riyadh's constant and firm denial to recognise the Communist government of Beijing as well as the small and symbolic number of Chinese *hajj* mission members which has been allowed to perform *hajj* since 1955 may, in one way or another, support such a hypothesis.

2.4. THE IMAMAMAT WAR AND THE BURAIMI OASIS INCIDENTS: AN EPISODIC POLITICAL CONVERGENCE

No less interesting, were some political developments in the Saudi periphery that contributed to the creation of a sort of accidental Sino-Saudi *détente* and consensus towards a number of regional political incidents during the early 1950s including that of Oman, one of Saudi Arabia's closest neighboring countries. Although this convergence was short lived, it was another important phase in the development of Saudi-Chinese relationships because it mirrored a genuine Chinese desire to engage in the Gulf region as one of the key areas in world politics. Also it signifies that ideological considerations were not the only determinant of the Saudi or Sino foreign policies at that time but actually national interests and security issues have had an important role to play in this matter.

In a dramatic change, following the death of the Imam of Oman, Mohamed bin 'Abdullah, in May 1954, the Imamate War (1955-1959) broke out between Imam Ghalib bin Ali, who announced himself the legitimate successor of the Imamate of Oman, and the British-supported Sultan of Muscat and Oman, Sultan Sa'id bin

Taimur. Relying on British military assistance, the Sultan decided to wage war against Imam Ghalib in order to put an end to the question of the Imamate in the Sultanate by eliminating its unruly tribes and opposing factions (Behbehani 1981: 135-136).

During the period between (1955-1956) the Saudi government was suspicious about Western intentions in the region, more particularly following the announcement of an Anglo-American plan to establish the Baghdad Pact as a regional alliance to counter the Soviet infiltration. Saudi Arabia, consequently, adopted an episodic and short lived anti-Western²⁹ trend in its foreign policy, which was mainly preoccupied with both protecting its national interests and checking the British-supported Hashemite monarchy of Iraq especially after the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in November 1955. King Saud of Saudi Arabia regarded the Iraqi involvement in the Anglo-American sponsored pact as a rebirth in a most dangerous form of the 'old Hashemite threat' (Safran 1985: 78).

The Saudi concerns about Britain's role in promoting the Baghdad Pact led Riyadh to pursue a number of episodic anti-Western policies such as advocating Egypt's project and Nasser's themes of neutralism and Arab nationalism³⁰ although both of which were unfavourable and 'highly charged concepts' that could have, on the one hand, weakened the Saudi monarchy domestically and, on the other hand, jeopardised the Saudi-American relations especially following the Saudi decision in 1956 to renew its agreement³¹ with the US on the lease of the Dhahran air base for merely one year. In fact, the Saudi refusal to join the Baghdad Pact was accompanied by substantial efforts to dissuade not only Iraq but also Jordan and Syria from taking part in the Western alliance. Furthermore, when Nasser concluded an arms deal with the Soviet Union in September 1955, this move was welcomed by Riyadh, which in the subsequent month concluded a mutual defence treaty with Egypt (Safran 1985: 79-80; Bryson 1977: 185,233).

Within the same year, Faisal bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Crown Prince and Foreign Minister, was reported to proclaim the Saudi condemnation of Arab states'

²⁹ Anti-western, by that time, was mainly directed against British regional influence.

³⁰ Saudi Arabia joined Egypt and Syria in the formation of the Damascus Pact. Then in 1956 The Saudi government forged with Yemen and Egypt the Jeddah Pact. In the subsequent year, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Syria signed an Arab agreement of solidarity (Bryson 1977: 234).

³¹ It was originally signed in 1951 as part of a defense agreement according to which the US was allowed to use the air base at Dhahran and Riyadh, in return, received an American military assistance (Bryson 1977: 233).

involvement in 'foreign security pacts'. Not only that but Riyadh announced its 'unquestioning' political and monetary support to Egypt. More interestingly, some American reports³² claimed that the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal, announced in October 1955 that Riyadh was considering a Soviet offer of arms in addition to the establishment of diplomatic relations. However, on November 21, 1955 the whole story was denied by a Saudi communiqué (Page 1971: 30).

Likewise, in July 1956 Riyadh supported Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal and severed its diplomatic relationships with Britain and France. It declared, as well, an embargo on oil shipments to the two European powers following their invasion of Egypt. It seems that the political confrontation between Riyadh and London by that time had become a 'contest between Saudi "national rights" and British "imperialism" and [hence] extended the hostility to other fronts as well' such as backing up the imam of Yemen's claim to the British colony of Aden and encouraging and supporting a tribal revolt in Oman against the British-supported Sultan (Safran 1985: 79; Lackner 1978: 113).

Saudi Arabia decided to financially and militarily support Imam Ghalib because it believed that his victory would lead to the establishment of an independent state and participate to the expulsion of the British colonial presence in the region. The Kingdom, furthermore, thought that by supporting Imam Ghalib, it would stop, on the one hand, the British infringements within its territory committed by oil companies during their explorations and, on the other hand, it would be able to defend and recover its alleged historical rights in al-Buraimi Oasis especially following the occupation of it by the Trucial Oman Levies and the expulsion of the minute Saudi Police detachment there in October 1955 (Behbehani 1981: 135-141; Lackner 1978: 112-113).

On the other hand, Beijing during the mid 1950s came to the conclusion that some Middle Eastern governments 'notwithstanding their "backward" political nature, were capable of contributing to the struggle against imperialism' (Shichor 1979: 4; 39). It would seem that the Saudi anti-British foreign policy between 1955-1956 may fit neatly into that category, and as a result it was welcomed in Beijing as compatible with the latter's foreign policy towards the region and corresponding to

³² An American Intelligence Report claimed that two Saudi princes paid a visit to Prague in December 1955 in order to allegedly discuss an arms deal. For more details, see (Safran 1985: 79, 469).

the revolutionary line of its closest ally by that time in the region, Jamal Abdul Nasser (Kerr 1965: 438-439).

It was not a surprise, thus, that Chinese leaders sought to make a common cause with Riyadh both in its dispute against Britain over the Buraimi Oasis and its support to Imam Ghalib during the Imamate War. Consequently, in the wake of the occupation of the Buraimi Oasis by Sultan Sa'id with British military assistance, the *People's Daily* commentator denounced this British action by arguing that the problem when you come right down to it was a Saudi-British one and that is why the then Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz, described the incident as 'an act that violates international law and principles'. The commentator went on to argue that:

The occupation of the oasis on October 26 by the forces of the Sultanate of Oman, under the command of British officers, was motivated by the rich petroleum recourses of this oasis which had been coveted by certain western countries ... This is why Britain is grabbing it, in the capacity of 'protector' and 'ally' of Oman ... [And] for many years British forces repeatedly intruded into the oasis and clashed with Saudi Arabian authorities, to compel Saudi Arabia to agree to special colonial privilege for Britain over the oasis. Finding threats useless, Britain is now occupying it by force³³

In accordance with their philosophy of struggle against Western 'imperialism' in the 'intermediate zone', the PRC viewed the Imamate War as a window of opportunity to make an early involvement in the Gulf area. Accordingly, in 1957 the PRC sought to establish contacts with the Imamate forces and offered Imam Ghalib a militarily support against Sultan Sa'id. Yet, the latter's representatives in Cairo refused to accept this offer. As a matter of fact, the rejection of Chinese aid was basically based on religious grounds due to Imam Ghalib's 'reservations about dealing directly with a Communist state'. Yet, it was not until late 1960s that the PRC's managed to score its 'first' real political involvement in the Arabian Peninsula following establishing ties with the Omani leftist movement (Behbehani 1981: 165; Kerr 1965: 454).

It is worth noting that the Saudi-Chinese common attitudes about the Buraimi Oasis and the Imamate War did not last for a long time. Rather, it was a very short-lived phase in the history of a tense bilateral relationship during the 1950s. As a matter of fact, the Sino-Saudi convergence has resulted in merely a single Chinese trade mission to Jeddah on January 9, 1956 to discuss the "promotion of trade and

³³ *People's Daily*, November 3, 1955.

friendly ties'', yet the visit was a failure and yielded no tangible outcomes (Page 1971: 32; Khalili 1970: 108). It is also worth saying here that apart from the above-mentioned 'testing the water' visit and the annual *hajj* missions, there were no genuine contacts between the leaderships of either countries (North 1969: 126).

2.5. AN UNMISTAKABLE INCOMPATIBILITY (1957-1964)

The period between (1957-1964) saw deterioration in what one could call a modest and short-lived Saudi-Chinese partial *détente*. In this regard, it should be noted that such *détente* has not succeeded in yielding any sort of substantial coordination or even at least any direct contacts between Riyadh and Beijing regarding issues such as the Imamate cause. Moreover, the origins of this drawback could, arguably, be found in the course of events and the new developments on both the Saudi and Chinese domestic and foreign policies that took place after 1957³⁴.

2.5.1. The Decline toward Crisis: China's Muslim Communities in the Late 1950s

Remoulding the Culture of the Chinese society through the elimination of all 'former familial, religious and economic loyalties' was one of the major aspirations of the political regime since the establishment of Communist China. The imposition of dialectical and historical materialism represented an official instrument to replace various religions and cults such as Mohammedanism (Islam), Christianity, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Boyd 1962: 13-15). Not only that but, in order to speed up the process of the Socialisation of the minority populace, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders sought to impose an ethnic assimilation upon some religious and ethnic minorities such as Mongols, Tibetans and including Muslim communities all of which were labeled as *Zhongguo ren* (Chinese) instead of using their original minority names (Dillon 1999: 163).

Difficult conditions including the broad propagation of Marxist education and propaganda, food scarcity, Chinese Han control along with the confiscation of Muslims' mosques have made China's Muslim communities dissatisfied with their situation. The Hundred Flowers Campaign³⁵ of 1956 showed the extent to which

³⁴ The Chinese foreign policy was also subject to a fundamental change in 1957. Such change and alteration will be discussed in detail in the ensuing chapter.

³⁵ A period of time between 1956-1957 during which intellectuals were persuaded by the Chinese Communist Party to express their viewpoints and criticisms regarding the current Chinese issues and policies. Some commentators believe that this was a trap set up by Mao to tempt his perceived enemies

Muslim leaders were unhappy with the existing Communist regime and had robust separatist trends with the intention of creating an Islamic state in company with other Muslims inside the Soviet Union. The CCP's leaders were not tolerant towards such aspirations and, thus, in 1957 implemented a more aggressive homogenisation strategy against them that included the abolition of minority language, festivals and special customs, imposing limitations on autonomy, the condemnation of local nationalism as form of 'ingratitude' and substituting the traditional elites with an up to standard class background cadres (Lapidus 1988: 819).

In accordance with Mao's desire to accelerate the process of China's transformation into his vision of a Socialist society, the Religious System Reform was introduced in 1958 and 'radical policies less sensitive to local feelings replaced the cautious approach of the early 1950s'. Such policies affected Muslim minorities in various ways. It resulted in the closure of many mosques and Islamic organisations, putting restrictions upon conducting religious activities and the confiscation and redistribution of their *waqf* land (Islamic endowment: land owned by mosques or other religious foundations) and buildings. Last but not least, it harmfully affected Muslim businesses including bazaars, bathing facilities as well as *halal* restaurants which, in the process of establishing communes, were subject to Socialisation and collective ownership (Dillon 1995: 3; Dillon 1999: 164).

Muslim women, moreover, were forced to abandon traditional clothing and the Chinese Islamic Association was disbanded (Lapidus 1988: 819). According to one commentator, leading figures of the China Islamic Association (CIA) which was originally established to woo Muslim countries were purged in 1958 over allegations of being involved in 'plotting an Autonomous Republic on Soviet lines' (Adie 1967: 321).

After years of agony for Muslims in China, the central government in Beijing decided to ease relatively its aggressive policies against Chinese Muslim communities. During the period between (1962-1966) an easing was due to the following factors. Beijing's desire to restore its image in the Islamic world following the spread of the news of its bad treatment of its Muslim minorities: China's concerns about the security of its borders with the Soviet Union after the tension that began to emerge between Moscow and Beijing, and the military resistance that appeared in

to show themselves and therefore be recognised by Communist authority (Dillon 1979: 90; Dillon 1998: 150-151; Schwartz 1968: 99-116).

regions with Muslim populations, such as Ningxia, with the purpose of forming a Muslim republic and the emigration of more than 60000 Kazakhs and Uyghurs into the Soviet Union (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) (Lapidus 1988: 819-820; Bovington 2004: 123).

Unfortunately, this decision was a temporary measure that was taken under some prevailing necessity and Chinese Muslims were in an appointment with the notorious Cultural Revolution that broke out in 1966 and represented the worst period for any Muslim in China. The background of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermaths on Chinese Muslims will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

2.5.2. Genuine Contradictions

Radical-Communist China and conservative-Islamic Saudi Arabia were obviously incompatible. Besides the Chinese atheist and anti-Islam policies that were adopted during the late 1950s which enhanced the Saudi image of Beijing as the 'foe of Islam' the Saudis realised at this stage that socialist and radical countries including the USSR, China and other leftist Arab countries were a serious danger to its political stability and national security.

The Saudi anti-Western trend 1955-1956 proved to be the result of a new Saudi perception of threat-sources to its national security. Riyadh's realisation of the twilight of the Hashemite threat that was the *raison d'être* of its alliance with Nasser and the adoption of an anti-western foreign policy, with its adherence to Egypt's line and Nasser's themes of Arab nationalism, began to remarkably fade away after Riyadh viewed the growing popularity of Nasser in the Arab world and his escalating radical political aspirations as a direct threat to its national security and the nature of its monarchical system.

Similarly, the Saudi-Egyptian rapprochement era was utilised by Nasser to recruit and indoctrinate some senior Saudi army officers with nationalist notions, who were 'ultimately inimical to the Saudi political system'. Safran highlights that during the Saudi-Egyptian alliance against the Baghdad Pact, there was a number of aborted Egyptian attempts to motivate and create a Saudi 'free officers' movement' in the footsteps of the Egyptian model which put an end to monarchy in Egypt in 1952. Moreover, Riyadh was concerned about Nasser's inclination towards taking vital decisions without consulting his supposed allies and without paying attention to the possible harmful consequences of his decisions on them (Safran 1981: 80-82).

The mid 1950s, in addition, witnessed growing Communist subversive activities in some of the key Saudi cities against the Saudi Royal Family and the established order, which in turn represented an unequivocal danger to the Saudi ruling elite. For instance, an American diplomatic report written by Windsor G. Hackler the then American Consul to Dhahran in Saudi Arabia claimed that on Thursday and Friday, August 19 and 20 1954 the village of Al-Khobar (now the third or fourth largest city in Saudi Arabia) in the Eastern Province (which contains most of the Saudi's huge oil reserves) was a scene for the distribution of a one-page leaflet printed in Arabic and headed with a hammer and sickle symbol. The leaflet comprised 'a brief but bitter attack on the royal family' describing them as "corrupts", "reactionaries", "foreign imperialists" and "exploiters of the workers" and thus encouraging workers to 'seize the exploiting oil company'³⁶.

Moreover, during King Saud's visit to the Eastern Province in 1956, he was encountered by unfriendly Arab-Nationalist and Communist-oriented demonstration demanding the nationalisation of Aramco (the Arabian American Oil Company, now Saudi Aramco) and the abrogation of the agreement on the lease of the American base in Dhahran. Such protests, it was claimed, were organised by some Communist and Arab-Nationalist elements who also were involved in anti-monarchical activities and in encouraging both the 1953 and 1956 Aramco labour-strikes (Abir 1988: 79).

Against this background, it seems that by 1957 a definite reorientation of the Saudi foreign policy was not long in the making and that there was a serious intention to conduct a reappraisal of its (1955-56) foreign policy. Riyadh decided to offset Nasser's revolutionary threat by refreshing the Saudi-American connection, to alter its hostile stand towards the Hashemite monarchs and to seek a cooperative relationship with them. In other words, it can be said that yesterday's friends became today's enemies. One of the major consequences of Riyadh's new trend was King Saud's state visit to Washington on January 1957 during which the American administration actively sought to gain the King's advocacy of Eisenhower Doctrine³⁷. The Saudi

³⁶ *Foreign Service Despatch*, The Department of State, Washington, August 25, 1954.

³⁷ An American policy towards the Middle East was aimed at filling the power vacuum, which resulted from the fall of the British and French influence in the region following the Suez failure and to check any Soviet endeavor to increase its influence in the region. This doctrine proclaims that the US would use its armed forces to counter an imminent or actual aggression on the US or countries that adopt attitudes opposed to Communism. Under this doctrine, moreover, anti-communist governments were entitled to receive an American support in different ways including protection against aggression by any country under the control of 'international Communism'. Needless to say that Beijing was clearly an opponent of such policy.

sovereign responded favourably to the American request and gave his consent to the renewal of the lease on the US Air Force base at Dhahran for another five-year period³⁸. In return, the US Administration promised to extend economic and military aid that included the formation of a small Saudi navy (Safran 1981: 82-83; Lackner 1978: 113).

In Washington, King Saud was thought of as a potential counterweight to Nasser's radical line in the Arab World and hence Riyadh became an essential part of the global war against Communism and Socialism (Kunz 2002: 82). The work of Agwani underlines that 'the increase of Soviet influence in the Arab East following the Suez war [1956] had weakened the Cairo-Damascus-Riyadh Axis. Scared by the prospect of Soviet ascendancy in the area, King Saud now appeared favourably disposed to "combat Communism" with American aid, if necessary' (Agwani 1969: 152).

At this stage, it can be pointed out that the Saudi definition of threat has changed and its newly perceived threat created a great potentiality for a Saudi-American common ground. While the former wanted to protect its political system and religious beliefs from radical movements, revolutionary orientations, Nasserism and Communism, the latter desired to check the Soviet infiltration into the region as well as contain Nasser's radical nationalist aspirations, both of which have been considered similar and inseparable for Eisenhower's administration (Stookey 1975: 148; Adie 1967: 320).

Al-Kurdi emphasises that the contradictions between the 'conservative' and 'revolutionary' regimes, on the one hand, and the Chinese association with the 'Soviet strategy', on the other, 'formed a negative turning point in the Saudi-Chinese relationship and took it far away from cooperation' (Al-Kurdi 1991: 32). It would seem, accordingly, that Saudi Arabia by the late 1950s has reached the point of no return towards fighting against radicalisation and Communism and that such fresh firm stand led Riyadh to take another important external move towards achieving this end. Besides escalating its denunciation and condemnation of Communism and its subversive activities, it decided firstly to reopen the ROC Vice-Consulate in Jeddah in January 1956 and then in May 1957 to establish formal diplomatic relationship with

³⁸ The US air base in Dhahran was closed in 1962 due to considerations related to both Arab nationalism and Saudi sovereignty (Cordesman 1984: 253).

Taiwan as the only legitimate representative of Chinese (Salamé 1980: 289; Lipsky 1959: 148; Quandt 1981: 65; Ma 1988: 57).

The Chinese scene, on the other hand, witnessed mounting revolutionary trends towards radicalisation and the adoption of extremist doctrines such as 'armed struggle' as well as 'people's war' all of which were products of Beijing's internal and external environment. Since Autumn of 1956 and early 1957, it began to recognise a seedbed of upcoming Western onslaught such as the Hungarian Crisis, the Suez invasion and Eisenhower doctrine (Shichor 1984a: 314). The Sino-Soviet relations, also, began during the late 1950s a deterioration turn and a growing hostility. The domestic Chinese arena, as well, saw a number of remarkable shifts such as the anti-rightist campaign that maximised the power of the more militant elements within the Chinese hierarchy and the revival of the most militant form of Maoism in Chinese domestic politics, which was embodied by the Great Leap Forward (Harris 1985: 29; Hinton 1970: 251).

Therefore, not surprisingly, Beijing radically turned against Riyadh and changed its stand from supporting it in its dispute against Britain over the Buraimi Oasis to adopting a harsh condemning attitude against it. Behbehani wrote that

China's stand on Omani internal developments and their relationship to Saudi Arabia was clouded with uncertainty over the nature of the political attitudes of the various parties involved in the dispute. Although China had originally clearly sided with Saudi Arabia during the Buraimi dispute, two years later China's analysis of the dispute shifted, seeing it as a dispute between two external powers: Britain and the USA, implying that the latter had a free hand in maneuvering Saudi Arabia over the Buraimi issue³⁹. To China the whole affair was reminiscent of Anglo-French-Israeli action against Egypt during the Suez Crisis of 1956 (Behbehani 1981: 166).

The new modified Chinese strategy towards the conflict in Oman, accordingly, became based on the notion that the conflict embodied an extension of 'imperialist' alliances between Britain and the USA aimed at 'slicing' Oman for their own vested interest. The implications of this argument are several. Initially, during the period between 1958-1964⁴⁰, Beijing decided to confront the Anglo-American intrusion in

³⁹ The Chinese analysis was not accurate because, according to Bryson, the Saudi-American relations developed some strains during the mid-1950s following the announcement of the American-supported Baghdad Pact. He, moreover, mentioned that with regard to the Buraimi oasis dispute, 'The U.S. government urged arbitration, but largely remained aloof from the dispute' (Bryson 1977: 233).

⁴⁰ Starting from 1958, the Middle East saw some important political and radical changes all of which represented a direct and genuine threat to the Saudi monarchy. Firstly, in February 1958, Egypt and Syria formed a political union that became known as the United Arab Republic (UAR). Secondly, in

Oman's domestic affairs by considering the Imamate cause of Oman to be one of the 'national independence movements' in the Arab world including Yemen, Algeria, Morocco, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) all of which deserved its political and moral support. Beijing, furthermore, considered the whole 'Gulf of Arabia' to be under a foreign occupation that should be forced to withdraw. It, also, decided to strengthen and intensify its relations with similar 'revolutionary', 'progressive' and extreme nationalist-oriented regimes in the Middle East such as Nasser's Egypt, Iraq's Qasim, Syria and Yemen. It is worth noting, however, that China's advocacy of the Imamate movement at this early phase of its intrusion in the Gulf was limited to merely political, moral and propaganda support (El-Rayyes & Nahas 1973: 89; Behbehani 1981: 166-171, 138).

In parallel with its revolutionary anti-imperialist policy, China's official press launched a propaganda campaign against the anti-communist regimes in the Arab World. Beijing, as well, considered the Gulf petroleum to be under an 'imperialist' exploitation and governed by Western capitalist monopoly. For example, an article in *Hong Qi* (The Red Flag) argued:

Petroleum, the life-blood of the Arab peoples, is now still basically controlled by imperialism. 99.9 per cent of the oil deposits in the Middle East (including Iran) and 99.7 per cent of the oil output are still in the hands of monopoly capital in the imperialist countries (Cited in Behbehani 1981: 171).

This article, also, contained an unequivocal attack against a number of Arab leaders who were anti-Communists and accused them of selling their countries' national interests short. However, it is worth noting that despite the fact that the relationship between Riyadh and Beijing was characterized by tension, the article did not insult or mention the names of any of the Saudi leaders during this harsh propaganda campaign.

2.6. Conclusion

While trade and religious nexuses have linked China and the Arabian Peninsula since an earlier age, historical evidence suggests that official ties between Saudi Arabia and Republican China were established in 1939 after the signature of friendship

July 1958, the Hashemite monarchy of Iraq was overthrown by a military coup d'état under the lead of the Marxist Major General Abdulkareem Qasim. Little by little, the key countries of the region such as Egypt and Syria and Iraq aligned themselves closely with the Soviet Union and to the Marxist line. Such changes and growing communist orientations, undoubtedly, enhanced Saudi fears of a potential stronger Chinese intrusion in the region as Communist China was, as well, a close ally of the Soviets.

agreement between the two countries making the Kingdom the first Arab country to have such diplomatic connection with China. The purpose of having these diplomatic ties at that time was taking care of Chinese annual *Hajj* missions to the holy lands in the Kingdom. This short-lived official relationship with Mainland China ceased in the aftermath of the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949.

Ideological differences between radical-communist China and the Saudi conservative-Islamic monarchy along with negative news delivered by Chinese Muslim emigrants who fled to Saudi Arabia about the harsh way the Communist government had treated them contributed to the already bad impressions the Saudis had about the new regime in Beijing. While the Chinese ruling elite regarded Riyadh as merely subservient to British imperialism, the Saudis considered them as 'atheistic' and 'oppressive' since they had toppled the legitimate government by force.

Such ideological conflict with China side by side with the Chinese association with the Soviet revolutionary regional agenda prompted Riyadh to establish diplomatic relations with Taipei as the legitimate only representative of the Chinese people. This, also, inclined Riyadh to ignore all PRC's endeavours to reverse such matters by using its Muslim minorities as diplomatic messengers between the two countries. Moreover, growing perceptions of regional menaces of a Communist-radical nature led Riyadh in 1957 to enter into a strong relationship with the US to protect its religious beliefs, political stability and national security against leftist-revolutionary governments in the region during the Cold War era. Such Saudi moves were to establish a long antagonistic relationship between Riyadh and Beijing during the phases that would follow. As will be discussed in the coming chapter, this was especially the case following the Chinese decision to adopt armed struggle and support revolutionary movements in the Gulf against what it regarded as reactionary and feudal political regimes.

CHAPTER 3

THE PREDOMINANCE OF IDEOLOGY AND THE RADICALISATION OF CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY (1964-1972)

The period between (1964-1972) represents the second historical period in the general course of the Sino-Saudi relationship. During this era, Chinese foreign policy moved into another phase and took a turning towards revolutionism as radical ideology began to play an important role in the formulation and articulation of Beijing's foreign policy. Following the Bandung conciliatory phase, Beijing decided to pursue a different set of tactics and plans towards both its minorities and the outside world. Some analysts contend that the previous conciliatory policies were merely a reflection of the PRC's desire to break its international isolation and to gain as much recognition by international parties as possible and that the peaceful policies that coincided with the Bandung era were merely temporary tactics to achieve short-term targets. Still others hold the belief that the radicalisation of the Chinese foreign policy was a consequence of a number of internal developments in the Chinese domestic environment, the Great Leap Forward (1958-61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) particularly.

Taking into account that Communism was one of the major and direct challenges to the Saudi national security throughout this era, Riyadh adopted a clear-cut anti-Socialist and anti-revolutionist policy. This was crystallised in King Faisal's world view according to which the world was divided into three levels (the Arab, the Islamic and the Free worlds) all of which face the three major threats of Marxism, Zionism and Imperialism. Riyadh as a result pursued a firm counter-revolutionary stance to stem such dangerous challenges and sought to check the tide of radicalism and socialism in the region via supporting conservative regimes and through attempting to abort Communist endeavors to infiltrate in the Arabian Peninsula.

The concentration of ideology in Beijing's political discourse and behaviour was clearly reflected both on the situation of China's Muslim minorities, on the one hand, and on Beijing's foreign policy towards the Gulf region, on the other. Such internal and external developments profoundly contributed to the deepening of identity differences between Riyadh and Beijing in this phase and thus the exacerbation of the existing Sino-Saudi cool relations. Riyadh's concerns and doubts

of the Marxist-oriented threats in the area in general and towards the conservative political systems in particular were confirmed following the Socialist efforts to acquire a foothold in the Arabian Peninsula (North and South Yemen and Oman) especially after Britain announced in the late 1960s its intention to withdraw from Aden and its protectorates in the Gulf.

This chapter will discuss the difficulties and constraints China's Muslim communities experienced during the Cultural Revolution. Next, it will show in depth how the Chinese foreign behaviour underwent a remarkable shift and became mainly governed and directed by the Communist ideology during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It will, moreover, examine the consequences of China's radical approach towards the Arabian Peninsula and how that affected its relationship with Saudi Arabia. Then, it will focus on the key determinants of the Saudi foreign policy during that historical period and how the latter was guided by Faisal's world view to adopt a counter anti-communist stance against Communist and radical activities both regionally and internationally.

3.1. THE NOTORIOUS CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND ITS CRITICAL AFTERMATH (1966-1976)

The Chinese Cultural Revolution (CR) was a demonstration of a split and factional struggle for power within the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party between the radical faction of Mao and the more pragmatic elements led by Liu Shaoqi (who was purged during the CR) and Deng Xiaoping. Schram stresses that 'The use of ideology as an instrument or weapon in political struggle reached ... a high point which can scarcely be equaled, let alone surpassed, during the Cultural Revolution decade, when means were devised for classifying all those who disagreed with Mao as Class enemies' (Schram 1984: 1).

In May 1966, Mao Zedong launched the CR to restore and reiterate his power following his disastrous strategy known as the Great Leap Forward⁴¹. While the announced purpose of the CR was to rid China of its 'liberal bourgeoisie' elements and their representatives who 'have sneaked into the party', it was, in practice, a

⁴¹ The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) was a social and economic plan based on Mao's Theory of the Productive Forces. The main goal of this plan was to attain a dramatic rise in industrial production via the exploitation of China's vast population to convert the Chinese economy from an agricultural into a modern industrial one. This policy, however, was doomed to failure and resulted in the death of millions of peasants. For more information in this regard, see (Dillon 1998: 121-122).

prelude to the creation of Mao's cult of personality and a vehicle through which Mao was able to eliminate and castigate the opponents of his line all of whom were regarded as 'persons on power taking the capitalist road'. As a matter of fact, CR policies secured a prevailing position for Mao's line. To achieve such an objective, Mao and some of his close proponent elements such as Lin Biao (Defence Minister) and Jiang Qing (Madam Mao) deployed students and youth militia to form what came to be known as the Red Guards, which became a suppressive tool to purge Mao's perceived enemies. The CR era lasted nearly for a decade and was marked by disruption and violence as the struggle for power developed to take the form of a wide-scale social, political and economic disorder that broke out throughout China and was about to escalate to something like a civil war (Dillon 1998: 65-67; Heberer 1989: 23).

The CR epoch was destructive to China's minorities including Muslims (Goldman 1986: 147-149). In fact, it represented the worst period for China's Muslim Communities as they, among other minorities, had to undergo official pressure to conform to a pan-Chinese norm and were subject to Red Guard's endeavours to eradicate all traces of the pre-Communist culture. The main ordeal of China's minorities was that Beijing's rulers, at that stage, became convinced that the nationality problem was solved and that the majority Han culture should prevail and had to be adopted. As a result, the need for special privileges and policies for China's ethnic minorities was no longer necessary (Dillon 1999: 8-9, 164).

Several facts about the Chinese community were denied. First and foremost the multinationality of the Chinese society was refused. The national autonomy policy was denounced as 'backward' and Minority's Schools and colleges were closed down. Natural fortunes and recourses of minority's regions were unskillfully squandered and misused. The health practices of the minorities were strictly controlled as 'superstitious'. Minority folk songs, dance, films, languages, scripts, customs and manners were banned as they were regarded as 'feudal, capitalist, revisionist, poisonous weed' (Heberer 1989: 25-27).

In connection with the above, the CR raised the slogan of the abandonment of the 'Four Olds', old thinking, old customs, old cultures and old morality, all of which were considered as 'archaic and absolute feudal culture'. Most Muslim mosques were, thus, desecrated, damaged and sometimes completely destroyed or burnt, copies of the Holy Quran were burned, and research about Islam and study of the Quran were

banned. Hundreds of Muslims were humiliated, abused and purged by the Red Guard militia (Dillon 1999: 164; Lipman 2004: 37).

The well-known 'Shadian incident', for instance, provides a crystal-clear example of the abusive way through which Red Guards and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have treated Chinese Muslims during the CR. Muslims were banned from celebrating Ramadan and forced to eat pork, and pork bones were thrown both into the mosque and water wells from which faithful used to draw water to wash before prayer. The armed clashes between villagers and the PLA that lasted for eight nights, during which the PLA used heavy cannon and artillery and the village was bombed by rockets of MIG jets, starting from July 29, 1975 resulted in the death of more than 1600 casualties most of them were Muslims and the demolition of roughly 4400 houses (Gladney 1991: 136-140).

The Communist government maltreatment of Muslims throughout the CR was not only confined to Chinese Muslims but in fact extended to touch other foreign Muslims in China who were susceptible to such official abuse. Shung provided examples of foreign Muslim merchants from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who had lived in China for decades yet both of whom were mistreated and suffered torture and one of them was forced to leave the Chinese mainland (Shung 1960: 17).

Notwithstanding the fact that some Muslims during the early 1950s have for some time assumed high posts in different Sino-Arab friendship and informal bodies related to foreign policy and 'people's diplomacy', and were influential in conducting China's Middle East policy via wielding a key role in improving China's image in and relations with the Arab countries, the ill-treatment China's Muslims have experienced starting from 1957 and throughout the CR era may indicate that, as Winter argued, they were merely political tools of foreign policy (Winters 1979: 47-48). Rather, another scholar argued, Beijing employed religion for political purposes and 'short-term tasks and [hence] was no longer necessary', as Shichor indicates (Shichor 1984a: 312).

It seems, therefore, that exploiting the 'Islam card' and granting Islam special treatment was mainly a cosmetic political tactic that aimed at deceiving the outside world, enlisting the support of the Islamic countries and bridging the gap of suspicions between the latter and Beijing, which suffered a strong international isolation following its establishment. The situations, unsurprisingly, sharply changed

in the wake of its diplomatic success in penetrating, and establish diplomatic relations with a number of Islamic countries (Shung 1960: 19; Shichor 1984a: 307).

In fact, Yang had foreseen such deterioration of the situations of China's Muslim community several years before the outbreak of the CR. Although he attached a considerable importance to the international considerations and organic connections of Chinese Muslims with the Middle East in making China's lenient policy towards its Muslim minorities at home, he stressed that 'should the policy of international Communism change, or a stronger attitude towards the minority groups in China be adopted, the tactical leniency given this group might suddenly be reversed and the campaign against Islam stepped up' (Yang 1957: 22).

The significance of this period to the study of the Saudi-Chinese relationship is twofold. On the one hand, it clearly shows the oppressive way Chinese Muslims were treated by the Communist authorities during this era; and on the other it cast dark shadows on the Chinese foreign policy and led Beijing to adopt a more revolutionary approach towards the Middle East, embodied in supporting radical movements and 'armed struggle' in the Gulf. Both unhealthy consequences harmfully overshadowed the already deteriorated Sino-Saudi relationship. Bearing in mind David Long's emphasis that Saudi leaders do 'feel a special responsibility to protect the Muslim community and the Islamic way of life' and that Communism has been regarded by them as one of the key challenges to the 'Muslim way of life', one can understand the Saudi concern about the Muslim communities all over the world and the Saudi effort to counter such a threat (Long 1980b: 102-105).

The Saudi suspicions and misgivings about the PRC's abuse of Muslim communities in China became evident more than ever when Chinese annual *hajj* missions to Mecca were brought to a halt on the eve of the CR and following the anti-Muslim governmental actions and mistreatments that gained ever larger-scale during that period. In this regard, Hinton suggests that one of the PRC's foreign policy key weaknesses in the Arab World was its failure to assure and dispel reasonable fears and suspicions among some Arab countries about the conditions under which Chinese Muslim communities live. He concludes that, there were indeed some justified doubts that Muslim communities were suppressed by the central Communist government (Hinton 1970: 257).

3.2. THE RADICALISATION OF CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY: EXACERBATING THE DETERIORATION

The Bandung phase between (1955-1964) during which Beijing adopted a flexible and conciliatory approach towards the Middle East given its limited means of influence in that area and its desperate need to form a 'united front from above' against colonialism and the West as well as to break its diplomatic isolation, was abandoned and replaced by a new radical approach (Neuhauser 1968: 2; Shichor 1977: 158; Calabrese 1991: 15). The transformations that occurred in PRC's foreign policy during the subsequent period between (1964-1972) were an outcome of developments that took place in China's domestic and international milieu. These transformations have notably influenced the behaviour of the PRC's foreign policy towards the outside world in general and the Gulf region in particular.

Disagreement among Chinese national leaders regarding their personal visions of their state and its national interests, the anti-rightist campaign during the late 1950s along with domestic political turmoil within the Chinese arena during the Cultural Revolution overshadowed the PRC's foreign behaviour and resulted among other things in the rise of the more militant elements within the Chinese hierarchy and the adoption of an extreme-left foreign policy (Fidah 1980: 38; Harris 1985: 29). In the heat of a brutal and tense political atmosphere it was no surprise that revolutionary writings and language- such as the 1965 Lin Biao's *Long Live the Victory of People's Wars!*⁴²- have bloomed as they were timely products of the CR period and that they presented a crystal-clear sign of a Chinese foreign policy reorientation in the making.

On the other hand, increasing tension between Beijing and Moscow following the deterioration⁴³ of Sino-Soviet relationships in the early 1960s had a significant influence on the PRC's self-image as well as foreign policies in the Arab World (Dutt 1966: 152-153; Behbehani 1981: 6). On the one hand, Beijing's position towards its self-power and Mao's vision of China as an important Asian power and as a merely

⁴² In accordance with Mao's strategy to rely on the gun and violent revolution to change the world, Lin Biao called for encircling the world cities (the developed capitalist countries) by the world countryside areas (the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America) (Lin Biao 1965).

⁴³ The Sino-Soviet cleavage was over a number of issues including way Beijing and Moscow should deal with the U.S, disagreements about the Soviet economic and military aid, Chinese concerns regarding the suitability of the Soviet economic model, the organisation and leadership of the international Communist movement, disputes, due to differences of political culture and personal style, over the identification of problems and the fashion of decision-making especially after the arrival of Khrushchev following the death of Stalin (Scalapino 1979: 51-52). For more detailed account about the Sino-Soviet rift, see (Deutscher 1970: 202-277).

complementary part of the socialist world shifted to retrieve the traditional concept of a '[S]ino-centric world' (Simmonds 1970: 151-153). Likewise, the evolving dispute between Beijing and Moscow resulted in the radicalisation of Beijing's foreign policy especially in the region in order to 'prove itself more revolutionary, hence more pure than Moscow' (Scalapino 1974: 354).

China's intrusion in West Asia and the Arabian Peninsula was aimed at undermining the Western 'imperialism' in the region in addition to competing with the Soviet Union for the leadership of the Communist camp and the domination in the Afro-Asian arena, which became the battlefield of the Sino-Soviet rivalry (Abir 1974: 131; Calabrese 1990: 864). The main theme of the PRC's foreign policy towards the Third World including the Arab World, accordingly, became the notion of 'national independence' gains and the importance of the 'people's war' theory (Behbehani 1981: 6-9).

The PRC's leaders believed that such revolutionary goals could only be obtained by fostering revolutionary movements and Communist parties in its mould for the purpose of enabling them in due course to seize power in their countries. Pursuing such a policy would, on the one hand, guarantee the loyalty of the local Communist parties in the Arab world to the PRC and, on the other, drift them away from the United States and the Soviet Union (Hinton 1966: 180; Harris 1994: 323).

By the mid 1960s, Beijing's new policy towards the Arab countries including the Arabian Peninsula started to take shape and the headlines of the novel strategy during the upcoming era were revealed in a Sino-Yemeni joint communiqué on June 15, 1964. According to *Xinhua*, five principles have governed the PRC's approach towards the Arab countries: firstly, they supported the Arab struggle against 'imperialism' in order to accomplish complete autonomy. Secondly, they backed up Arab neutralism. Thirdly, they gave support to Arab unity. Fourthly, they assisted the efforts of the Arab countries to resolve their inter-disputes by consultation and finally, they countered any outside intervention in Arab Affairs (cited in Hinton 1966: 184).

This communiqué meant that China's desire to play an independent world-wide role and Mao's doctrine of the 'united front' and 'people's war' found their way into the region. Also it meant that instead of merely monitoring the political incidents in a very strategic and vital area for the Saudi national security, Beijing got directly

involved in the Arabian Peninsula affairs through the adoption of a new policy of direct presence and interference.

3.3. SUPPORTING REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

Throughout the CR, it seems that the PRC was at a momentous crossroad. Both China's domestic and external arenas were extensively influenced by this historical era. One of the major consequences of such period was Beijing's policy of directing its contacts and ties toward extreme revolutionary movements rather than existing governments (Yodfat 1977: 3).

The revolutionary anti-colonialist slogan and emphasis on ideological purity were the main driving forces of the PRC involvement in West Asia and North Africa, including the Arabian Peninsula. While the Bandung principles of co-existence have disguised Beijing's bilateral relations in that area during the early 1950s, 'Its latent objective was to promote ideology' and it was obvious that 'its ideology dominated its national interest'. Attaining such goals in the region was not an easy task for China even among those radical Arab states who were attracted to the former in order to mainly capitalise on their bilateral relations for their own benefits and hence refused to follow the principles of the Chinese ideological approach. At that time and compared with Moscow, Beijing's capabilities were limited and in terms of military, financial and political⁴⁴ aid. It had little to offer to Arabs, who thought that the Sino-Soviet schism then rivalry put some constraints and obstacles in the way of cultivating their relations as compared with the Soviets who were regarded as more beneficial. At 1965, therefore, the Chinese felt that they have been letdown by the existing Arab regimes, including the radical ones, and that a considerable shift had to be undertaken (Abidi 1982: 195, 197).

Beijing's attention was, as a result, turned toward the Southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, namely Aden (which became South Yemen) and Oman, where there was a sort of an emerging revolution that corresponded to China's criteria of revolutionary struggle and were classified as 'proper targets of revolutionary' (Ness 1970: 138). Besides the shifts that were taking place in the Chinese internal political arena and China's self image in the socialist camp, two factors also contributed to the

⁴⁴ Mainly in their conflict with Israel.

formation of Beijing's radical intrusion in the region. Firstly, the Chinese disappointment with the existing Arab regimes that preferred to reinforce their relations with the Soviet Union at the expense of their relations with the PRC during the 1950s and the 1960s, and were not happy with Beijing's general orientations during the CR. Secondly, Beijing's failure to impose its control over the PLO during the late 1960s as China provided mainly propaganda and militant slogans rather than enough material and military support; the PLO, on the other hand, felt that they were exploited by Beijing to revenge itself on the Soviet Union and other Arab governments. China used to stress that 'the suppression of right wingers and reactionary leaders in the Arab world was a task much more important to the cause of revolution than the reconquest of Palestine'. This led China to establish instant and material contact with a number of 'national liberation fronts' in the Arabian Peninsula as a new frontier (Abidi 1982: 195, 198-199).

Ness contended that supporting wars of national liberation was a sort of Chinese international power politics approach that was a reflection of domestic events within the PRC borders that aimed at achieving four key functions. It, first, provided a means to chastise governments that did not prove agreeable to adopting pro-Chinese foreign policies and punish those governments serving as a threat to other governments, which might be reluctant about their future foreign policy directions. It, secondly, could help in educating, mobilising and bringing up a radical world political consciousness through revealing the real face of imperialism via engaging the imperialist enemy in situations where it will be encouraged to militarily interfere quash such wars of national liberation. Thirdly, to introduce and sustain the radical change in the countries of the Third World through deposing the existing governments by revolutionary movements. Finally, to 'replicate the Chinese revolutionary experience' and give the ratification of Mao's claims that his strategy was appropriate to the whole developing world (Ness 1970: 232-235). Seeing them as a sabotaging plan and a threat to its stability, such functions or maybe more accurately, aspirations were an unquestionably unwelcomed agenda by Saudi political circles.

3.3.1. The PRC and North Yemen: Republicans vs. Royalists

Yemen was one of the first countries of the Middle East to establish contacts with the PRC. Relations between the PRC and North Yemen date back to the Yemeni royalist

reign when both sides decided to form diplomatic relations in 1956. An economic and technical cooperation agreement was signed between China and the royalists of North Yemen in 1958. The agreement included sending Chinese technicians and skilled workers as per a ten-year arrangement. At that time, Beijing defended Yemen's claims to territories under the British protection (North 1969: 126).

Four years later, in 1962, and following a Marxist-supported Army *coup d'état* the Chinese recognised the newly established Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) which received in 1964 further large Chinese loans to finance some projects including the construction of some motor roads (Masannat 1966: 224). In the same year both sides agreed to upgrade relations and Beijing as a result appointed its first resident Ambassador to the Yemeni Capital, Sana'a. During the Yemeni Civil War⁴⁵ (1962-1970) between the Royalists and the Republican factions, Beijing encouraged the Yemeni Republicans to continue fighting when Nasser urged them to make peace with the Royalists in accordance with his agreement with the Saudis in this regard. Moreover, the Chinese experts actively carried out an important role in building bridges and roads through which the Yemeni republicans succeeded to penetrate the siege of Sana'a (Harris 1993a: 108). These roads, actually, played a crucial role in the supply and transportation of the Egyptian tanks and artillery from the coast to the capital, Sana'a, during the Yemeni Civil War (Sheean 1975: 100).

Yet, in the final analysis and despite Chinese financial and technical aid, Beijing enjoyed no tangible political influence in North Yemen and was not able to counterbalance the relatively large-scale Soviet military presence throughout the Yemeni Civil War⁴⁶ (Yodfat 1977: 6-7).

3.3.2. The PRC and South Yemen: A Strategic Communist Bridge

South Yemen or the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY) gained its independence from Britain on November 30, 1967⁴⁷. In 1968 official diplomatic relations were established between the Marxist-prone PRSY and the PRC. Two years later, in 1970, the name of the PRSY was altered to be the People's Democratic

⁴⁵ During this war while the royalists received support from Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the republicans received an Egyptian and Soviet support (Bryson 1977: 231).

⁴⁶ The termination of this war has relatively put an end to both the Chinese and Soviet presence in North Yemen in favour of a growing Saudi political influence as the latter recognised the threat posed by both Sino-Soviet Marxist policies and strategies (i.e. the overthrow of the monarchical Imamate in Yemen). (Yodfat 1977: 7; Halliday 1974: 138; Yodfat 1983: 5).

⁴⁷ The Soviets recognised the new state the day after independence was declared.

Republic of the Yemen (PDRY) and the new regime in Aden was supported by both the Soviets and the Chinese. Beijing's interest in South Yemen was usually linked and attributed to the Chinese awareness of the strategic importance of Aden as a southern gateway to the Arabian Peninsula as well as a bridge to the Horn of Africa and Oman where Beijing had some strategic political and ideological aspirations, on the one hand, in addition to its rivalry with Moscow and the naval presence of the latter in the Indian Ocean, on the other (Calabrese 1991: 57).

At that time, the anti-imperialist National Liberation Front (NLF) not only ruled the country⁴⁸ but some important provinces, such as Hadramaut, were governed by a radical Marxist pro-Chinese wing that launched some key reforms on the Chinese model. They formed 'people's councils', adopted anti-religious educational policies, confiscated land and then redistributed them to the landless peasants, nationalised financial institutions and foreign trade and established a 'People's Guard' which was armed and organized by the Chinese in line with the Chinese 'Red Guards'. The Yemeni 'People's Militia' came to be an offset to the PDRY regular military forces, which were armed and trained by the Soviets (Yodfat 1977: 7).

Seemingly, South Yemen was considered by Chinese leaders to be within the 'course of socialist development'. The extreme left faction became more left-orientated because of its fiasco to extend its power over the entire country. At that stage, relations between the PDRY and the PRC grew steadily stronger to the extent of encouraging the latter to accredit its largest diplomatic mission in the region to Aden. The activities of the Chinese diplomatic mission were wide and extended to cover the whole Middle East.

Divisions among the leadership of the NLF were obvious. The PDRY, as was the case in the YAR, was an arena for an apparent Sino-Soviet political and ideological rivalry. Whereas the NLF President, Salim Ruba'i 'ali, was considered to be Maoist and pro-Chinese and used to frequent Beijing, the General Secretary of the NLF, Abdulfatah Isma'il, was regarded to be pro-Soviet and used to visit Moscow. The rift, according to Yodfat, merely reflected personal rivalry for power and was not of ideological foundations (Yodfat 1977: 8).

⁴⁸ NLF assumed power in South Yemen after a violent contest with another militant movement the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). Originally the NLF was not Marxist-dominated and was opposed by the Aden Marxist Party. Furthermore, there were moderates and extremists among the NLF Marxists. By 1969 the moderate Marxist faction of the NLF was overwhelmed by the radical-Marxist wing, which planned to 'transform the state into a model of Marxism in practice' (Henze 1989: 107).

The PDRY hugely benefited from the economic aid that was offered by the PRC and received 20 per cent of the latter's aid in the Middle East. In 1970, for instance, Aden received Chinese aid of nearly 55 million pounds. More importantly, knowing that Riyadh was not happy with the existence of a Socialist regime living next door, Salim Ruba'i 'ali was given Beijing's implicit support against Saudi Arabia during a state visit to the PRC (Halliday 1990: 219-220; Calabrese 1991: 58; Behbehani 1982: 184). Also, in this regard, the Saudi leftist-dissenter Nasser Al-Said who was tied to President Jamal Abdunnasser, of Egypt, and used to live in South Yemen paid a visit to the PRC to seek some support from Beijing against the ruling political system in Riyadh⁴⁹.

There can be no doubt that the Chinese and Soviet Marxists-oriented infiltration and competition⁵⁰ to gain a foothold in south Arabia in general and in the PDRY in particular, which resulted in the emergence of a Marxist regime on the Saudi doorstep, had unmistakable implications for the national security of the Kingdom. An example of such menace was obvious during an eight-day visit to the PRC by an official PDRY delegation that arrived in Shanghai on September 16, 1968. The Yemeni delegation was warmly welcomed and then throughout the visit programme was lectured by the Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister, Marshal Ch'en Yi, about the importance of following the Chinese pattern of national democratic revolution against imperialism, colonialism and the extermination of feudalism in the PDRY and about the unconstructive impacts on the Yemeni regime due to some of its close 'reactionary and feudal' neighbors namely Saudi Arabia. The Chinese Foreign Minister sought to provoke the Yemeni delegation against Riyadh by harshly attacking the intentions of the Saudi monarchy. He claimed that

it is not your country alone over which feudalism has dominion, for you are aware that you have strong neighbors who practice feudalism of the worst kind. Surrounding you is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the people are subject to a reactionary feudal system about which you know much. Indeed, you know better than we about the intentions it harbours towards you. This system is not only feudalist; in addition, it exploits religion in a repugnant manner due to its presence in the areas sacred to Muslims and its claim to protect and supervise these areas. You must be thoroughly conscious of this and understand the importance of the religious weapon which the Saudi ruling

⁴⁹ For more details about this visit, see Al-Said's website:

(http://www.nasseralsaid.com/index.php?option=com_zoom&Itemid=47&page=view&PageNo=1&key=0&hit=1&catid=12).

⁵⁰ As ruling factions both in North and South Yemens used to play off, the common game of, the USSR against the PRC.

family employs to prevent the liberation and advancement of the people of the region. You must understand that this system receives complete and absolute support from the American imperialism due to the immense riches in the Kingdom's territories - above all, oil - and due to the strategic position of Saudi Arabia and its influence on developments in the Arab region and the Islamic nations (Behbehani 1985: 18-19).

The Soviets, on the other hand, were keen to challenge the Chinese influence in the PDRY, which was thought to be the first Marxist-Leninist state in the Arab World and '*as a base for operations in neighboring parts of the Arab Peninsula and the Horn of Africa*' (italic added). They, consequently, raised their military aid gradually in the 1970s to reach more than \$2 billion by 1983 (Henze 1989: 108). The KGB, as well, was heavily involved in South Arabia during the early 1970s by establishing and sustaining a number of anti-Chinese radical movements around South Yemen. The Soviet strategy was two-fold. It, firstly, allowed them to entirely kick the Chinese out of the PDRY by 1974 and draw the country into the Soviet camp. In addition, it gave them an opportunity to train and arm some guerillas of radical political movements in the Arabian Peninsula such as the so-called Saudi Arabia National Liberation Front (SANLF)⁵¹, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO), and the Front for the Liberation of Dhofar (FLD). Sakharov and Tosi, put emphasis on the challenge and danger of these radical movements to Saudi national security by arguing that 'The struggle of these obscure tribes in remote Yemen may seem trivial ... but for the Saudis it represented a real threat' (Sakharov & Tosi 1981: 295-296).

3.3.3. The Omani Political Theatre: A Maoist Haven

As mentioned earlier, the PRC had presented its political⁵² support for the Imamate Movement in Oman in 1957 against the British-supported Sultan Sa'id bin Taimur. Such moral support continued during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It, however, ended by the dismantling of the Imamate Movement of Oman in 1964. The same year witnessed the birth of Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) as a result of the merger of the two key forces in Oman, the Dhofar Charitable Association (DCA) and the Dhofar

⁵¹ President Jamal Abdunnasser originally established the (SANLF) in 1962. In 1975, the (SANLF) was transformed into the Saudi Arabian Communist Party (SACP). The membership and the activities of the militant movement and then the Communist Party were of marginal importance inside Saudi Arabia and it was not more than a 'small debating group' that used to receive occasional verbal support from the USSR (Yodfat 1983: 36; Katz 1986: 126; Henze 1989: 114).

⁵² As it has been earlier indicated, the Imam's representatives refused to accept a Chinese military support because of religious considerations.

Soldiers' Organisation (DSO). The DLF proclaimed the launch of armed struggle against the British-supported Sultan Sa'id's rule over Oman on June 9, 1965. The independence of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in November 1967, however, reinforced the DLF's position in the area as the former operated as the latter's 'secure rear base'. The DLF, in return, protected the PDRY's borders with the Omani Sultanate (Halliday 1974: 321). In fact, following the late 1960s announcement of its British intention to withdraw from the Gulf, 'Chinese ideologues thought that an identical revolutionary situation as was built up in South Yemen would develop in the Gulf' (Abidi 1982: 200).

The period between (1967-1972) represented the heyday of the Chinese involvement in the Omani political theatre. During this period Beijing was the sole⁵³ foreign military supporter of the PFLOAG (Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf), which was politically and organisationally influenced by Mao's ideology and thoughts. Despite the fact that the soviets were capable of extending political and military aid, the DLF (then became PFLOAG) leaders chose to knock at the Chinese door and sought to gain Beijing's support of their cause. This might be due to the Chinese propaganda campaign for 'world revolution through armed struggle' and because the PRC was seen by them as 'spearheading revolution in the world'. Following some talks between the DLF's representatives and the Chinese embassy in Cairo, the DLF's first delegation arrived in Beijing on June 23, 1967. The visit resulted in a Chinese vow of nominal aid such as light armaments, small sums of money (\$35000) and Marxist literature including the Red Book and some of Mao's writings. It is worth mentioning here that Marxist literature played a notable role in drawing the DLF's attention to Marxism in general and its Chinese version in particular. Such literature had been, moreover, reflected on the Front's later political structure when it was subsequently transformed to become the PFLOAG (Behbehani 1982: 140, 161, 164, 177; El-Rayyes and Nahas 1973: 164-165; Page 1985: 126-127).

In September 1968, in connection with the above and following some substantial divisions regarding the strategies and tactics of the 'revolutionary movement in the Gulf' among the members of the Arab Nationalist Movement

⁵³ The soviet support for Dhofari rebels began in 1973 through Aden in the wake of China's withdrawal from rendering material assistance to the radical guerillas in the Gulf starting from 1972 (Hensel 1982: 194).

(ANM), the DLF adopted an extremist left orientation and recalled for radicalisation and armed struggle as the 'sole means for defeating imperialism' and therefore renamed itself to become the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied'⁵⁴ Arabian Gulf' (PFLOAG). In 1968, the PFLOAG extended an invitation to the PRC to observe the 'working and progress of the revolution'. Beijing sent two official observers to report the developments, changes and the political situation in the area and as a result of a positive report submitted to the PRC's leaders signifying that the PFLOAG was espousing a pro-Chinese attitude, Beijing supported the newly-established Front and its programme of the adoption of scientific Socialism and total revolution in the Gulf. A delegation of the PFLOAG, furthermore, visited the PRC for political and military training. Such training significantly influenced the future organisation and orientation of cells and political education among the Front's cadres.

In an official visit, the Chinese, also, received a high-ranking delegation from the PFLOAG's Central Committee, which met Premier Zhou Enlai and members of the Defence Ministry. During this visit, the Chinese promised to extend an increased and substantial amount of military support such as providing anti-craft missiles explosive and light machine guns. As from this visit, Beijing received several PFLOAG's military, political and technical delegations one of which, for instance, was offered a broadcasting station. Needless to say, the visits and cooperation between PFLOAG and Beijing made the former's leaders committed to Maoism and the Chinese political line even at the expense of the Soviet one. For example, in September 1969, the PFLOAG's representative to the Anti-imperialist Journalist Conference in Pyongyang unequivocally expressed their loyalty to Beijing and stated that 'after four years of armed struggle and people's war, we are sorry that in the free progressive world only the PDRY and China understand and support our struggle' against 'the Sultan, the neighbouring "artificial" shaikhdoms, western domination' (Behbehani 1981: 144-145, 161, 177-178).

During its involvement in the Omani political theatre, Beijing provided the Dhofari rebels with financial, medical, food and military assistance. Not only that but some reports talked about the existence of some on-site Chinese advisers. It would seem that the PRC's leaders thought that the PFLOAG could be a replica of the

⁵⁴ The term (Occupied Gulf) referred to nine Gulf Sheikhdoms from Dhofar to Bahrain only. It included Dhofar (Oman), Abu Dhabi, Dubai, 'Ajman, Fujairah, Sharjah, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaymah, Qatar and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were not included in the PFLOAG strategy as they were already independent states since 1932 and 1961 respectively.

Chinese revolution experience especially following the spread and propagation of Maoism in Dhofar (Harris 1993a: 117). According to Yodfat, cordial relations between South Yemen and the PRC have reflected positively on and logistically facilitated the delivery of military aid to the PFLOAG. The inauguration of the Chinese embassy in Aden in 1969 transformed the latter into 'a clearing house for Chinese arms and supplies and guerilla leaders passed through it on their way to training camps in China' (Yodfat 1977: 9). Some reports talked also about allocating 'millions of Dollars' to implement a Chinese plan to create a communication line along the Arab Sea in order to control entrance to the Red Sea (Ben-Dak 1970: 150).

The year 1970 witnessed two essential political developments. The first took place in June and embodied in the birth of another Marxist-prone radical front in Muscat (Oman)⁵⁵ under the name of the 'National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf' (NDFLOAG). Both Fronts, the PFLOAG and NDFLOAG, have engaged in armed struggle and waged major offensives against the Sultan Armed Forces, and such battles resulted in the high casualty rates. As the PFLOAG strategies in Dhofar were more successful and sufficient than those of the NDFLOAG in Oman, both Fronts decided to totally merge in June 1971. This move resulted, among other things, in the creation of 'people's councils' in the liberated areas, the nationalisation of all land in the countryside and changing the name of the Fronts to be People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). Behbehani stressed that 'for the first time PFLOAG agreed to delete the label 'occupied' from the Front's new name. At this time, the problem facing Oman and the Gulf, from the Front's points of view, was *'the continuing power of the existing rulers'* (italic added). The second key development was the successful British-supported palace coup that put the 28-year-old British-educated Qabus (the son of the deposed Sultan Sa'id bin Taimur) on the throne of Oman following the overthrow of his father. It seems that the succession of Sultan Qabus was a fundamental step towards curbing the advances made by radical Marxist movements and to launch a programme of change and modernisation in Oman. From August 1974 and due to some changes that took place in the Gulf such as the Front's recognition of its limited military capability to liberate the whole Gulf besides the declaration of independence of Bahrain (August 1971) Qatar (September 1971) and the United Arab Emirates

⁵⁵ Dhofar and Muscat are two separate provinces in Oman.

(December 1971)⁵⁶, it became merely the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman' (PFLO) and turned out to be solely supported by the Soviet Union (Halliday 1974: 288; Behbehani 1981: 152, 155).

3.4. SWIMMING AGAINST THE RED TIDE: KING FAISAL AND THE RISE OF A FIRM SAUDI COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

In November 1964, King Faisal, an experienced and widely respected sovereign, assumed power as the third king of Saudi Arabia. He inherited from his predecessor, King Saud, a country surrounded by a volatile strategic environment. After his ascendancy of the throne, Faisal realised that the kingdom's neighbourhood was full of various threats each of which represented a direct and serious danger to the stability of the Saudi national security. Firstly, the Soviet-supported Nasser's Arab Socialism and his claim to the leadership of the Arab world was a crystal-clear risk to the very existence of the Saudi monarchical system especially following the Egyptian involvement in the North Yemeni Conflict (1964-1967) in favour of the republicans and against the Imam's proponents (Royalists) including the Saudis. Secondly, there was the Soviet-Marxist infiltration in the Arab World in general, principally following the feelings of frustration that spread across the Arab world following its defeat in the Six-Day Arab-Israel War of 1967; and in particular in the situation in North Yemen after the Egyptian withdrawal from the area in November 1967. Thirdly, the Marxist National Liberation Front (NLF) that had gained control and then established the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY) at the rear of the British withdrawal from Aden and the South Arabia Federation. The announced aspiration of the PRSY's government was to remove all 'traditional regimes' in the Arabian Peninsula from power. Fourthly, the Chinese-(and afterward Soviet)-supported Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) in Oman. The menace of the revolutionary-oriented PFLOAG became more serious following the expected 'vacuum of power' that surfaced in the wake of the British announcement of their intention to withdraw from the Gulf by 1971 (Safran 1985: 117-124).

Besides the obvious risk of the spread of anti-monarchical, atheistic, and radical Marxist-Socialist ideologies across the Middle East, King Faisal deemed the

⁵⁶ Oman joined the United Nations as an independent state on October 7, 1971.

establishment of a Zionist⁵⁷ state in 1948 as an invasion of what he considered a 'sacred Arab soil' and thus a major threat and offensive against the Muslim world as a whole. As a matter of fact, Faisal's anti-Zionist and anti-Communist policies had their origins in his religious loyalty. The Israeli occupation of West Bank in 1967 including the third holiest site in Islam, Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, confirmed Faisal's grave suspicions and fears as it resulted in the profanation of Muslim sanctuaries (Long 1980a: 178; Sheean 1975: 96).

With regard to China, the late 1950s policies against its Muslim communities and the aggressive measures and ill-treatment Muslims in mainland in China during the CR period side by side with the halt of Chinese *hajj* missions to Mecca were negatively perceived by Saudi Arabia and regarded as unfriendly cultural and religious gestures. With a moral obligation towards Muslims all over the world as the homeland of Islam, the Chinese policies against its Muslim minority enhanced the Saudi fears regarding Communist countries hostile orientations towards both Islam as a religion and faithful Muslims as populace.

Above all, China's support of radical ideologies in the region such as Nasserism and Baathism, China's initial alignment with the Soviet Union and then its political rivalry with Moscow to gain a foothold both in North Yemen and more principally in South Yemen, along with its material support of radicalisation in the Gulf and its strong relations with the Dhofari guerrillas in Oman, furthered such misgivings and added another crucial political dimension to the already tense Sino-Saudi relationship. It seems that such Chinese policies confirmed the conventional wisdom that Beijing as all Communist countries⁵⁸ had political as well as ideological aspirations in the region. Bin Huwaidin concludes that 'had the Chinese government continued its tolerance of its Muslim population and discharged itself from supporting the revolutionary movements in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula region, the Saudi government might have felt more comfortable dealing with the Chinese in more formal political relations' (Bin Huwaidin 1999: 216).

Al-Ashaal maintains that the Saudi refusal to recognise the PRC was due to an original negative Saudi stand against world Communism in general, on the one hand,

⁵⁷ King Faisal made a clear-cut differentiation between Zionism as a secular political doctrine and Judaism as a part of *ahl al-Kitab* 'Peoples of the Book' (members of tolerated religions such as Christians and Jews) who has a monotheistic religious belief and recognised revealed scriptures (Long 1980a: 179).

⁵⁸ The Soviet presence in North Yemen, South Yemen and Oman was also an indication of a Communist infiltration in the Arabian Peninsula.

and because of the Chinese politics of interfering in internal affairs of Gulf states which was evidently exemplified in their support of Dhofar's rebellions, on the other (Al-Ashaal 1983: 138). In fact, Riyadh, according to a Saudi commentator, regarded the Chinese encouragement of revolutionary activities with Communist nature as 'a source of negative impact on the Saudi foreign policy' (Al-Gabbaa 1980: 80). This may be due to the fact that the Chinese mainly following their involvement in the Omani political arena posed a substantial threat to the Saudi southern flank and became a key player in the region's security equation.

In summary, Socialism, Zionism and anti-monarchical Arab-Nationalism (Nasserism and Baathism) were the most obvious dangers that enveloped the Saudi strategic environment during Faisal's reign (1964-1975). Due to the geo-political fact that Saudi Arabia, however, had no immediate political borders with Israel, one may assume that at that time⁵⁹ radical-Socialism and revolutionary-Arab-Nationalism as grounded on ideological motivations were more pressing and direct regional-threats to the Saudi national security as they posed serious threat to its territorial integrity. Actually, turbulent incidents and political upheavals that took place in South Arabia including North Yemen, South Yemen, and Oman, set off alarm bells in Riyadh and were a wake-up call for the Saudi leadership who saw what both Nasser's radicalisation and Soviet-Chinese subversive intrusion could bring to the Arabian Peninsula and how it might shake its stability. As a result and in order to stem the Leftist-radical tide that made some substantial presence in its southern flank, Riyadh resolved to adopt a firm anti-Communist policy.

3.4.1. Faisal's World Philosophy and the Call for Islamic Solidarity

The foundation of the Saudi anti-revolutionary foreign policy was laid and began to take shape in King Faisal's reign. According to Badeeb, Faisal harboured an unmistakable antagonism to the Communist ideology and was aware of the growing Communist threat in the region. His hatred of Communism stemmed from political as well as religious grounds as he considered it to be 'the most dangerous and inhuman form of government, holding it responsible for the spread of leftist and radical regimes in the Arab and the Islamic world' (Badeeb 1993: 65).

⁵⁹ Particularly during the era that preceded the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War in 1973.

Sheean presented a similar account to King Faisal's opposition to Jamal Abdunnasser and his Soviet allies. Besides 'the naked power motives concerned with oil, money and territory ... Faisal believes in the essential truth of Islam under all forms and that he regards the intrusion of Russian ideas or ideology into the Islamic countries as a disaster'. The Saudi monarch believed that Communists across the Arab World 'are fundamentally opposed to the faith of Islam and would overthrow it if opportunity offered' (Sheean 1975: 102).

In accordance with his religiously guided world view, Faisal saw Communism, Zionism and Imperialism as the major threats not merely to Saudi Arabia, but to the entire Arab and Islamic worlds. For a combination of religious, security and strategic motivations, the Saudi Monarch was, also, willing to ally with Western free world countries against atheistic, antireligious leftist-revolutionary countries (Long 1975: 179; Lackner 1978: 114; Long 1980b: 105; Yizraeli 1997: 178-179).

Besides engaging in material support⁶⁰ for the moderate and conservative forces in the Middle East, King Faisal believed that countering subversive-Socialist ideologies and developing a sufficient inter-governmental cooperation among Islamic countries entails the deployment of Islam as a 'counter-ideology' and the call for Pan-Islamic *tadamun* (solidarity). In 1965, Faisal, consequently, launched an active diplomatic initiative that included nine conservative Muslim countries⁶¹ to amass support for his Pan-Islamic project. This policy aimed to achieve three focal objectives. Enhancing Inter-governmental cooperation among the Islamic countries, eradicating Socialism and radicalisation from the Arab world and deploying the Islamic world to serve the Arab struggle against Israel (Sindi 1980: 186-189). In fact, King Faisal's political recipe to counterbalance the outside threats was an amalgamation of pan-Islamism, anti-Communism and moderate pan-Arabism (Abir 1974: 35).

In accordance with his Islamic orientations and under Saudi patronage, Riyadh sought to implement Faisal's strategy through the formation of two key Islamic international bodies. The first was a non-governmental organisation based in Mecca and was formed in 1962 (when Faisal was a Crown Prince, Foreign Minister and Head of the Council of Ministers) and named World Muslim League (WML) which

⁶⁰ The Saudi huge oil revenues during the 1960s facilitated such mission.

⁶¹ His visits included Iran, Jordan, Sudan, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, Guinea, Mali and Tunisia.

became, according to Piscatori, a 'non-governmental Saudi spokesman'. Among its many purposes were to expose all alien radical ideologies and habits that contradict with Islam, and to safeguard the Muslim world of their subversive impacts. The second was established in 1972 and called the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Both organisations were intended to strengthen Riyadh's political stature equally in the Arab and Islamic Worlds by entitling it to both give emphasis to its 'special role' in the Islamic World and convey its viewpoint regarding the course of events in the area (Piscatori 1983: 41-42; Esposito 1998: 113-114).

As part of its counterrevolutionary-agenda and armed with both a rapid increase in oil revenues during the first two years of Faisal's reign and an American willingness⁶² to promote the King's strategy and to fortify the Kingdom's armed forces and deterrence capability, Riyadh also paid attention to the significance of taking part in the material support of moderate and conservative forces especially in the regional hotspots including Oman, North and South Yemens and hence entered into a direct confrontation with Chinese revolutionary activities there. In North Yemen, for instance, Riyadh materially and financially supported the Royalists in the Civil War to counterbalance the Soviet, Chinese, and Egyptian backing for the Republicans.

Nasser's defeat in the 1967 War had resulted in the erosion of his influence in Yemen so that he became no longer a threat-source for Riyadh. This was especially so following a compromise, that arose from considerable Egyptian economic constraints related to the post-war economy, reached with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya during the Al-Khartoum Summit in 1967 at which the three states promised to extend a financial subsidy of \$266 million in exchange for the halt of Nasser's sabotage and rhetoric against them. Yet even with Nasser's death in 1970, which ended one of the direct threats to the Saudi Monarchy, it was pretty difficult to consider that the Communist-radical challenge had been completely overcome given the fact that the Chinese and Soviet had enhanced their direct presence and announced their plain support of Marxist-radical regimes and movements in the region namely in south Yemen and Oman. That, logically, necessitated a long-term Saudi strategy to confront

⁶² In the face of the Soviet-supported Egyptians, Saudi independence, security and territorial integrity were re-confirmed by President Johnson following King Faisal's visit to Washington in June 1966. In fact, both the Americans and Brits agreed to improve the air defense system and the mobility of Saudi forces via supplying them with equipment and assistance (Safran 1985: 122).

such ideological threats (Safran 1985: 119-125; Yodfat 1983: 3; Abu-Jaber 1979: 182, 187).

Generally speaking, there can be no doubt that King Faisal's principled anti-Communist attitude, not only in Saudi Arabia but all over the region including his support to the royalists in the Yemeni Civil War, in Jordan and for the Syrian opposition, brought with it tremendous hostility and accusations of 'reactionary' and 'feudalism' to the Saudi monarchy across the Communist Camp (Yodfat and Abir 1977: 54). Not only was Faisal seen by the Communists as an 'avowed henchman of imperialism and Arab reaction', but his active policies vis-à-vis Nasserism and Marxism across the whole Middle East besides his initiative to create a pan-Islamist entente during his diplomatic tour during 1965 were considered as a Western plot that aimed at reinforcing the 'conservative camp' and creating an Islamic axis at the expense of the Arab League and national liberation movements (Laqueur 1969: 140; Vassiliev 2000: 386).

3.4.2. The Saudi-Omani Rapprochement: A Plausible Response to a Common Threat

In correspondence with its efforts to confront radical-Socialism, the Saudi stand towards the political situation in Oman dramatically shifted and, indeed, by the end of 1966 Riyadh's support of the Imamate cause had faded away⁶³. It seems that, on the one hand, Saudis had become suspicious of DLF's political orientations and that the triumph of the NLF in South Yemen, on the other, represented a wake-up call for the Saudi government. In fact, it significantly contributed to alert Riyadh to the growing Communist infiltration in the Arabian Peninsula and therefore entailed a shift in its relations in favour of the Sultan. Actually, Riyadh by the end of 1968 considered the PFLOAG rebels as a 'handful of anti-Islamic infidels' (Halliday 1974: 321; Kelly 1980: 134; Behbehani 1981: 141, 146).

During a four-day state visit to Riyadh in December 11-14, 1971, Qabus, the new Sultan of Oman, succeeded in securing generous Saudi economic aid and a promise to abrogate its advocacy of Imam Ghalib and the imamate cause in exchange for ceding three major villages adjacent to Oman. As a matter of fact, the Saudi

⁶³ Riyadh in 1964, for instance, supplied, the anti-Sultan, Muslim ibn Nufal, a Sheikh of the Kathiri tribe and a key affiliate of Imam Ghalib, and tens of the Dumfries with arms, money and transport during his trip from Iraq to Dhofar to confront the British-supported Sultan. The Saudi government pledged to extend more aid if this group succeeded in its mission (Kelly 1980: 134).

opposition to all subversive-Communist activities and Marxist-oriented movements all over the region encouraged Riyadh to cultivate a cordial relationship with Oman and hence became involved in maintaining the stability of the area in general and Qabus's political regime in particular⁶⁴. For instance, in 1972 and in a response to a call from Sultan Qabus, Riyadh sent a military delegation to conduct a field study of the Dhofar province and besides, established for the Gulf states a 'joint intelligence organisation to exchange information about and concert action against subversion in the region' (Behbehani 1981: 156, 158). Riyadh, also, launched a number of military attacks against the Dhofari rebels through operations against South Yemen which at that time was regarded as their rearward base (El-Rayyes and Nahas 1973: 167). Within the same context, the Saudi financial assistance to the Omani anti-Communist effort exceeded \$3 billion by 1980 (Dawisha 1982: 21).

In 1974, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Abu Dhabi reached an acceptable formula to demarcate the borders between them including the disputed Al-Buraimi Oasis. As per that accord, the three parties agreed to collectively share oil revenues in that area and give the right to coordinate the exploration and investment to Abu Dhabi (Behbehani 1981: 151).

3.4.3. Enhancing the Saudi-Taiwan Front

Within the framework of its anti-Communist efforts, Riyadh enhanced its ties with Taipei. During the year 1963-1964, relations between Riyadh and Taipei had significantly developed on various levels. For instance, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Muhammad Surur Al-Saban, paid a twelve-day visit to the ROC during which he inspected the Taiwanese military and economic establishments. The Saudi Agriculture Ministry, furthermore, following a number of ministerial-level visits to the ROC signed an agricultural cooperation agreement with the Taiwanese Government in April 1964. According to that agreement, the ROC agreed to send agricultural experts to the Saudi east province, *Al-Ahsaa*, to help in cultivating rice. In the following month, Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the Saudi Oil Minister, paid a visit to the ROC during which he discussed with the Taiwanese officials furthering economic ties between Riyadh and Taipei. From the cultural aspect, the Saudi Government granted

⁶⁴ أضواء على العلاقات العمانية السعودية (*Spotlights on the Omani-Saudi Relations*), 1972, Oman: General Administration for Information and Tourism.

a full scholarship to three Taiwanese students to pursue their higher education in the Islamic university of Medina.

From the Taiwanese side, Taipei sent, in March 1964, a ministerial-level goodwill mission to Saudi Arabia in a four-day visit. The ROC also sent a five-man *hajj* mission to the holy lands in Saudi Arabia. The *hajj* mission stayed in Saudi Arabia for a month during which it paid a visit to the then Saudi Crown Prince, Faisal Bin Abdulaziz, and this particular visit had considerably contributed to the Saudi-Taiwan relations especially as it coincided with the halt of *hajj* mission from the Chinese main land⁶⁵.

Following the historical four-day state visit of King Faisal to Taipei in May 22-25, 1971, the Saudi-Taiwanese relations entered a new phase in which the ROC became a key pillar in the Saudi announced strategy to counter Communist infiltration and sabotage activities as well as subversive ideologies in the region. The visit was the first by a Saudi monarch and came at the official invitation of the ROC's President, Chiang Kai-shek. At the end of that visit the Saudi and ROC leaders issued a joint communiqué in which they emphasised their desire to promote and further the relations between their countries in various fields including economic, commercial, cultural and technical sectors. Moreover, they, in reference to their common enemy, Communism, stressed that good will ultimately defeat evil and that the unsettled world situation entails a tight connection among states that have historical civilisations based on spiritual values and immortal human legacy and that materialism cannot alone grant happiness and well-being to the mankind unless it is founded on spiritual bases deeply rooted in the people's souls (*Umm Al-Qura*, May 28, 1971).

Faisal's visit succeeded during a hard time, the hight of the Cold War and the growing menace of Communism, to lay the basis for a deeper and broader bilateral understanding and cooperation in numerous arenas including security issues with a country that shared the Saudis their anti-Communism sentiments. The significance of King Faisal's move, moreover, stems from the fact that it reflected the Saudi leadership's awareness of the importance of engaging and supporting Taiwan as a complementary part of its efforts to oppose Communist tide and subversive

⁶⁵ *China Yearbook 1964-1965*, ROC, PP.249-250, Taipei: China Publishing CO.

revolutionary activities in the region including those of the PRC both in South Yemen and in Oman⁶⁶.

Taiwan, consequently, became a real partner in the relentless Saudi anti-Communist policy and strengthening relations with it, it is argued, involved some latent political implications to the PRC such as securing actual and active Saudi presence in the PRC's doorstep and sustaining its immediate rival by means of offering a remarkable material and financial support throughout the 1970s.

3.4.4. The International Diplomatic Counteraction: Riyadh and the Question of PRC's Admission to the UN

The establishment of the PRC under the lead of Mao Zedong in 1949 and the consequent emergence of the American-supported Chiang Kai-shek's government (ROC) in Formosa was the reason behind one of the most complicated issues of representation, membership, recognition and replacement in the United Nations. Joining the UN was a major Chinese aspiration because it would enhance the PRC's international prestige and stature. The international acknowledgment would, furthermore, give China the opportunity to upgrade its relations with the Afro-Asian countries and their communist parties. Not only that but, by its presence in the UN Security Council the PRC might also succeed to employ the former to serve the Communist cause. Therefore, in order to maximise its potential to enter into the UN, Beijing since 1950 onwards has wielded its relations with the developing nations including Arab countries such as Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Sudan and Algeria which were highly in favour of the admission of Communist China to UN following the 1955 Bandung Conference (Masannat 1966: 217; Khalili 1970: 82-83).

Against this background, however, Riyadh thought that diplomacy could operate as a supplementary component of its anti-Communist strategy. Saudi Arabia, therefore, decided to adopt a negative diplomatic stand towards the PRC in the international bodies including both the Arab League and the United Nations. Al-Ghamdi argues that the Saudi diplomatic attitude toward the PRC was characterised by steadiness and constancy (Al-Ghamdi 1989: 23). In contrast to Al-Ghamdi, it is argued here that Riyadh's anti-Communist-China diplomatic attitude during the era that preceded Beijing's accession to the UN fluctuated between implicit and explicit rejection to that matter depending on Beijing's foreign behaviour towards the region.

⁶⁶ Private interview with *HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud*, op. cit.

While the Saudi diplomatic campaign tended to be more lenient towards the PRC before 1966, it was characterised by straightforwardness and sometimes inclined to adopting a confrontational form especially in the aftermath of Beijing's radical intrusion in South Yemen and Oman during the Cultural Revolution era.

Official records of the Arab League Secretariat show that the Saudi delegation presented a memorandum in September 1953 stating that the embassy of the ROC in Cairo had asked the Saudi government to maintain its support to the continuation of the ROC representation at the UN in order to abort the Soviet endeavours to replace the ROC's delegation with a Communist Chinese one⁶⁷. Al-Saket draws attention to the fact that by that time, early 1950s, there were no diplomatic relations between Beijing and any capital of the Arab member states in the Arab League and as a result their views towards the PRC have varied between the rejection and the abstention from voting on this topic at the UN. Such a concerted Arab stance regarding the rejection of the PRC's accession to the UN continued from 1951 until 1956 when Egypt and then a considerable number of the Arab countries⁶⁸ established formal relationships with the PRC in the wake of its conciliatory policy during the 1955 Bandung Conference. The formation of formal bilateral diplomatic relationships between those Arab capitals and Beijing entailed a dramatic shift in their stands towards the latter. The Saudi position in the direction of supporting the continuity of ROC's representation at the UN remained firm and unchangeable. Riyadh pursued a ceaseless politics of abstention from voting on the draft-resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly (1950-1968) concerning the consideration of the representation of the PRC in the UN (Al-Saket 1983: 174; Al-Saket 1987: 286-287).

In 1961, likewise, Riyadh upgraded its diplomatic effort against the PRC and decided to vote in favour of the General Assembly (GA) resolution, based on article 18 of the UN charter, which put obstacles and difficulties in the face of the admission of the PRC. The UNGA resolution stipulated that any proposal to change the representation of China in the UN must be regarded as 'an important question, and therefore required a two-thirds majority'⁶⁹. Not only that but, in August 1961, the

⁶⁷ *Official Records of the Arab League Political Committee*, September 1953.

⁶⁸ Since 1956 most of the Arab countries including Syria (1956), North Yemen (1956), Iraq (1958), Morocco (1958) Algeria (1958), Sudan (1959), Somali (1960), Tunisia (1964), Mauritania (1965), Democratic Yemen (1968), Kuwait (1971), Lebanon (1971), Comoro Islands (1975), Jordan (1977) Djibouti (1977), Oman (1978) and Libya (1978) have respectively established diplomatic relationships with the PRC and that entailed a dramatic change in their political stands towards the latter.

⁶⁹ UNGA (16th Session), *Official Records*, Doc. 1668, December 15, 1961, PP. 1068.

Saudi government delivered the ROC's government request in which the latter appealed for support of the Arab League Member States. The decision of the Arab League Political Committee⁷⁰ in 17/9/1961 was to leave a wide margin of freedom for each member state to take the attitude that suits its policies and interests (Al-Ghamdi 1989: 24).

Apart from the 1961 incident above-mentioned and in coincidence with the onset of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Saudi diplomatic campaign against the PRC starting from 1966 witnessed a notable escalation as compared with the pre-Cultural-Revolution phase. In fact, during the period between 1950 and 1966 the Saudi permanent representative to the UN abstained from voting on the General Assembly draft resolutions that suggested granting the PRC instead of the ROC China's permanent seat in the Security Council as the only lawful and legitimate representative of the Chinese people to the United Nations (Al-Gabbaa 1980: 79; Al-Ashaal 1983: 194). Moreover, when the United States submitted its essential draft resolution to the UN General Assembly in 1954 with the intention of labeling the PRC's intervention in the Korean War as an aggression, Saudi Arabia chose not to take part in that vote process and even not to consider the 'abstention' option⁷¹. This may be interpreted as a Saudi tactic to avoid engaging in an explicit conflict with Beijing.

Since 1966⁷², however, the Saudi persistent abstention in the UN votes regarding the question of PRC representation turned into an explicit and unmistakable vote against the PRC's accession to the UN. Al-Gabbaa believes that the late 1960s have seen the worst time ever in Riyadh's relationships with Beijing. The issue of the representation of China in the United Nations became a competence arena in which the Saudi diplomacy played an important role via deploying all possible diplomatic means to impede the accession of the PRC to the UN. The permanent representative⁷³ of Saudi Arabia to the UN waged an unequivocal oral attack against the motion of giving Beijing the permanent seat of China in the Security Council (Al-Gabbaa 1980: 81).

⁷⁰ *Official Records of the Arab League Political Committee*, September 1961.

⁷¹ UNGA (5th Session), *Official Records*, Doc. 498, February 1, 1951, PP. 695-696.

⁷² *The New York Times*, November 30, 1966.

⁷³ For such diplomatic endeavors and efforts in the corridors of the UN, the then Saudi Permanent Representative, Al-Barodi, was lauded by the then American Representative to the UN, George Bush who described him as a Saudi missile (Al-Gabbaa 1980: 82).

Al-Saket argues that the Saudi stand was based on the principle of Taiwan's right of self-determination and that the UN General Assembly had no right or power to force the Taiwanese people to join the PRC (Al-Saket 1985: 407). Both Al-Gabbaa and Al-Ghamdi, on the other hand, attribute the change in the Saudi diplomatic behaviour to two main reasons. Firstly, the Chinese proclaimed a policy of supporting armed struggle in the region including Dhofar's insurgents in Oman and, secondly, Riyadh did not want to jeopardise or sacrifice its robust political and commercial relationships with Taipei for the sake of the revolutionary and subversive activities of people's China in the region which reached the Saudi political doorstep (Al-Gabbaa 1980: 81; Al-Ghamdi 1989: 23).

On October 25, 1971 and as a result of an Albanian Resolution 2758 by a favourable vote of 76 member states to 35 with 17 abstentions, the PRC entered the UN and occupied China's place in the Security Council. Unsurprisingly, Saudi Arabia was the only Arab state among 35 states which voted against the accession of China (Harris 1993a: 130). Chang and Al-Saket offer further details about the Saudi stand regarding the UN resolution 2758. Chang emphasises that the Saudi delegation, initially, submitted a suggestion to postpone the vote on the Albanian draft resolution but the latter was rejected by 56 votes to 53 with 19 abstentions (Chang 2005: 231). The Saudi envoy, then, submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly suggesting that the government of the PRC should take its place in the UN side by side with the government of the ROC which should, as well, maintain its seat in order to enable its people, under the auspice of the UN, to express their opinions about three suggested options: Whether to remain as an independent and sovereign state or to create a con-Federal union with the government of the PRC or finally to create a Federal union with the government of the PRC. The Saudi suggestions and endeavours, however, were rejected and, therefore, doomed to failure (Al-Saket 1987: 291-293).

Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and following thirty years of hostility and diplomatic estrangement between the two countries, the early 1970s witnessed the emergence of the Sino-American détente. In 1972 President Nixon paid an eight-day state visit to Beijing. The visit was culminated by the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué that proclaimed that the US acknowledges the principle of one China and that the door between the former and the latter is open, and followed by a number of friendly political gestures such as the agreement on the opening of

liaison offices in each other's capital. The Sino-American rapprochement in the wake of Shanghai Communiqué and long diplomatic negotiations, during both Nixon and Carter Administration, was promoted by the normalisation of relations and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing starting from January 1, 1979. One of the major outcomes of this agreement was Washington's decision to cease its diplomatic relationships with Taipei, its long-standing ally in South East Asia (Foot 2005: 90-115; Li 2005: 116-146; Chang 2005: 209).

It is sometimes suggested by some Arab scholars and diplomats that the Saudi foreign policy in general and its anti-Communist attitude against the PRC in particular was merely a response to or an echo⁷⁴ of American pressure to isolate Beijing from its international domain and to minimise its presence in the Middle East and Africa because Riyadh has aligned its self closely with the United States during the Cold War (Ahmed 2004: 15; Al-Wadi 2005: 100, 103). From a Saudi perspective, this oversimplified reading lacks accuracy to the extent that it depicts an image of the Kingdom as a country that has neither political sovereignty nor independent foreign policy agenda. It is true that the Saudi-American connection was robust during the Cold War era *due to common national interests and in the face of joint international and regional threats*⁷⁵ (stress added). It is significant, on the other hand, to emphasise that despite the fact that the Sino-American relationship saw a remarkable détente in the early 1970s and a restoration of direct ties between the two countries in 1979, the Saudi stand towards the PRC witnessed no improvement or alteration. Quite the opposite, Riyadh declared its condemnation and resentment of the Sino-American rapprochement (Salamé 1980: 299).

⁷⁴ For instance, while discussing the reasons for delaying the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and some Arab Gulf states, Muhammad K. Al-Wadi, the Syrian Ambassador to Beijing, argues that this delay was due to two reasons the first was 'the extreme hatred the U.S. harbored toward the PRC which led Washington to prevent its Arab allies from cooperating with China at any diplomatic, political or economic formula. And the other reason to refrain from having diplomatic relations with China was owing to the refusal of some Arab capitals, mainly in the Gulf, to extend their hand to an atheist Communist state such as China!'. Defiantly during the 1980s when relations between those states and China started, that happened not because Beijing gave up its stand towards the religion or abandoned its Communist ideology. That happened because there was an essential change occurred in the American attitude towards Communist China' (Al-Wadi 2005: 100).

⁷⁵ For a thorough understanding of the various dimensions of US-Saudi relations at that historical stage, see for example Miller's work (1980) *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949*; Peck's work (1980) *The Saudi-American Relationship and King Faisal*; Long's work (1985) *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies*; Cordesman's work (1987) *Western Strategic Interests in Saudi Arabia*; Singh's work (2000) *Saudi-U.S. relations: The Oil Factor*; Al-Shamlan's work (1999) *Saudi-American Relations*; Lippman's work (2004) *Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia*; and Bronson's work (2006) *Thicker than Oil: An Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*.

In this regard, Prince Turki Al-Faisal asserted that the Saudi leadership had told its American counterpart that normalising relations between the US and the PRC at that time involves some risks due to a number of considerations. On the one hand, Mao was still alive and Beijing did not entirely give up its attempts and efforts to export its revolution⁷⁶. On the other, the Chinese tide and influence in the region was still active and notable in various Arab countries including Iraq, South Yemen, Oman, and East Africa. If we were to follow the Americans, the Prince emphasised, we would have shortly changed our stance from the PRC in the aftermath of the normalisation of the Sino-American relations in 1978⁷⁷.

Not only that but careful reading of the development of Sino-Iranian relations in 1973 leads one to realise that the Americans had shown no objection to any sort of rapprochement with the PRC since the early 1970s as happened in the case of the Shah, the US regional ally at that time. According to Behbehani,

it is imperative to note that the Shah's regime was most certainly allied and to a large extent heavily influenced by the USA. For at the time of Sino-U.S. 'ping-pong diplomacy' and eventual agreement between the two, Iran was given American consent to court China. For all these states shared many common and mutual interests, e.g. anti-USSR, strategic importance of 'securing' oil through the gulf etc (Behbehani 1983: 221).

By the same token, it is conceivable that there was no US objection of a Saudi-Chinese rapprochement. However, Riyadh adhered to its principle opposition to establishing diplomatic ties with any Communist country and the Saudi acceptance to forge such formal relations with Beijing came only in 1990.

The rigid Saudi stand might be perceived as a fundamental and firm opposition to the PRC's policies and external behavior as well as the Marxism-Leninism they espoused and the possible threats, and challenges such ideology may pose to the stability of the Saudi political system in accordance with King Faisal's world view that regard Communism to be the most serious menace to the Islamic world in general and the Saudi kingdom in particular.

Saudis believe that Riyadh's attitude was one of principle. It does signify, furthermore, that tense relations between Riyadh and Beijing were not merely

⁷⁶ In fact, even those in Third World who had contacts with the PRC at that time were worried about the Chinese revolutionary aspirations. These fears and concerns stem from their consciousness that 'the Chinese are appealing to revolutionary forces within their societies and that the Chinese connection for them in the long term may be a highly destabilising one' (Yahuda 1978: 282).

⁷⁷ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, op. cit.

assimilation to the American policies or an automatic repercussion or ramification of the Sino-American ties. Riyadh's disapproval of Communism was, according to Salamé, the prevailing consideration in the Saudi foreign policy above all direct-political considerations. Not only that but even with regard to its tense relationship with the Soviet Union⁷⁸, Riyadh never sought to play the 'Chinese card' as some countries like Sudan, Zaire and Pakistan did (Salamé 1980: 299).

Moreover, despite the fact that the issue of the representation of China in the UN had been settled by granting the PRC the permanent seat of China in the UN Security Council in 1971, and in spite of the relative shift in the Chinese stand regarding the feasibility of the totality of revolution in the Gulf and the adoption of a skeptical stand starting from 1972, the relations between Riyadh and Beijing witnessed no improvement (Behbehani 1983: 186). This, again, could be due to the firm conviction among Saudi political elite that the PRC was a genuine extension of the Communist threat and infidelity. Yahuda reaches the same conclusion and contends that until the late 1970s 'The Saudi Royal House has long eschewed formal relations with "godless" government in Peking, preferring instead to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan authorities' (Yahuda 1981: 109).

3.5. CONCLUSION

Profound ideological and political differences between the KSA and the PRC were obvious since the establishment of the latter in 1949 and dramatically deepened during the era of 1960s and early 1970s. The outbreak of the CR in 1966 during which Chinese Muslims were harshly abused and *hajj* missions were discontinued enhanced the fears and misgivings of Saudi religious circles and political elite about the communist regime in Beijing as a 'foe of Islam' and sent a negative message about the unacceptable way the Chinese central government mistreated its Muslim minorities.

Saudi concerns were also furthered following China's decision to abandon its conciliatory approach that was adopted during the 1950s, the rise of the more militant elements within the Chinese hierarchy during the anti-rightist campaign in late 1950s

⁷⁸ It might be useful here to cite what Katz has stressed within the context of his discussion of the Saudi-Soviet relations during that historical phase. In his words, 'In addition to their both opposing Israel, the USSR and Saudi Arabia are not friends with the people's Republic of China either. Yet Riyadh's refusal to establish diplomatic ties with Peking is of little comfort to Moscow, since the Saudis have not established relations with any other communist state either' (Katz 1986: 151).

along with domestic political turmoil within the Chinese arena during the Cultural Revolution. Such developments resulted in China's decision to pursue an extreme-left foreign policy and to adopt armed struggle and support revolutionary movements as a means to counter both Western 'imperialism' and Soviet 'revisionism' all over the world.

This new Chinese orientation overshadowed Beijing's foreign policy towards the region and hence Beijing began its policy of intervention in the Arabian Peninsula through supporting leftist movements, especially in Oman and Yemen, against the ruling political systems. Not only that but Chinese leaders also explicitly regarded these movements as a spearhead fundamental change in the conservative and royalist political regimes in the region especially in the Gulf including Saudi Arabia. This Chinese escalation, which can also be viewed within the context of the Sino-Soviet enmity and their competition to establish a sphere of influence in the region, had exacerbated the deterioration of unhealthy Saudi-Chinese relationship. Besides the political and ideological differences that distanced Riyadh, Beijing and Moscow, China's subversive and revolutionary activities in the southern flank of the Kingdom added another security dimension to the already Saudi-Chinese hostile relationship. The Kingdom began to see Beijing and Moscow equally as a direct and serious threat to its survival and national security within the framework of the Cold War.

Saudis, hence, took several measures to counter such a threat. Besides its cooperation with the US to offset such communist tide in the region, Riyadh defended the ruling political system in Oman and supported the conservative forces in the region including South and North Yemens. Riyadh, as well, established active non-official international Islamic organizations such as WML and the OIC to ideologically counter radical ideologies and habits that conflict with Islam. Likewise, Riyadh enhanced its ties with Taiwan and became one of the main and steady diplomatic supporters of Taipei's right to hold the seat of China in the UN against the PRC's efforts to assume that position. In fact, such vigorous anti-Communist policies won the Kingdom the hatred of the whole socialist camp and made Saudi Arabia one of the most hated countries among communists, be they Chinese or Soviets.

CHAPTER 4

THE SEEDBED OF CHINA'S CHANGE & THE CRISES OF CONFIDENCE (1972-1978)

After a decade of revolutionary-leftist foreign policy and as a result of a number of domestic and international factors, the time had come by 1972-1973 to reassess the priorities of Beijing's foreign policy. As such, China's foreign behaviour during the mid-1970s was subject to a shift towards pragmatism and realism. Pushed by both survival and security necessities, elements such as pragmatism and national interest began to assert their primacy over ideology, radicalism and fanaticism. Such recalculations of foreign outlook found their reflection in the PRC's choices and interactions in various areas including the Middle East and the Gulf region.

In order to increase its ability to confront the Soviet gains in the region, namely in Iran, Iraq, Egypt and South Yemen, the PRC at that time realised the importance of establishing diplomatic relationships with the existing political entities in the Gulf region instead of pursuing policies that only gained Beijing their antagonism. China, therefore, decided to stop its revolutionary intervention and support of radical movements in the region and showed a remarkable intention to set up state-to-state relationships with the ruling political orders.

This chapter will first highlight the changes that led to the transformation of China's perception of world political realities and its position in the international arena. It will then discuss the implications of such changes for China's foreign policy in the Gulf. After that, it will shed light upon the Saudi decision to impose an oil embargo in 1973 as a political watershed in the Saudi foreign policy that had its impacts on both the US-Saudi and the Sino-Saudi relations. It will, also, focus on China's unsuccessful efforts to persuade Riyadh to open a new chapter in their relations and establish formal diplomatic contacts between them. This chapter will finally talk about the main reasons that pushed Riyadh to ignore Chinese attempts and efforts to court it.

4.1. THE (1972-1978) CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY: THE SEEDBED OF RE-ORIENTATING BEIJING'S WORLD OUTLOOK

After a full decade of radical and leftist external agenda, the early 1970s manifested a cautious outset for a transition in China's foreign policy towards embracing a

pragmatic approach and pursuing a rational diplomatic behaviour in conducting its international interactions. This transformation came as a translation of several key events in both China's internal and international arenas, which collectively produced the reformulation of China's alignment map and heavily influenced the character of the PRC's upcoming foreign policy. At that time, the Chinese domestic political scene had seen a number of essential incidents that contributed to the redistribution of power within the PRC's political system. For instance, the most violent phase of the CR was brought to a close and the most radical elements in the Chinese government such as Defense Minister Lin Biao⁷⁹ (who was named successor of Mao in 1969) and some of his main supporters were reported killed in a plane crash in 1971 while they were trying to escape to the Soviet Union following an unsuccessful *coup d'état* attempt against Mao Zedong (Harris 1985: 44).

On the international level, the new stage was marked by a major shift in the Chinese perception of the two superpowers and the relative importance and security fears Beijing has accorded each of them. In fact, Beijing came to a definite conclusion that 'Soviet Revisionism' and 'Soviet social-imperialism' rather than 'U.S. imperialism' was its 'principal enemy' and danger source. This led China to attempt to isolate and contain the USSR especially following its invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and Brezhnev's subsequent proclamation of his doctrine of 'limited sovereignty', as well as the Sino-Soviet border clashes in the spring of 1969⁸⁰ (Dillon et. al. 1977: 459).

Accession to the UN was another important issue in China's agenda at that time and in order to achieve the necessary back-up to regain its UN position and attain a permanent seat in the Security Council, Beijing sought to break its isolation, relieve tensions and reach *détente* with Washington. Mao's invitation of the US table tennis team to visit China in 1971, President Nixon's 1972 visit to Beijing, accession to the UN in 1972, the improvements and then the normalisation of China's relations with the US, Japan, and most other capitalist countries were the 'symptoms of profound

⁷⁹ For a full understanding of the impact of Lin Biao's political rise and fall on the Chinese political life and foreign policy, see (Ghoble 1990: 67-99).

⁸⁰ Though was for obvious structural security concerns, Mao his new alignment with the US against the USSR through ideological premises as a natural result of the 'contradictions' of each stage in the way to accomplish advancement and reach Communism as a final objective. According to Mao's political thought, the society must go through stages which contain 'contradictions' some of which are 'primary' and the other are 'secondary'. In order to achieve advancement in each stage, society must resolve the 'contradictions' of each stage (Mao Zedong 1971: 91-98).

developments in the way Chinese foreign policy theorists came to view the world' (O'Leary 1978: 203). At this stage, it would seem that as a consequence of a common opposition to Moscow, Beijing and Washington decided to move closer towards each other despite their different objectives in such rapprochement.

It can be said that as of early 1970s, post-Cultural Revolution China was in the process of 'turning out-ward' and becoming more pragmatic after a long period of isolation and 'turning-in' (Tretiak 1971: 219). Beijing abandoned its radical foreign policy and the Chinese 'confrontational approach to international relations was broadly replaced by its adaptation and conformation to accepted conventions governing international relations in the society of states' (Zhang 1998: 247).

It appears that Beijing's decision to put an end to its support of leftist and revolutionary organisations was also an outcome of two important conclusions. China's turning towards the left had, on the one hand, proved to be a strategic 'failure' since most of the revolutionary groups and guerrillas supported by Beijing acquired no tangible success all over the world including Vietnam, Yemen and Oman. Likewise, even those who were supported by Beijing had reached a stage where they felt that they had their own revolution and that the need now was no longer for radicalism but rather to focus on more crucial issues such as nation-building and economic development towards which Beijing 'could be of only limited help' (Scalapino 1974: 355).

In accordance with Mao's new world strategy of 'power transformation' that was put forward in August 1973, China sought to achieve two goals. The first was transforming mainland China to a modern and powerful social state through the speeding up of economic and military defence construction. The second was to exploit the contradictions of the two-polarity system in order to weaken both the Soviet Union (the chief enemy) and then the US (the secondary enemy). Mao believed that in order to undermine the more urgent Soviet threat, the West must tactically be wooed and befriended through a policy of 'anti-Soviet common alliance' that would also allow Beijing to get an access to the Western technological and economic assistance (Yao 1978: 15-17).

The Sino-Soviet cleavage over a number of issues had developed into a primary threat to the Chinese national security, which went hand in hand with Beijing's bare need to improve its relations with the enemy of its enemy, and the only countervailing force to Moscow, the US. This paved the way for a new realistic

Chinese foreign policy and from a theoretical perspective gave birth to Beijing's new division of a tripartite world instead of its older version that divided the world into two camps as was earlier discussed in chapter one (*Peking Review*, November 4, 1977, p. 10-41).

In short, it seems that the previous radical perception of the global situation during the first phase of the CR based probably and to a large extent on Lin Biao's vision was subject to a critical review in favour of a new world outlook that accommodated the transformed view and analysis of Mao and Zhou Enlai. The Chinese leadership thought that improving Beijing's bilateral relations with the external world including the West, the countries of the Second and Third worlds would be the cornerstone for a new policy that would suffice to check and counterweight the Soviet aspirations in several spots all over the world, especially in Europe and the Middle East. Hence, it made qualitative changes in Beijing's foreign policies all of which have shortly resulted in acquiring a permanent membership of the UN Security Council, normalisation with the US, receiving the recognition and establishing full diplomatic relationships with more than another thirty countries, five of which were Middle Eastern states⁸¹ (Shichor 1979: 161-162).

From a geopolitical point of view and as one of the world's 'hotspots' that is inherently linked to China's national security concerns, the Chinese leaders and strategists attached great importance to the Middle East. They considered it to be a 'pivotal area' in determining the global balance of power and the battleground for the contention of superpowers due to its strategic location and rich crude oil deposits. They, furthermore, regarded the Middle East as the immediate target of Soviet expansionism and firmly believed that the ultimate goal of Moscow's infiltration and political efforts in the area was to achieve a 'great strategic encirclement' of China. The Chinese foreign policy towards the Middle East, as a result, witnessed a fundamental change starting from early 1970s and Beijing at this stage was in favour of American rather than Soviet dominance and supremacy in the region (Shichor 1979: 162-164; Yahuda 1981: 105).

⁸¹ Kuwait 29/3/1971, Turkey 4/8/1971, Iran 16/8/1971, Lebanon 9/11/1971, Cyprus 14/12/1971.

4.2. CHINA'S POST-1972 FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE GULF: THE TWILIGHT OF IDEOLOGY AND THE DOMINANCE OF REALISM AND PRAGMATISM

After conducting a general re-evaluation of its behaviour towards the external milieu and as a vital part of its overall foreign policy in the Middle East, Beijing decided to submit its agenda and its relationships with the existing political systems in the Gulf to a fundamental appraisal. As a matter of fact, one can safely argue that the post-1972 policies pursued towards the political entities in the Gulf embodied a clear reflection of China's new stance on the global situation in correspondence with Mao's 'Theory of the Three Worlds' and its pressing desire to create a sort of balance of power in its relations with superpowers.

The first positive development in Beijing's foreign policy towards the Gulf was the suspension of propaganda and disparaging media campaigns against ruling political orders. During the 1970s, the Chinese propaganda machinery halted its anti-Saudi polemics and explicit condemnations of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula royal families including the House of Saud and the Sultan of Oman in a political gesture of goodwill in the hope of mending broken fences and gaining their confidence. The Chinese press coverage, moreover, of the political confrontations in Dhofar became very reserved and the PFLOAG's news was kept to a minimum in a political sign of neglecting and playing down the importance of such incidents to Beijing (Behbehani 1981: 184-185).

The second positive development was the transformation of Beijing's reading of the method through which it might both acquire a foothold and offset the Soviet penetration in the region. Contrary to its prior radical approach, Beijing assumed that the best way to achieve this objective was by normalising its relations with the ruling political systems that succeeded to prove their strength and durability in comparison with the weak and unpopular revolutionary-leftists movements in the Gulf region. This was especially the case after seeking and obtaining diplomatic ties with the pro-West Iran and Kuwait, which shared Beijing its interest in containing Soviet regional influence (Chubin 1984: 128). The Chinese, indeed, regarded their previous approach based on supporting fragile and unconvincing rebellious movements with an uncertain future as passionate and pointless (Yodfat & Abir 1977: 74).

The new Chinese approach towards the region during this era, thus, saw a dramatic shift in favour of a groundbreaking orientation to establish formal and

amicable state-to-state diplomatic relationships with the existing political entities. By 1972, Beijing started to move to the side of maintaining the *status quo* in the Gulf and, as a result, decided in 1973 to terminate both its material and propaganda support of radical movements in the region, including the PFLOAG (Harris 1980: 362). In addition, it 'dropped its ideological criteria in its dealings with foreign countries' and instead 'adopted more flexible and subtle diplomatic tactics and made great efforts to establish contacts and strengthen its relations with existing governments, be they conservative, moderate or socialist' (Yodfat 1979: 3, 5).

Such re-calculation was, according to Abidi, due to the fact that the post-1972 Chinese foreign policy had become increasingly governed by new imperatives such as national interest and pragmatism rather than ideology. The supremacy of national interest and pragmatism over the latter was a crystal-clear sign of a new turnaround in the Chinese foreign policy not only towards the region but also towards the world in general (Abidi 1982: 195, 201).

Behbehani, similarly, attributes the change in the Chinese foreign policy and its withdrawal from the Omani war to three factors. The first was the development of China's world foreign policy following the twilit of the heyday and upheavals of the CR. The second was the Iranian⁸² precondition of putting an end to China's support of PFLOAG as a prerequisite to establish formal diplomatic relationships with Beijing⁸³. The third factor was the self-evident contradiction between the PFLOAG's political and military agenda that aimed at toppling the existing political orders and Beijing's fresh desire to establish diplomatic relations with those regimes (Behbehani 1981: 164).

Another important change to China's foreign policy in the Gulf was about the American presence in the area and, in fact, the common fears of both Beijing and Washington regarding the Soviet threat brought them closer on a number of regional policies. Not only that but, owing to its concerns about the growth of Moscow's

⁸² China at that time saw a great potentiality in courting the anti-Soviet Shah as a partner in its regional anti-Soviet endeavours. President Sadat of Egypt was also seen as a friend towards achieving the same end especially after his decision (due to Saudi encouragement and promises of financial assistance (Holden & Johns 1982: 292-293)) in 1976 to abrogate his country's Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union that resulted in the expulsion of the Soviet advisers from Egypt (Marshall 1988: 12).

⁸³ In fact, the Iranian troops were fighting along the British and the Sultan's forces to put an end to the upheavals and riots of the rebellious movements in Dhofar. For more details, see (Price 1975: 1-19; Price 1976: 7).

thrust, the American presence⁸⁴ in some areas vulnerable to the Soviet penetration including Asia and the Middle East, was welcomed by China in the late 1970s (Scalapino 1979: 56-57).

The new Chinese foreign policy in the Gulf had borne fruit and resulted in receiving the political recognition of and establishing full diplomatic relationships with a number of Gulf states starting with Kuwait in March 1971 and Iran in August 1971. Beyond this Beijing extended its unilateral recognition of some newly independent though 'incongruent states' like Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in 1971 and discussed with some Arab parties⁸⁵ via diplomatic channels its genuine desire to establish diplomatic relations with Riyadh (Abidi 1982: 43).

4.3. THE (1973) WAR⁸⁶ AND UTILISING 'OIL WEAPON'⁸⁷: REVISITING FAISAL'S WORLD VIEW AND REASSERTING THE IDENTITY FACTOR IN THE SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY

This section sheds light on an important political watershed in the Saudi foreign policy that coincided with the onset of the alterations in the Chinese foreign policy in the region and had implications for their bilateral relations. The significance of this key political incident is that it helps to provide a better understanding of the essential determinants and considerations that influence the formulation of the Saudi foreign policy by showing the role of the element of Islamic and Arab identity in making the Saudi foreign decisions and that Saudi foreign policy during the Cold War was not merely governed by its alignment with Washington. It, additionally, had some notable consequences on the course of the Saudi-Chinese relationships.

As a considerable force for stability, moderation, and modernisation in the Middle East, the US had found in the KSA both a secure source of energy and a

⁸⁴ Moscow expressed its concerns and worries over Beijing's growing diplomatic presence in the region during the 1970s and saw in it a systematic endeavour to oppose the Soviet regional infiltration and accused the PRC of colluding with the imperialists, supporting 'reactionary' states and security arrangements in the Gulf as well as Red Sea area designed to isolate and eradicate the 'national liberation movements' (Chubin 1984: 129).

⁸⁵ The Kuwaitis, Yemenis and Sudanese.

⁸⁶ The 6-26, October War was the fourth war between the Arabs and Israel in which Egypt and Syria jointly attacked Israel to retrieve the lands Israel had occupied during the Six-Day War of 1967 (namely the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights). During this war, Arab nations placed an oil embargo against the United States, Western Europe and Japan due to their support of Israel.

⁸⁷ The notion of and call for using oil as a 'diplomatic weapon' and 'political lever' by the Arab nations against the West and Israel dates back to the early start of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1946 (Itayim 1974: 84; Ali 1987: 48). However, it is reported that the Saudi leadership until the War of 1973 was not in favour of using the political weapon of oil and that 'oil and politics should not be mixed' (Al-Sowayyegh 1982: 28).

trustworthy ally in its anti-Socialist strategy in the region (Al-Sowayyegh 1982: 34). The Saudis, in turn, had also benefitted from the American commitment to defend the national security of Saudi Arabia against any Communist menaces⁸⁸. However, despite the harmony that characterised the long-standing American-Saudi 'special relationship' that lasted throughout the Cold War on the premise that they both shared the target of countering Communism and subversive ideologies along with a number of vital security and economic common interests, Riyadh was prepared to express its opposition to some of the American orientations when it felt the necessity to do so.

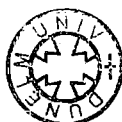
Riyadh's opposition to the Sino-American *rapprochement*, for instance, was not the only demonstration of the independence of the Saudi foreign policy from the American strategy. In fact, the Saudi foreign behaviour throughout and after the 1973 War provided another example of Saudi willingness to conduct its foreign policy independently when it believed it essential. This independence from the US reflected its own calculations and national interests that proceeded from its particular identity, national interests and analysis of international political realities.

In 1972 King Faisal felt that the Americans 'caused him to lose face' with President Sadat of Egypt and some other Arab leaders. The King had advised Sadat to get rid of the Soviet experts and told him that President Nixon had promised him to exert diplomatic pressure over the Israelis to withdraw back to the 1967 borders⁸⁹. Faisal, however, was shocked to learn that the Nixon Administration not only failed to keep its promise to the Saudi monarch, but it also announced its intention to supply Israel with sophisticated arms including Phantom jets. Faisal, consequently, sent his oil minister, Ahmed Yamani, in April 1973 to Washington to deliver a strong message that 'it was impossible for Saudi Arabia to work against the interests of its neighbors' and that 'he can not stand alone much longer' (Ali 1987: 52).

As war broke out on October 6, 1973 and after a short-lived Arab advance, the course of events became in favour of Israel, with American material assistance

⁸⁸ Since the Second World War onwards, the sequential announced U.S. Presidential Doctrines of Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and Nixon had clearly attached a great deal of importance to the protection of the independence, territorial integrity and stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and all of which had emphasised the American readiness and willingness to protect the Saudi national security against any Communist or Soviet-supported threat as part and parcel of the U.S. immediate national interests. For further details see (Yergin 1991: 428; Klare 2004: 33-45). McLaurin et. al. summarise the Saudi-American relationship as 'based tangibly on Saudi value to the United States as a supplier of oil to the West and American value to Saudi Arabia as a protector' (McLaurin 1982: 214).

⁸⁹ Which means that Israel will withdraw from the Egyptian and Syrian lands it occupied in the aftermath of 1967 War, the action, however, that did not take place.



presented to Israel in the form of a strategic airlift including weapons, tanks, artillery and ammunitions (known as Operation Nickel Grass). Across the Arab world, as a result, pressure was amounting for 'the use of oil as a weapon' to 'bring pressure to bear on America'. Saudi Arabia took the lead in the imposition of oil embargo on 17, October 1973 during a meeting of the Arab oil ministers of the OAPEC (Organisation of the Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries). Riyadh, next, announced a complete halt of oil exporting to unfriendly countries (those who supported Israel) including the United States, Netherlands, Canada, Portugal, South Africa and Zambia⁹⁰ (Ali 1987: 52-55).

Given that such a decision directly contradicted both the Saudi financial interests, as it resulted in a considerable loss of revenues, and its strategic alignment with the West in general and the US in particular in the anti-Communist endeavour, it can only be understood in the context of Faisal's world view that regarded Zionism and Communism along with imperialism as the main threats to the Islamic world. Confronting these challenges, according to Faisal's doctrine, was an inherent component of his strategy and commitment to defening Islamic solidarity and protecting holy Muslims shrines.

Taking part in the Arab struggle to liberate the Arab territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 War and the restoration of what Arabs believe to be the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with the UN resolutions was regarded by the Saudi Arabia as both a religious and national obligation. One could argue that had the Saudis not taken part in the Arab effort to exert pressure on the US and other supporters of Israel, the situation could have turned to a practical test for the credibility and reliability of the Islamic content of the Saudi foreign policy. Riyadh in one way or another was obliged to adopt such a policy because 'if Saudi Arabia remained aloof while Egypt and Syria fought, or if it openly opposed the recourse to hostilities, it would also be vulnerable to charges of colluding with imperialism and Zionism' (Quandt 1981: 20).

Peck contends that misperception and a lack of historical awareness have characterised Washington's dealing with the Riyadh's foreign policy as the Saudis sought to convince the Americans to pursue a more balanced and 'evenhanded' approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Riyadh 'also noted that failure of the

⁹⁰ For an excellent analysis of the Saudi oil policy at that time and the influence of political considerations on it, see Al-Sowayyegh (1980); Al-Sowayyegh (1982); Golub (1985).

Americans to heed such warnings could make it difficult for Saudi Arabia to continue its close co-operation with the United States, including the supply of the required amounts of oil' (Peck 1980: 231).

It is obvious that there were a variety of common strategic interests that combined Saudi Arabia with the capitalist West and Japan such as defense, industrialisation and the sale of its oil, which is regarded to be both its national strategic commodity from which it derives its world economic significance and the main source of its national revenue. However, such considerations have not prevented Riyadh from pursuing an Islamic moderate foreign policy that reflects a profound faith in its leading Islamic stature as the cradle of Islam (Ali 1976: 89).

From a Saudi perspective, this incident vindicates that there were occasions⁹¹ when one can trace an 'independent Saudi policy' that could be 'approached separately from the "American imperialism"' (Salamé 1980: 298). It, moreover, proves that regardless of the bipolar-structure of the international system and even with its closest ally during the heyday of the Cold War, one of the driving forces and determinants of the Saudi foreign approach with respect to various international issues related to the Arab and Islamic worlds has been its own self-identity as a monarchy that emerged from the cradle of Islam and Arab civilisation to protect both itself and Arab-Islamic interests and sacred sites (Goldberg 1984: 261).

An analysis of the influence of the element of identity on the making of the Saudi foreign policy is useful and could also be applied to understanding the Saudi negative attitude towards the PRC and its refusal to make any progress in their relationship. Besides the dangers and threats posed by the PRC's recent regional subversive interventions against the Saudi national security, it was unimaginable that Riyadh would be ready to exchange diplomatic relations with a country known as a 'foe of Islam' as a result of its bad record in abusing its Muslim communities with the excuse of achieving ideological purity and getting rid of the 'three olds'.

⁹¹ Saudi Arabia has repeatedly resorted to use the 'oil weapon' and placed an oil embargo during 1956 War (on oil shipment to Britain and France), 1967 War (on oil shipment to the United States for a short time) and 1973 War (on oil shipment to the United States); All of these actions were aimed at defending Arab and Islamic countries and issues (Itayim 1974: 84-85; Peck 1980: 234; Ali 1987: 49-56).

4.4. PROBING WITHOUT PROGRESS: CHINA'S FRUITLESS HUNTING FOR A SAUDI RECOGNITION

In recognition of the significance of having formal relationships with a crucial regional player in the Middle East and in parallel with its new foreign policy in the region, the Chinese leadership throughout the period between 1972-1978 was very keen to set up formal diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In hope of achieving this target, Beijing pursued and implemented a number of tactics and policies that encompassed for instance using its media to praise the Saudi oil policy during the War of 1973, paying tribute to the key and influential Saudi regional role and seeking the diplomatic mediation of some Arab states to rectify the Chinese image in Saudi eyes. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese efforts to woo the Saudi Government and hail its political actions did not succeed in achieving its diplomatic objective.

4.4.1. Emphasising the Saudi Unique Regional Role in the Chinese Media

As one of the developing countries at that time, China's Mao favoured the sovereign rights of the Third World states to unlimited control over their natural resources in order that they might acquire economic independence vis-à-vis the two superpowers aspirations. The conflict at that historical stage, according to the Chinese perception, was between the developing and industrialised countries over the domination of natural resources and raw materials. Accordingly, the Saudi decision to impose an oil embargo on its exports to countries supporting Israel including the US received great attention from the Chinese leaders. The embargo was warmly and openly welcomed as it corresponded to Beijing's foreign policy of confronting the hegemony and economic monopoly of the two superpowers. The whole incident was regarded by *Xinhua* as a 'peoples struggle for the defence of oil resources and sovereignty' (*Xinhua*, October, 21, 1973).

In the speech of Deng Xiaoping, the then Chairman of the delegation of the PRC and Vice-Premier of the State Council, in the U.N. General Assembly, he made reference to and hailed the Saudi decision (though without explicitly mentioning the name of the KSA) to use the weapon of oil to serve the Arab's causes against Israel's advocates. He called to generalise this experience and apply it to other kinds of resources. To quote him:

In the recent Middle East war, the Arab countries, united as one, used oil as weapon with which they dealt a telling blow at Zionism and its supporters.

They did well, and rightly too. This was a pioneering action taken by developing countries in their struggle against imperialism. It greatly heightened the fighting spirit of the people of the Third World and deflated the arrogance of imperialism. It broke through the international economic monopoly long maintained by imperialism and fully demonstrated the might of a united struggle waged by developing countries. If imperialist monopolies can gang up to manipulate the markets at will, to the great detriment of the vital interests of the developing countries, why can't developing countries unite to break imperialist monopoly and defend their own economic rights and interests? The oil battle has broadened people's vision. What was done in the oil battle should and can be done in the case of other raw materials (*People's Daily*, April 11, 1974; *Peking Review*, April 19, 1974. p.9).

A Chinese analyst, Huang Hua, went too far in this regard assigning the idea of exploiting the 'weapon of oil' to Mao himself and claiming that the origin of this notion had stemmed from a meeting between Mao Zedong and a visiting Arab chief of state during which the former advised the guest that 'the "black stuff" (petroleum) be used as a political weapon in the struggle against the imperialists' (Yao 1978: 27). In the same context and under the title of 'Truth Cannot be Covered Up', the editor of the *People's Daily* said, on December 27, 1977, that the Third World countries has the capacity to launch a robust and effective struggle against the two superpowers by means of its influential weapon of natural resources (*People's Daily*, December 27, 1977).

Some believe that exploiting the 'oil weapon' by Arabs had rendered assistance to the Chinese foreign policy in a number of ways. It, firstly, set the example and provided a concrete platform for the PRC's calls for the Third World to wage war against superpower hegemony and helped to formulate and launch the 'centre-piece of Beijing's Third World policy from the late 1970s onwards' which put emphasis on 'Third World control of Third World resources'. Secondly, by stressing the Third World's right to exert economic pressure on superpowers in order to rectify its problems, the PRC was capable of rescuing its materialist revolutionary credibility while at the same time carry on to project itself as a responsible member of the international community (Calabrese 1991: 84).

In its quest for progress in its relations with Riyadh, Beijing intensified its approval of the foreign policy through its media machinery and the Chinese recognition of the Saudi pivotal role in regional affairs became more and more evident in a number of issues related to maintaining the security and the stability of the Gulf. For example, the successful visit of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, then Crown

Prince, to both Kuwait and Iraq in June 1975 in an attempt to reach a peaceful settlement of their border disputes had received the attention of the Chinese media that praised Riyadh's increasing role and weight in the regional affairs (Behbehani 1981: 231).

Prince Fahd's visit to Iran, in the subsequent month, to promote the notion of 'Gulf Security' had similarly been given a great deal of attention from the editor of *Xinhua* who wrote that the Saudi Crown Prince held meetings with both the Shah and the Iranian Prime Minister during which he raised issues related to the ways and means through which the peace and security of the Gulf could be maintained and the region could be kept free from the intrusion and contention of the 'Big powers' (*Xinhua*, July 5, 1975).

In early 1975, *Peking Review* reproduced the interview given by the then Second Deputy Prime Minister, Prince Fahd, with the Lebanese daily *Al-Anwar* during which he spoke about the Saudi decision to impose the oil embargo (*Peking Review*, January 10, 1975, p.10). On August 1, 1975 *Peking Review*, in addition, praised the efforts and endeavours made by the Gulf states to settle their differences and border disputes using diplomatic means. The journal hailed the coordination of the political attitudes of the Gulf states in OPEC and argued that it had resulted in the creation of a kind of 'unity' between them in the face of superpowers. Among the regional issues discussed within that article was the Saudi-Iranian commitment to 'fight together to defend common interests of all countries in the area', the Saudi-Iraqi agreement to demarcate their political borders and the Saudi-Kuwaiti agreement to demarcate the neutral zone. It seems that the author deliberately exaggerated the fact that those political interactions be interpreted within the context of resisting the superpowers, mainly the Soviet Union, and depicted the Gulf states as undertaking a 'United Struggle against Hegemonism' according to the Chinese criteria (*Peking Review*, August 1, 1975. p.13-14).

The Chinese media machinery continued its attempts to woo the Saudi Government and hail its political actions. On June 26, 1976, the editor of the *Xinhua* praised the two-day Arab quadripartite summit conference held in Riyadh June 23-24 and comprised Egypt, Kuwait, Syria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Chinese, in particular, welcomed the anti-Soviet implications of Riyadh's conference and highlighted the positive influence of joint Arab efforts in this regard (*Xinhua*, June 26, 1976). *Beijing Review*, elsewhere, made reference to this meeting and its focus over

settling Arab differences by the Arab themselves and highlighted that one of the main outcomes of this successful summit conference was the decision to send an Arab Deterrent Force into Lebanon to supervise the ceasefire in the in the Civil War (1975-1976) (*Beijing Review*, May 4, 1981. p.11-12).

Xinhua, furthermore, gave considerable attention to statements of Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, during an interview with the Iranian international newspaper *Ettela'at*. *Xinhua*, (April 24, 1978) republished this interview in which the Saudi minister expressed his profound condemnation of and opposition to the superpowers' intrusion and rivalry both in the Gulf and the Horn of Africa. Prince Saud, moreover, speculated that such harmful policies of the superpowers could transform the region into a 'playground' for their contention and antagonism and in order to avoid this scenario he urged the international community to reject those policies and regional parties to make every effort to keep the region free from superpowers' competition.

In the same direction and in a long article, the following day, *Xinhua* highlighted and praised a number of Saudi policies including its decisive role in using the 'weapon of oil' in the battle against Israel, the Saudi financial support of the frontline Arab states and several other Third World countries, safeguarding its oil investments and developing its national economy as well as its people through huge expenditure on education policies and infrastructures (*Xinhua*, April 25, 1978).

4.4.2. Engaging Some Arab Parties in Mediation Efforts

Within the framework of its endeavor to restore its image in Saudi eyes, Beijing requested the assistance and intervention of some Arab states and asked them to undertake some diplomatic mediation efforts between the two Capitals. Kuwaiti and Sudanese diplomatic resources pointed out that, in March, 1974 and in December 1979 respectively, Beijing had implied and sought through diplomatic conduits the mediation of some Arab parties, including Kuwait, Yemen Arab Republic and Sudan, to convey a Chinese serious desire to establish diplomatic relations with Riyadh and to set the foundation for negotiations to serve this purpose (Behbehani 1981: 231; Ahmed 2004: 21). According to Behbehani, 'It was clear to China that Saudi Arabia was the key to recognition from other [Arab Gulf] states in the region because of its dominant position'. He went on 'Kuwait was unable to persuade the Saudis; but

China continued pressing the Kuwaitis to use their good offices to bring about Saudi recognition' (Behbehani 1981: 224).

In the same context, Jaser Al-Jaser⁹², Currently the *Editor Manager* of the Saudi daily *Al-Jazirah newspaper*, mentions that during the late 1970s while he was living in Kuwait and working for the department of political affairs of the daily newspaper *Al-Seyassah*, he used to receive regular invitations from the PRC embassy in Kuwait to attend some diplomatic parties during which the Chinese diplomats showed a great deal of interest in talking to him, as a Saudi journalist, about the importance and feasibility of establishing bilateral diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Beijing⁹³. Al-Jaser interprets the Chinese endeavours to approach him as an attempt to push him to adopt and transmit the Chinese viewpoint into his press corps.

4.5. GIVING COLD SHOULDER TO CHINA'S GESTURES: STRENGTHENING SAUDI-TAIWAN CONNECTION & ADHERING TO PREVIOUS POLITICAL LINE

Beijing's endeavours and attempts during the period between (1972-1978) to make progress in its relationship with Riyadh yielded no tangible results on the ground and the Saudis at this stage appeared to be neither convinced nor ready to exchange formal diplomatic relations with the PRC. In contrary, Riyadh rather preferred throughout the 1970s, both during the reigns of King Faisal (1964-1975) and King Khalid (1975-1982), to sustain its ties with Taiwan as a loyal partner in its anti-Communism policy⁹⁴ and to complete what King Faisal had begun following his state visit to Taipei in May 1971. Not only that but the Saudi authorities took a symbolic move by imposing a temporary ban on trade with the PRC in 1972⁹⁵ (Harris 1993a: 157).

⁹² Currently the *Editor Manager* of the Saudi daily newspaper *Al-Jazirah*.

⁹³ Private interview with the author, Riyadh, April, 2008.

⁹⁴ The fundamental national policy of the Republic of China consists of 4 cardinal principles the second of which reads: 'The goals of anticommunism and national recovery of the republic of China will never be changed'. Elsewhere, Taipei stresses that 'in external affairs, the government of the Republic of China holds firmly to the fundamental national policy and anticommunist stand' (*Republic of China, 1987: A Reference Book*. p. 433).

⁹⁵ The volume of inter-trade between Riyadh and Beijing was not that plausible. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) trade statistics, the real trade exchange between the KSA and the PRC only started at 1978. The *Almanac of China's Foreign Economic Relations and Trade* (1984, p. 846), however, offers some statistics of the PRC's exports to Saudi Arabia between 1954-1977 all of which are of marginal significance. The significance of such Saudi move at that time, thus, was to a great extent symbolic.

The Saudi-Taiwanese connection continued to develop and acquire more grounds and cooperation between the two parties, consequently, continued close in various fields. The two sides maintained exchanging frequent official visits at ministerial-level especially to discuss issues related to economic, engineering, industry and technical cooperation. Those talks and meetings culminated on June 19, 1975 in Riyadh in the signature of a five-article 'Agreement for Economic and Technical Cooperation'. One of the main results of this agreement was the formation of a permanent joint committee that 'will hold alternate annual meetings in each of the two countries or when the necessity so dictates, for consultation and agreement on development projects and the necessary procedures' to implement this agreement⁹⁶.

Besides its political support of the ROC in the international organisations and in the context of its support of the ROC, the latter was excluded from the Saudi oil embargo as a 'friendly nation' and Riyadh promised to give Taipei a 'preferential treatment' and to supply it with all of its crude oil needs. Not only that but, the ROC won in September 1973 the bid to take part in the construction of a new 100 kilometer Mecca-Taif highway in Saudi Arabia. The Taiwanese experts, also, participated in a project regarding rice breeding in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, Al-Ahsaa. By 1972 the trade exchange between the two sides reached more than USD \$ 65 million and subsequently it remarkably continued to increase to reach USD 2400 million in 1982 (*China Yearbook 1974*, ROC p.346-348; *Arab News*, October 31, 1982). During the period between (1974-1976), Riyadh, additionally, extended via the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) a generous and huge financial help in the form of a long-term and low-interest loans⁹⁷ to the Taipei Government to sponsor the construction of three out of the most important ten Taiwanese national projects at that time. The sum of the Saudi loans was USD 110 Million⁹⁸.

The Taiwanese, in return, realised the Saudi concerns about the Communist activities in the region and was ready to join the Saudi efforts to offset the penetration of such subversive ideologies. Taipei assistance came in the form of offering special training courses to the Saudi security forces in the field of countering communism and

⁹⁶ الاتفاق الاقتصادي والفني بين المملكة العربية السعودية وجمهورية الصين (*Agreement for Economic and Technical Cooperation between the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia & the Government of the Republic of China*), 1982.

⁹⁷ The SFD's loans to the ROC were extended on favourable terms and were as follows USD 30 million for the first north-south highway in Taiwan, USD 50 million for the construction of a major port and USD 30 million for the Taiwan railroad electrification project.

⁹⁸ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, op. cit.

subversive ideologies. Prince Turki Al-Faisal pointed out that Riyadh at that time sent several intelligence and secret service officers to attend and receive special anti-Communism courses and training in the ROC⁹⁹.

On the cultural side, the Mecca-based World Muslim League, continued to visit and send its delegations to study and inspect the general condition of Muslims in the ROC. The Taiwanese, furthermore, maintained sending a five-man *hajj* mission to Mecca every year since 1960s. In a sign of appreciation and of its importance, the *hajj* mission used to receive an audience of the Saudi monarch every year they visited the Holy Sanctuaries in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Government, as well, kept granting full scholarships to Taiwanese students and in 1974 it hosted two students to study in the Islamic University of Medina (*China Yearbook 1974*, ROC p.346-348). Riyadh also sent Mr. Ibrahim Yousef from 1968 up to the late 1970s to teach Arabic language at the National Chengchi University and to lend a hand in the training of more Chinese Arabic language students (*China Yearbook 1972-1973*, ROC p.382-383).

In conclusion we should consider the key question in Sino-Saudi relations in this era. Of why did Riyadh chose to ignore the PRC's positive gestures and cling to its previous line of enhancing the Taiwanese Connection instead?. In an attempt to answer this question and in order to understand the Saudi negative attitude towards the PRC, a number of important considerations need to take into account.

Firstly, during both King Faisal's reign (1964-1975) and then King Khalid's reign (1975-1982), fighting Communism in the Middle East (particularly in South Yemen and the Horn of Africa where the Soviets have managed to acquire a plausible success and infiltration) was the official banner of Riyadh and one of its foreign policy priorities¹⁰⁰. Being jeopardised by the Communist attempts both by Moscow and Beijing to gain a foothold in the region in this high point of the Cold War, the Saudi leadership considered Communism to be the immediate danger to the stability of the Saudi national security. In this way, King Faisal's world view, which continued to affect the formulation of Riyadh's foreign policy during King Khalid's reign,

⁹⁹ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ In this respect, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example, during the period between 1974-1979 joined a secret unofficial anti-Communist multinational cluster that comprised besides Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, Iran, as well as Morocco. The main purpose of this multinational group was to coordinate efforts and exchange information in the field of countering Communist activities in the Gulf, the Third World and Europe (Badeeb 1993: 130-131).

validates such an assumption¹⁰¹. In a landscape periphery fraught with a number of serious dangers, one may assume that justified sense of survival and obsession with national security were always present in the mind of the Saudi foreign policy maker¹⁰².

Secondly, despite the noticeable transformation that occurred in China's foreign policy towards the Gulf starting from 1972, it seems that Riyadh's own calculations, influenced by its preoccupations with national security fears and concerns, was unready at that time to set up a formal relationship with Beijing taking into consideration the latter's recent involvements to change the *status quo* in the area and its bad record of supporting revolutionary and radical movements against the legitimate and existing political systems. Riyadh, it can be said, was still sceptical about the Chinese intentions in the region¹⁰³ bearing in mind the fact that in spite of everything Mao was still alive and that his revolutionary thought and discourse remained vivid and influential in the articulation of the PRC's foreign policy¹⁰⁴. Riyadh, as well, believed that the changes that occurred to China's foreign policy had constituted merely a transitional period and preferred proceed cautiously until those new orientations had been confirmed. For a conservative political system, like the Saudi one, the Chinese political dictionary and behaviour in general continued to be perceived as revolutionary and only time could prove Beijing's goodwill and the credibility of its new policy towards the region. Successfully passing the reliability-test, would, it can be said, positively contribute to the restoration of China's image in the Saudis eyes in addition to the rebuilding of mutual confidence between the two countries¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰¹ David Long argues that the Saudi leaders (King Khalid and his Crown Prince, after the death of King Faisal) despite being no longer stressing Faisal's formulation of a Communist-Zionist conspiracy, they 'essentially share his world view. Communism is antireligious and therefore a threat to Muslim society' (Long 1980b: 105).

¹⁰² Dawisha, for example, argues that 'Security and stability, therefore, are paramount in Saudi thinking and calculations' (Dawisha 1979: 7). For further detailed elaboration regarding this matter see Dawisha's work *Saudi Arabia's Search for Security* (1979), Tahtinen's work, *National Security Challenges to Saudi Arabia* (1979) and Safran's work, *Saudi Arabia: the Ceaseless Quest for Security* (1985).

¹⁰³ During both King Faisal and King Khalid reigns, Riyadh repeatedly advised the Americans that it might be premature to make a rapprochement with the PRC taking into consideration that Mao Zedong still alive and the Chinese presence in the region was still active.

¹⁰⁴ While tackling and analysing Mao's Theory of the Three Worlds and Beijing's foreign policy at the early and mid 1970s in his book *The Shaping of Chinese Foreign Policy*, Greg O'Leary goes in the same direction by stressing that Mao's 'emphasis on pragmatism should not be interpreted as a loss of revolutionary perspective or a denial of principle' (O'Leary 1980: 23).

¹⁰⁵ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, op. cit.

Thirdly, the difficult conditions¹⁰⁶ China's muslims communities continued to undergo and suffer in the last phases of the Cultural Revolution was another important factor that considerably contributed to impeding any major progress in the Saudi-Chinese relations at that time. In fact, until 1978 Muslims in China like other religious minorities continued to receive bad treatment from the Communist authorities in the PRC¹⁰⁷. Due to the Islamic nature of the Saudi state as a monarchy that emerged from the cradle of Islam and being informed through various channels¹⁰⁸ of the unfriendly actions taken against the Muslims in Mainland China, Riyadh was unwilling to improve its relations with any apparent Communist anti-Muslim state¹⁰⁹.

Finally, the Saudi-Taiwan connection was another obstacle, though secondary in its importance, on the way to improving the Sino-Saudi relations. While the PRC had had an unshaken hard-line position towards the existence and independence of Taiwan, the KSA vowed to support the ROC in various fields and was unwilling for the sake of pleasing Beijing to sacrifice its robust and multi-dimension relations with Taipei which was seen by Riyadh as a part and parcel of its anti-Communist policies in the region.

For these reasons it can be seen that the full normalisation of China-KSA relations required further development and drivers as will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

4.6. CONCLUSION

The mid 1970s witnessed the birth of a new Chinese international outlook as a result of a combination of domestic and international factors including the diminish of the more radical elements in the Chinese communist regimes such as Lin Biao along with Beijing's hope to break its international isolation and get an accession into the UN

¹⁰⁶ For more details about the circumstances of China's Muslim minorities see the work of Fayez Mufti, *الأقلية المسلمة في الصين* (The Muslim Minority in China, 'undated').

¹⁰⁷ Winters stressed the usefulness and applicability of China's Muslim minorities in establishing and sustaining relations between the PRC and the Islamic countries. He noted that China's policy towards its Muslim minorities had been always the basic determinant and the thermometer through which one can gauge the nature and dimensions of Beijing's relationship with other Muslim countries. 'If the Chinese are accommodating the Hui and other Minorities within China they are also accommodating with Muslim countries' (Winters 1979: 27, 47).

¹⁰⁸ The frequent Chinese Muslim delegations coming from Taiwan continued to feed the Saudi concerns about the Muslims in mainland China and that during their several meetings with the Saudi leadership, they were keen to keep Riyadh up-to-date with the hard times and difficult circumstances under which their Muslim brothers and sisters live in the PRC. For further details, see (Ma 1988: 91-100; *China Yearbook 1974* p. 347).

¹⁰⁹ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, op. cit.

and finally the advent of Mao's new perception of threat sources that placed Moscow instead of Washington and Western imperialism as the principal enemy of China and. Hence, competing globally with 'Soviet revisionism' became one of the main targets of China's foreign policy during this period. Based on this common objective, Beijing and Washington were in an appointment with a new chapter of rapprochement in their relationship in 1972.

Given that Chinese leaders attached great geopolitical importance to the Middle East as one of the world's key regions of superpower competition that was directly linked to China's national security, especially due to its traditional fears of encirclement by Soviet domination in that region, Beijing thought that offsetting Moscow's regional infiltration entailed endorsing Washington leadership in that area; and such common fears of the Soviet threat brought China and the US closer on a number of regional policies. Furthermore, Beijing decided to give up its previous revolutionary efforts to overthrow ruling political regimes in the Gulf region and simultaneously to seek to establish state-to-state diplomatic relationships with them.

Also there had been a shift in Chinese media coverage of Saudi activities. Beijing praised the Saudis following their decision to impose oil embargo on the US to protect Arab causes in 1973 War and official media machinery began a series of articles to place emphasis over the positive Saudi regional role in countering Soviet aspirations in the area and its efforts to establish regional security and stability throughout its coverage of events in the area. Also Beijing asked several Arab countries to undertake mediation endeavours and good offices to express a Chinese serious desire to establish diplomatic relations with the Kingdom and to set the foundation for negotiations to serve this purpose.

However, Riyadh ignored these developments on the Chinese part and decided give the cold shoulder to Chinese subsequent gestures for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it seems that Saudis at that historic stage were neither ready nor convinced about the amount and degree of change that had occurred in China's foreign policy both worldwide and towards the region. Saudis believed that despite noticeable transformations in China's foreign policy in the region, Mao's ideology continued to guide China's global outlook and hence there were no guarantees that such Chinese foreign behaviour was a genuine orientation and not merely a provisional phase. Besides this, Saudis were unhappy about hard-line measures remaining in force against Chinese Muslim minorities. Also, Riyadh felt that it has an obligation to

continue to support Taipei as one of its loyal partners in countering Communism in the region. The Saudi-Chinese state of affairs, hence, remained marking time following Riyadh decision to pay no attention to the Chinese hints and instead continue to enhance its ties with Taiwan in various aspects.

CHAPTER 5

THE RISE OF CHINA'S PRAGMATIC FOREIGN POLICY AND THE CONVERGENCE OF SINO-SAUDI REGIONAL INTERESTS (1978-1985)

After passing through the hard stages of revolution and the construction of a new state, it seems that the PRC by late 1978 has reached the point of putting an end to its relative isolation. Instead, it embraced the policy of the 'open door' and rationally communicating with the external world (Yahuda 1983: 241-242). The arrival of Deng Xiaoping to power and the outcome of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held in December 1978 resulted in a clear-cut transformation of China's foreign and domestic policies. As will be examined, the adoption of the open door policy and the relatively tolerant policies towards China's Muslim minorities side by side with the rise of some geo-strategic regional threats in the Middle East including the Iranian Revolution 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 allowed a gradual Saudi-Chinese *Détente* and then *Rapprochement*. However, despite such a guarded rapprochement on the Saudi side following the Chinese constant attempts to court Riyadh by deploying various means including media and Islamic *hajj* contacts along with the convergence of interests that took place between Riyadh and Beijing over their common anti-Soviet attitudes, Saudis preferred to keep an official separation from Beijing and refused to normalise ties for a number of considerations that will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

5.1. POST-1978 CHINA: AN HISTORIC U-TURN AND A NEW FACE

The Chinese domestic political scene witnessed during the mid-1970s a number of political watersheds that contributed to pushing the Chinese leadership to put forward a new open foreign policy. The official abrogation of the CR, the death of Mao in 1976, the arrest of the so called 'Gang of Four' (Mao's wife Jiang Qing and the other three members, Chang Chunbiao, Yao Wen-yuan and Wang Hung-wen¹¹⁰), the arrival of the prominent pragmatic leader Deng Xiaoping to power, the outcomes of the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of

¹¹⁰ For a detailed account on the 'Gang of Four' and their influence on China's domestic and foreign policies during the Cultural Revolution, see (Hsin 1977: 1-50).

China held in December 1978 and the normalisation of Sino-US relations in the same year marked a new stage and a dramatic change not only in Beijing's foreign policies but also in domestic ones¹¹¹.

In post-Mao China, the CR and its shameful legacy were repudiated (*Beijing Review*, January 19, 1979, p. 4; *Beijing Review*, December 22, 1980, p. 11), and the 'Maoist totalitarianism' and political 'madness' were indicted (Dirlik & Meisner 1995: 3-4). The Chinese leaders admitted that the state's policy on religion during that period was sabotaged by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four who under their Ultra-left line claimed that religion 'no more exists' and accordingly carried out some anti-religious practices and actions against the faithful such as demolishing mosques, churches and persecuting religious personages. From 1979, however, the PRC announced a restoration of its 'policy on religions', which stipulates that 'freedom of religion'¹¹² is a fundamental policy in China and Chinese citizens are free to believe or not to believe in this or that religion' (*Beijing Review*, December 21, 1979 p. 14-15).

Against this background, in post-Mao China clerics and scholars of various religions have returned to handle their religious affairs and carry on religious activities and researches. Religious organisations, including the Islamic Association of China, resumed their activities and Mosques, churches and monasteries were repaired and reopened. Not only that but within the framework of its quest for legally ensuring the citizen's right to freedom of religion, Beijing issued in July 1979 Article 147 of the Criminal Law which stipulates that 'A state functionary unlawfully deprives a citizen of his legitimate freedom of religious belief or violates the customs and folk ways of a minority nationality, to a serious degree, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for not more than two years, or to detention' (*Beijing Review*, December 21, 1979 p. 15-16).

On the other hand, modernisation was seen in this era as the watchword and the only method through which China could ensure its security and international influence. The four modernisations (agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology) occupied the top priority in China's agenda and were adopted as a national banner. In order to achieve this end and incorporate itself into the existing world order, China had to pursue the policy of the 'open door' and to

¹¹¹ For a better understanding of the nature of this critical stage, see (Schram 1984).

¹¹² It is worth noting that Chinese leaders assume that clerics and their interpretation of religion must be patriotic, confine to personal belief and avoid violating the Constitution and law (*Beijing Review*, November 16, 1981 p. 21-24).

undertake a shift that entailed a 'virtual cessation of Maoist incantations and social upheavals ("mass campaigns") at home and an "opening" of the country to foreign economic contacts' (Hinton 1993: 385; Yahuda 1983: 125).

Under this new trend, the Chinese foreign policy in the post-Mao era transcended narrow ideological concepts and became more than ever mainly governed by immediate national interests in addition to modernisation aspirations. Therefore, since 1979 Beijing reached a stage in which it sought to improve its contacts with countries of Africa, Middle East and Latin America whether they were rightist or leftist and ideology itself became 'of marginal importance in China's foreign relations' (Harris 1980: 362). This new vision allowed the Chinese to change to a strategy of 'pursuing consensus rather than controversy and doing business with, rather than promoting revolution in the Third World' (Calabrese 1990: 870).

Besides promoting economic modernisation, Beijing's strategic priority in its foreign policy was also to continue its diplomatic efforts to contain the Soviet Union's grave 'southward' thrust through enhancing its alignment with Washington and all nationalist leaders that manifest themselves willing to weaken the USSR. The new Chinese alignments, indeed, pursue 'a balance of power, not ideological lines' (Scalapino 1979: 61-65).

5.2. A PROLOGUE TO DÉTENTE (1978-1982): MOTIVATIONS AND INCENTIVES

The period between (1978-1982) witnessed a sort of a *détente* in the Saudi-China interaction and served as a prelude for the *rapprochement* that followed later on. In this era, one can detect three important developments that influenced the Sino-Saudi relationships in various ways and degrees. The first event was the resumption of the religious life of China's Muslim community including *hajj* missions with all the implicit and explicit tenors that such a formal Chinese decision could bare. The second was the emergence of a number of common regional threats including the maximisation of the Soviet menace in the region in the wake of the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan and the eruption of the Iranian Revolution which as well brought factors of regional instability and turmoil. Such regional challenges, on the one hand, heavily overshadowed Riyadh's regional political calculations along with its international alignment map and, on the other, made the PRC wholeheartedly eager to have diplomatic relations with the KSA as one of the influential states in making the

regional decision. Those important developments both on the Chinese domestic political scene and the Middle Eastern regional theater succeeded in stirring up Saudi-China stagnant waters.

5.2.1. Revisiting *Hajj* Diplomacy: China's Trump Card

Armed with the fundamental transformations of its foreign policy after Deng Xiaoping took office hand in hand with the increased tolerance it showed towards minorities in mainland China and improvements of the conditions and circumstances under which China's Muslim communities were living, Beijing thought that the time was ripe to pursue a direct approach towards Riyadh. Instead of merely sending gestures behind closed doors, Beijing adopted a more explicit and overt manner in conveying its true desire to detach Riyadh from Taiwan and exchange formal diplomatic ties.

In this sense, the PRC's ambassador to Kuwait, Ting Hao, took the offensive and made it clear during an interview given to the Kuwaiti daily newspaper *Al-Seyassah* in May, 1979 that despite differences, related to the nature of the political systems and social structures, between Beijing and Riyadh, China desires to establish formal diplomatic relationship with the KSA. He stressed that what combines the PRC and Saudi Arabia is more than what divides them. In an implicit reference to their common antagonism to the Soviet regional infiltration, the Ambassador stressed that they both belong to the countries of the Third World and more importantly share 'identical' outlooks and political stances towards many issues and concerns (*Al-Seyassah*, May 2, 1979).

Knowing how important and pivotal Islam and Muslim minorities are for the Saudi state, the PRC was keen to show another straightforward goodwill initiative through reducing the restrictions upon the religious and cultural freedom of Muslims of China and allowing the Islamic Association of China (IAC) to resume organising and sending the Chinese annual *hajj* missions to the holy sites in Saudi Arabia. The resumption of *hajj* missions by the Chinese authorities in October 1979 came, in fact, after being brought to a halt for a period that stretched approximately 15 years¹¹³ since 1964 (Woodman 1987: 19-21).

¹¹³ The Chinese *hajj* missions were paralysed on the eve of the Cultural Revolution (1964-1974). This small mission was the 11th since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The number of pilgrims in this mission was 16 (Chi-Wei 1982: 34).

After finishing their religious rituals of the *hajj* season in 1979, a member of the Chinese *hajj* mission, Wang Genbao, wrote a long 'newsletter' during which he described the happiness and fraternal sentiments of other Muslims to know that Chinese Muslims became allowed again to perform *hajj* along with their Muslim brothers from all over the world (*BBC, SWB, FE/6291/ A4/2*, December 7, 1979). The Chinese *hajj* missions since that time have maintained its annual attendance of *hajj* seasons and have continued to grow in size and number. Yen-Fu mentioned that the Chinese *hajj* mission in the subsequent year, 1980, was received twice by the Saudi Monarch, King Khalid, who showed great interest during those meetings to know about the current situation of the Chinese Muslims after the recent reforms in the PRC (Yen-Fu 1982: 43).

In another positive development, the Islamic Association of China (IAC) was allowed to organise the 4th Islamic Conference in April 1980¹¹⁴. Political observers saw this as an official sign of the restoration of religious life of Chinese Muslims in Mainland China. The conference lasted for 11 days and was attended by 251 representatives all of whom were renowned Chinese religious leaders and scholars who came from 29 provinces. Besides condemning the extremist leftist policies and measures against the Chinese minorities including the Muslims, especially during the reign of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, the participants applauded Beijing's new policy of freedom of religious belief, equity among all nationalities, reopening of mosques and allowing Muslims to practice their religious rituals including reciting the Holy Quran, attending prayers and fasting in Ramadan. The conference resulted in modifying the constitution of the IAC and electing a new president and managerial board for the IAC. At the end of the conference, the participants were received by several senior politicians of the Chinese Communist Party in a high-profile event in the Great Hall of the People (Chie 1982: 44-47).

In an article entitled '*Muslims Elected me a President of the Islamic Association of China*', Muhammad Ali Zhang Jie wrote that we restored our right to practice our religion through the current policy of freedom of belief after very tough 10 years under the leadership of the Gang of Four and I trust that our relations with other Muslim countries would flourish day after day after they correct their misperceptions and doubts about China's religious policy (Zhang Jie 1982: 81-86).

¹¹⁴ The 3rd Islamic Conference was held in 1963 just before the eruption of the Cultural Revolution.

As has been earlier indicated, the Chinese leadership was conscious of the importance of its Muslim minorities in forging diplomatic contacts with the Islamic countries especially while dealing with the motherland of Islam, Saudi Arabia. Such awareness was illustrated by the Politburo member, Xi Zhongxun, who in 1982 was quoted to have encouraged the Chinese Muslims to set up religious and cultural ties with Muslims abroad as such connections considerably help to enlarge China's 'political influence' (*Hongqi*, Jun 16, 1982).

In correspondence with the new policy, including a new reading of the role China's Muslim minorities should undertake in the PRC's foreign policy towards Islamic countries, the Islamic Association of China following the accomplishment of their *hajj* rituals, extended an official invitation to the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL) in October 1980, which had hosted them during their presence in the holy sites to perform *hajj* (Chi-Wei 1982: 37). Following the notable transformations on China's foreign policy of opening towards the world in the aftermath of the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 and the resumption of religious life in China, the MWL was invited by the Islamic Association of China to visit Mainland China.

The MWL, hence, decided to send a seven-member delegation to undertake a double-fold mission¹¹⁵. According to Ahmad Jamjoom, the head of the Saudi delegation, the main purpose of this landmark visit 'was to obtain first hand information about the conditions of life of the Muslim community in China, and to offer, within the broader framework of Islamic cooperation, all possible moral and material help for our brothers in faith in that remote region' (Jamjoom 1985: 208).

In his book *رحلة وحديث في شؤون المسلمين: داخل أسوار الصين* (*Inside China's Walls: A Trip and Speech about Muslim Affairs*)¹¹⁶, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Oboudi, then the MWL's Assistant Secretary-General for Islamic Propagation who was supposed to lead the delegation but apologised because of his tight schedule and other urgent business engagements, stressed that such visit to mainland China was neither possible nor likely before the late 1970s fundamental changes in the PRC that allowed the MWL to establish contacts with the Chinese Muslims (Al-Oboudi 1992: 8-9).

¹¹⁵ In fact, this visit was in advance approved by a Saudi Royal Decree issued on March 10, 1981 (Jamjoom 1985: 208). One may argue that this intervention made the visit bear some official and political dimensions.

¹¹⁶ This book mainly describes the trip that Sheikh Al-Oboudi made to China to inspect Muslim conditions in April 1984.

The MWL delegation arrived in China on May 29, 1981 and was reported to have comprised some members of Saudi governmental bodies such as the Ministries of Interior, Information and *Hajj*. In his '*Notes of a Visit to Mainland China*', Ahmad Jamjoom, the former Saudi Minister of Commerce and the head of the delegation, mentions that in spite of his emphasis on the unofficial nature of the delegation as merely representing the MWL as an independent international organisation¹¹⁷, it was given a special treatment. Also throughout the delegation's meetings with Chinese officials -including a senior Muslim political official- the latter were keen to seize every available opportunity to emphasise and deliver their desire to establish official relations with the KSA. At the end of the visit, the MWL's delegation asked the Chinese authorities to enlarge the size of Chinese *hajj* missions and in a clear sign of cordiality with the purpose of courting Riyadh, the Islamic Association of China was exceptionally permitted by the local authorities to receive a USD 500,000 as a subsidy from the WML to the Islamic Association of China¹¹⁸ (Jamjoom 1985: 208-218).

In April 1984, the MWL, once again, sent a seven-member delegation to make a 25-day visit to China at the invitation of the Islamic Association of China. The delegation, which was led this time by Sheikh Al-Oboudi, toured several provinces in China including Xinjiang, Gansu, Shanghai and Guangzhou nonetheless, not all the areas they had asked to see. Besides presenting thousands of copies of the Holy Quran to local Muslims in China along with large sums of cash US Dollars to donate to the refurbishment of old mosques, the delegation offered to help the Islamic association in whatever it needs to undertake its duties including restoring old mosques, printing Islamic books and facilitating all the issues related to Chinese *hajj* missions (Al-Oboudi 1992: 97).

What makes the 1980s Chinese manoeuvre of employing the mechanism of Muslim solidarity significant from the one of the 1950s and early 1960s is the fact that at this time, and unlike the previous experience, the Chinese approach was backed up by fundamental changes in various aspects on the ground. The Chinese recent shifts, on the one hand, towards its Muslim minorities and, on the other toward its world outlook and the external milieu undoubtedly received the attention and welcome of Riyadh. This, in our opinion, is what allowed those minorities this time to

¹¹⁷ About Mecca-based MWL and its connection with the Saudi government, see for example (Piscatori 1983: 41-42; Al-Derweesh 2001: 54; *The Journal of Muslim World League* December 1983, p. 13-14).

¹¹⁸ Chinese local organisations are legally banned from receiving any kind of donations from foreign religious bodies (*Beijing Review*, November 16, 1981 p. 21).

play an important role in bridging the ideological distrust gap between Riyadh and Beijing.

2.2. New Common Menaces on the Regional Political Theatre

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, and following the changes in China's foreign policy, the Middle East was a venue for a number of dramatic and far-reaching developments that constituted a turning point in the history of the region. These regional watersheds posed a direct challenge to the national security of both the KSA and the PRC. There can be no doubt that these common threats have overshadowed the course of Saudi-China relationship and its later progress in the 1980s.

The first was the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution in January 1979 against the monarchy resulting in the overthrow of the anti-Soviet and US-supported Shah of Iran and hence the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a purely clerical state, under the lead of Khomeini. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was another important regional development that enormously contributed to the apparent escalation of the Communist regional danger. This intervention allowed Moscow to acquire a foothold in the region and to get just few steps away from the world largest known oil reserves in the Gulf, and achieving its age-old dream of reaching a Southern warm-water port¹¹⁹. The last serious regional incident during that era was the eruption of the lengthy and bloody Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which was, but one of the direct consequences of the previously mentioned regional developments, especially the Iranian Revolution.

It can be said that these key regional political incidents cast a long shadow on the Saudi-China relationship in various ways. In an attempt to draw a complete panoramic picture of the general strategic landscape in the region and its implications on the course of Riyadh-Beijing relationship, the following five points can be made. First, the ousting of the Shah's regime by a popular revolution in 1979 made Riyadh feel both uncomfortable about the course of events in Iran and dissatisfied with the US cold reaction and negligence of the Shah, US old-ally in the region¹²⁰. While Riyadh used to believe that the US was a reliable ally in the face of Communist and

¹¹⁹ For a summary of the main regional threats to the Saudi national security at that historical epoch including the Soviet one, see (Ojha 1980: 1-12; Ojha 1981: 1-19; Cordesman 1984: 776-800).

¹²⁰ This led to the collapse of President Nixon's Doctrine of the 'Twin Pillars' and the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task as per Carter's Doctrine (Brzezinski 1983: 456, 459; Hooglund 1989: 212-213).

regional radical forces, it started to question the basis of its 'special relationship' with Washington and the pressing need to diversify its strategic allies (Yodfat 1983: 94). It seems that the Chinese, on their side, became aware of the Saudi fears and such concerns found their way to the Chinese official media in the mid-1979 (*FBIS*, July 16, 1979. p. A-5).

Second, besides its fear arising from the crystal-clear danger presented by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Saudis had direct concerns of encirclement as a result of the Soviet activities on the Saudi's Southern doorstep. Those activities were concentrated in Aden in South Yemen, Massawa in Ethiopia, Dahlak Archipelago in the Red Sea, Perim Island in the narrow strait of Bab Al-Mandeb and on Socotra Island at the opening of the Gulf of Aden (*Beijing Review*, February 23, 1981, p. 12-13). According to the Chinese media, senior Saudi officials have demonstrated their consciousness of the danger of such a Soviet move as a 'step in a long-term plan to control the Arabian Peninsula and its oil' (*Beijing Review*, April 21, 1980, p. 12). Prince Fahd, then Crown Prince, was quoted to say during the 3rd Islamic Summit Conference held in Taif January 25-29, 1981 that 'The Islamic countries face a new threat marked by the soviet invasion of Afghanistan' (*Beijing Review*, February 9, 1981, p. 10).

Third, these Saudi anxieties and recalculations were accompanied, or maybe even preceded by what a political commentator described as a newly-born gradual inclination towards embracing a more pragmatic foreign policy¹²¹ and a subtle diplomatic approach during the early years of King Khalid's reign, 1975-1982 (Abir 1976: 17).

Fourth, the Chinese, on the other hand, had their own fears of recent soviet gains in the region, which mainly proceeded from the following considerations. To begin with, the Middle East in the Chinese strategic thought is the key to economically dominate the Third World and then most likely the globe because of its huge oil wealth and strategic geopolitical location (McCormick 1986: 2). Second, from a strategic viewpoint, the Soviet advances and 'southward drive' contributed to bringing to the surface the traditional concerns and scenarios of 'encirclement' in their worst form. The Chinese senior leaders both perceived and depicted the Soviet move into Afghanistan, its 'southward thrust', its activities in South Yemen and the

¹²¹ Despite that moderation had been to a large extent one of the main attributes of the Saudi foreign policy.

Red Sea as a confirmation of their previous warnings and that their concerns of the Soviet social imperialism had come true. They, as well, portrayed those advances as a huge 'pincer movement' and an attempt to strangle and outflank the Western traditional control of the world's energy sources and supply routes. They therefore asked the US to take a practical action to reign in such threat (*Beijing Review*, February 2, 1979, p. 21; August 3, 1979, p. 23-24 & May 11, 1981, p. 11-12; Harris 1980: 363-367; Shichor 1984b: 263).

Finally, it would seem that the above-discussed recent regional developments on the ground had paved the way for a common Saudi-China interest in countering the Soviet infiltration and gains in Afghanistan. This was especially the case in the wake of the PRC's unexpected loss of its anti-Soviet friends in the region, the Shah of Iran and President Sadat of Egypt, which resulted in making Beijing vitally eager to cultivate Riyadh as an alternative anti-Soviet regional ally (Shichor 1982: 101-104). The worst regional scenario for the Chinese at that particular moment would be the substitution of the moderate Saudi political system by a pro-Soviet political regime as happened for example in Afghanistan and South Yemen or because of circumstances similar to what happened in Iran (Harris 1980: 366). Though for its own reasons, the Saudi anti-communist regional efforts¹²² namely in South Yemen and the Horn of Africa corresponded to Beijing's anti-Soviet aims in the area and one can safely argue that such common strategic goal had led to an out-of-the-blue convergence of interests between Riyadh and Beijing (Calabrese 1991: 147).

5.2.3. Reflections of the Geo-Strategic Regional Situation on the Saudi-China Relationship

During the late 1970s and early 1980s especially after the PRC managed to forge diplomatic relations with Oman and then Libya, in May 25 and August 9 1978 respectively, there were some rumours¹²³ and press reports claiming progress in the Saudi-China state of affairs and an existence of mutual intention to establish formal

¹²² For more elaboration about the Saudi regional anti-Communist activities, see (Halliday 1982: 134-135; Safran 1985: 282-294).

¹²³ In fact there was also another allegation, according to the Kuwaiti daily *Al-Seyassah* in January 19, 1979, about a Saudi intention to form official relations with the USSR. The correspondent who wrote the press report, paradoxically, claimed that he received this news while attending a reception at the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait! (Price 1979: 12). One might conclude that the Chinese, in turn, were trying to test the Saudi waters in order to explore their stand toward such issue especially following the deposition of the Iranian Shah and the tension that marked the US-Saudi relations following the Camp David Accords in September 1978.

relationships (*The Times*, August 11, 1978 & September 29, 1978). Such press reports, however, were denied and described as baseless rumours and speculations by the head of Saudi diplomacy, Prince Saud Al-Faisal (*Al-Riyadh*, January 15, 1979).

The previously unexpected cooperation, however, between Riyadh and Beijing on geo-strategic basis against the Soviet presence in the Afghani arena became, though indirect, a tangible reality (Schrader 1989: 122). While some press reports (*The Times*, February 21, & June 20, 1981) spoke about some rumours that Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and China being involved in arming and supplying weapons to the anti-Soviet *Mujahedeen* fighting Moscow's troops in the Afghani soil, Prince Turki Al-Faisal confirmed such press news¹²⁴. He added that at that historic epoch and in the context of self-defence against Communist regional menaces, we used to supply the Afghani *Mujahedeen* with Chinese arms¹²⁵. He asserted, however, that due to absence of direct contacts with Beijing, the Kingdom bought the Chinese arms through instead via a third party, the Pakistanis, who served as middlemen between the Chinese and Riyadh. KSA used to send the money to the Pakistanis and they in turn bought the Chinese arms and managed to deliver them¹²⁶. Such indirect cooperation, it seems, has served as a precursor to the subsequent Saudi-China secret East Wind missile deal in 1985.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) represented another phase in the Saudi-China indirect military cooperation. Due to concerns related to the policies of the Khomeini's regime such as the declared desire to destabilise its neighbouring countries via exporting its revolution and radical model, Riyadh took a defensive stand in which it aligned itself closely with Iraq and provide the latter with all possible support against Iran during the war period (Hussein 1995: 210-240; Aborhmah 2005: 29-37). The PRC, on the other hand, despite its officially stated principal of 'strict neutrality' towards the conflict, as well as its repeated calls for an immediate cease fire and negotiations between parties concerned, was reported to have transferred 260 T-69 battle tanks and about 100 J-6 and J-7 fighter aircrafts to

¹²⁴ According to Zbigniew Brezinski, (the US former National Security Advisor to President Carter, 1977-1981), Carter's administration has 'quietly put together a coalition' that comprised Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Britain on behalf of the Afghan resistance against the Soviet (Brezinski 1992: 41).

¹²⁵ This possibly explains to the press reports published by some Western as well as Arab media during late 1981 claiming that two Saudi princes had paid secret visits to Beijing and then two Chinese envoys covertly visited Riyadh to discuss and negotiate the establishment of diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Beijing (cited in Shichor 1982:110).

¹²⁶ Private interview with HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud, op. cit.

Iraq during the war (*Beijing Review*, November 29, 1982, p. 3.; *Beijing Review*, August 3, 1987, p. 27; *The Military Balance* (1984-1985). p. 62; *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, April 11, 1983, p. 16-18 & August 15, 1983, p. 134; *The Military Balance* (1985-1986), p. 76).

According to a number of scholars, China actually signed its first deal to transfer arms to Iraq in September 1980 and the Saudis acted as middlemen for Beijing's arms sales to Baghdad by bestowing the PRC a secure access to their country for indirect overland military deliveries to Iraq (Shichor 1989: 26; Hyer 1992: 1104; Pipes 1998: 354). It is worth mentioning here that the Chinese in reality have made large-scale arms sales¹²⁷ to both belligerent¹²⁸ parties (Iran and Iraq) and did not confine their support to the Iraqis alone for various reasons¹²⁹. Whereas the first reason was related to Beijing's need for foreign currency, the second was its desire not to lose good relations with either side as both belligerents were major regional countries. The third motivation was the PRC's fears of a Soviet-Iranian *rapprochement* over a couple of issues such as their common anti-US stand and the Iranian armament needs especially following the deposition of China's former anti-Soviet ally, the Shah (Calabrese 1991: 145-146; Schaar 1993: 185-186). Finally, these arms transfers to the Middle East were regarded as by Chinese leaders as an instrument to intensify Beijing's leverage in the region (Gilks & Segal 1985: 137).

While a good number of political analysts (El-Rayyes & Nahas 1973: 86, 88; Yodfat 1977: 1,3; Azar 1979: 27; Harris 1980: 363-364) had noticed that before 1979 the Middle East was not a priority in China's foreign policy, and that Beijing failed to achieve a considerable presence in the regional political theatre or to influence the regional course of events, such status had arguably changed owing to Beijing's roles both in the Iran-Iraq War and the war effort to counter the Soviet gains in Afghanistan. One might argue, therefore, that China became a relatively active player

¹²⁷ Arms traffic and its enormous profits in the Third World as a 'chief market' started to catch the attention of the Chinese since early 1980s. In this regard, see (*Beijing Review*, March 9, 1981. p. 14-15).

¹²⁸ The U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (1988: p. 127) reported that 80% of the PRC's arms sales during the period between 1982-1986 were to Middle Eastern recipients, mainly Iran and Iraq. For a detailed account on China's arms sales to the Third World including Iran and Iraq during the period between 1981-1987, see (Bitzinger 1992: 84-111; Woon 1989: 601-618; Shichor 1988: 320-330).

¹²⁹ The sum of Chinese arms sales to the region during the period between (1979-1987) was roughly between USD 11-12 billion and China was ranked 5th among world arms exporters to the Third World in 1986 (*The Economist* May 14, 1988; Grimmett 1988: 88-352; Shichor 1988: 320-322).

in the region after 1979 and that its fortunes in playing an influential role in ensuring its security and stability increased from that time.

One might also contend that the Chinese on several occasions and using a variety of coded as well as direct means continued to show enthusiasm towards conveying similar connotations to the Saudis. For instance, the Chinese Muslims, like many other Muslims all over the world, sent in January 1980 a support and encouragement cable to King Khalid in which they condemned and denounced the Ka'ba seizure incident¹³⁰ and expressed their support for the 'wise measures' taken by the Saudi Sovereign to enhance security and stability in the holy sites (*BBC, SWB, FE/6331/A4/2*, January 29, 1980). It is unimaginable that such an important move and unequivocal friendly gesture was made without the green light and endorsement of the ruling authorities in Beijing, which had probably encouraged it and thought it might be interpreted by Riyadh as a positive indication that the PRC had -unlike the past- become interested in the stability and security of the Saudi Monarchy.

Within the same context, the Chinese media visibly backed-up the Saudi proposal to buy the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)¹³¹ airplanes and criticised the American delay in sealing the deal because of the persistent and vociferous Israeli opposition¹³² which employed its strong lobby in the American Congress. The Chinese criticism of the American reluctance arose from their profound conviction that the mounting soviet infiltration and influence in the region needed to be curbed. Such an objective, according to the Chinese, could not be achieved without granting Riyadh all the equipment and armaments¹³³ it needed to protect its national security and counter the Soviet menace (*Beijing Review*, October 12, 1981, p. 11-12).

In any case, although the official and political Saudi-China frontier remained unchanged in the absence of any palpable progress, the economic frontier saw remarkable and meaningful *détentes*, which took place in the form of expansion in the field of trade exchange between Beijing and Riyadh¹³⁴. Such progress, it is argued,

¹³⁰ For further details about this incident, see (Wright 1986: 146-154).

¹³¹ For detailed information about the USD 8.5 billion AWACS transaction, see (Cordesman 1981:21-61; Cordesman 1984: 269-299).

¹³² For more details about the Chinese account on the US delay of the deal, see (*Beijing Review*, April 27, 1981, p. 12; *Beijing Review*, October 12, 1981, p. 11).

¹³³ This does not mean the absence of US-Saudi cooperation in the spheres of countering regional Communist infiltrations. In this regard, see (Ransom 1989: 110).

¹³⁴ Riyadh removed its previous ban on direct trade with the PRC and since the early 1980s; unofficial Saudi trade delegations began to visit the PRC for commercial purposes (Tanzer 1982: 28).

was an obvious and definite outcome of the KSA's initial satisfaction with the developments that occurred in China's domestic and foreign policies. According to Chinese and IMF statistics, the volume of trade exchange between Riyadh and Beijing rapidly grew up more than tenfold since 1978 from only USD 16 million in 1977 to roughly USD 232 million in 1981 and 193 million by 1982 with a trade balance in favour of China (*Almanac of China's Foreign Economic Relations and Trade*, (1984), p. 846; *Direction of Trade Statistics*. IMF).

5.3. TOWARDS A GUARDED RAPPROACHEMENT (1982-19850): CHINA'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY

The Chinese at this stage appeared to be keen to exploit the momentum created following the short, unofficial meeting that took place in late October 1981 between then Saudi Crown Prince, Fahd bin Abdulaziz, and the Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang, on the sidelines of the North-South summit held in Cancun, Mexico, with the aim of enhancing Beijing's relations with Riyadh (*Arab News* October 24, 1981). The constant official denial by the Saudi side of any progress with the Chinese side did not dissuade Beijing from patiently continuing its endless endeavours to court Riyadh with the purpose of winning its diplomatic recognition. In this sense, Beijing pursued a step-by-step approach with Riyadh and showed a noticeable understanding of the importance of bridging the trust gap between the two countries and avoiding the impression of seeking to rush the Saudi side to cease its diplomatic relations with Taipei and establish official relations with Beijing, as this move could prove to be counterproductive¹³⁵.

In what appears to be a response to the Chinese continuous positive advances, the Saudi side began a guarded and gradual *rapprochement* with Beijing. This new attitude was reflected in expressing some appreciation of China's international role as well as showing some meaningful, though symbolic, alterations to the political language in which Riyadh accustomed to address both the PRC and the ROC. The Saudi media, for instance, made some amendments towards softening the phraseology

¹³⁵ This stance was expressed by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (CMFA) in a paper entitled *العلاقات الخارجية للصين خلال الـ 35 سنة الماضية* (*China's Foreign Relations Throughout the Past 35 Years*) presented at a symposium on the Arab-China relations held in Amman (Jordan) during the period between October 18-19, 1986. The CMFA stressed that 'With regard to those countries with which we still have disagreements, we will do our best to reach solutions through consultations until these relations improve. We believe that each state has the right to develop its relations with any state and to accept any support suits its interests and needs. This should not have an effect on China in its continuous pursuit to develop its relations with these countries' (1987: 165).

used to describe the PRC and instead of calling the latter 'Communist' or 'Red' China, it began to label it the 'People's Republic of China' or 'Mainland China'. Taiwan was also affected by this new Saudi media orientation and instead of calling it the 'Republic of China'; it was named 'Taiwan China', 'China (Taipei)' or even 'China Formosa' (Shichor 1989: 22).

The Chinese apparently were conscious of such symbolic change. In this sense, *Xinhua*, attached importance to what it considered a positive development following the statement made by Prince Fahd bin Sultan, Deputy Minister of Social Affairs, to a Chinese official during a banquet given by the Saudi Ambassador to Malaysia in honour of the KSA's National Team Mission following a football match between the Saudi and Chinese national teams. In his statement, the Saudi official hoped that relations between Riyadh and Beijing would continue to improve (*Xinhua*, November 15, 1981).

5.3.1. Reemphasising the Key Saudi Regional Role

The Saudi active presence in the regional theatre throughout the 1980s- both during the late phase of King Khalid's reign (1975-1982) and the early years of King Fahd's reign (1982-2005) had captured the attention of the Chinese official media (*The New York Times*, December 11, 1988). In fact, this matter was not a new orientation but it represented a continuation of Beijing's previous line of praising the Saudi regional role since mid 1970s. However, during this period it became more intensive in its stressing of the importance of Riyadh's foreign policy activities in the regional sphere in general and in countering the Soviet influence in the region in particular.

In this regard, one can highlight the glowing article entitled '*Saudi Arabia: New Trends*' through which the author paid attribute to Riyadh's active regional diplomacy and its 'policy of uniting with Islamic countries in countering hegemonism'. The article focused on the recent Saudi efforts to improve relations with Turkey, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and the Yemen Arab Republic. It, moreover, shed light upon the Saudi three-point programme to maintain stability in the Middle East which stipulated that 'Gulf states should arm to defend themselves, all powers should keep out of the area, and the Palestine problem should be resolved'. The author also stressed that Saudi senior officials had shown a clear-cut opposition to and awareness of the Soviet regional

aspirations following Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan especially during the sessions of the 1980 Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference held in Pakistan (*Beijing Review*, April 21, 1981, p. 12).

The Chinese media, furthermore, welcomed and applauded the decision of the six Arab-Gulf states in February 1981 to establish the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)¹³⁶ over some security concerns related to the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and superpower contention in the region especially following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. *Beijing Review* described the decision to give birth to the GCC as 'A Step Towards Unity' in the face of foreign intervention, mainly from the Soviet Union, in a trouble spot astutely described as the 'Center of a Whirlwind' (*Beijing Review*, February 23, 1981, p. 12-13; *Beijing Review*, June 8, 1981, p. 25).

In a further step, the Saudi diplomatic endeavours to reach a ceasefire in Lebanon¹³⁷ were praised by the *Xinhua* (January 3, 1981). *Beijing Review*, in the same context, not only hailed the Saudi peaceful efforts to bring about a ceasefire in Lebanon and advance unity among Gulf countries, but paid tribute to the Saudi initiative widely-known as Prince Fahd's eight-point peace plan for solving the Palestinian question¹³⁸, the Arab-Israeli conflict and introducing regional security and stability. The article considered the plan as a 'positive step for co-ordinating the stand of the Arab countries in the process of finding a peaceful solution to the Middle East situation' (*Beijing Review*, October 12, 1981, p. 12; *Beijing Review*, August 24, 1981, p. 11-12). *Beijing Review*, elsewhere, criticised the American disinterest to support the Saudi peace proposal because of the opposition of the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. As the Chinese saw it, the American apathy could open the door for the USSR to support this proposal and thus play a wider role both in the region and peace process (*Beijing Review*, November 16, 1981, p. 12-13).

China Daily, on its part, regarded the Saudi plan as 'the first comprehensive and realistic formula made by an Arab country to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict' (*China Daily*, January 13, 1982). *Xinhua*, correspondingly, argued that the Saudi

¹³⁶ The GCC is a regional organization that came into existence in May 25, 1981 as a result of common security concerns among its members, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. For detailed information about the GCC, see (Sandwick, 1987; El-Azhary, 1982).

¹³⁷ For more details about the Saudi role in Lebanon Crisis, see, (Al-Mansour 2001: 270-276).

¹³⁸ This plan was proposed initially at Fez Arab Summit in August 7, 1982 as an Arab peace project and had afterward served as the precursor to the Arab Peace Initiative approved at Beirut Arab Summit in 2002. For further details in this regard, see (*The Times*, November 4, 1982; Elmoneif 2005: 124-136; Al-Mansour 1999: 225-227).

peace plan unlike other peace initiatives take into consideration the legitimate interests and rights of all parties concerned in this conflict (*Xinhua*, December 29, 1981).

5.3.2. Acknowledging China's Key International Role: The Saudis Reciprocate

Post-1982 witnessed a kind of spontaneous convergence in the Saudi and Chinese attitudes towards the superpowers. Whereas they both harboured antagonism to the Soviet policies and interventions in the region, they started to share, albeit for their own reasons, a growing disillusionment with the US role (Calabrese 1991: 148). The Chinese attitude can be attributed to two major developments. The first was Beijing's own calculations that the Soviet strategic threat in the Middle East had started to fade away and the second was the emergence of some serious strains in its relations with Washington over the American growing relations with, and arms sales to, Taiwan under the Regan administration. These were two contributing factors to China's announcement in September 1982 that it would pursue an 'independent'¹³⁹ foreign policy based on a restructuring of its relationships with the superpowers (Harding 1984: 196-199; Smith 1986: 59-62). The suggested restructuring was bound for distancing the PRC from the US policies hand in hand with reducing tension in its relationship with the USSR. Equally, the US and the USSR were regarded in the Chinese new analysis as an equivalent source of instability and danger both to the PRC and the international community as a whole (Hamrin 1982: 51; Calabrese 1990: 872).

The Saudi attitude, on the other hand, might be accredited to a number of reasons. First, Riyadh's dissatisfaction with the US reaction towards the overthrow of the Shah of Iran¹⁴⁰. Second, the tension that marked the US-Saudi relations following the split in their views regarding the Camp David Accords (September, 1978) and its inadequate and unwelcomed outcomes. Third, the Saudis were displeased about the American reluctance, under Israeli pressure, to support and agree with Prince Fahd's

¹³⁹ The Chinese previous foreign policy between (1978-1981) is usually referred to as 'leaning to the West'.

¹⁴⁰ Riyadh thought that Washington could have done better to prevent such thing (Yodfat 1983: 94). Riyadh, on the other hand, had constantly rejected the American frequent proposals to establish a permanent US presence on its soil on the premises that such presence would directly conflict with its basic sovereignty. Riyadh, moreover, felt that its 'special relation' with Washington became a burden as the Americans became obsessed with the fall of the Shah and consequently started to almost constantly question and publish inaccurate reports about the Saudi domestic stability as well as the cohesion of the ruling Royal Family (Cordesman 1984: 252-265).

peace plan. Fourth, the Saudi discontent over US policy in Lebanon. Last but not least, the Saudi perception of the US as an unreliable supplier of military equipments due to unexpected difficulties that faced the Saudi military sales including the F-5E, F-15 and even the recent AWACS deal which barely was approved by a small majority in the US Congress¹⁴¹ (*Beijing Review*, November 16, 1981 p.12-13; Katz 1986: 137; Cordesman 1984: 253-265).

Such similarity and parallel attitudes towards the superpowers could have contributed to promoting the PRC's positive image in Riyadh's eyes and as a consequence enabled Saudi-China relations to find a sort of commonality and gain some notable progress in that era. Such commonality, in the author's evaluation, made Riyadh more inclined towards acknowledging the Chinese key role in the international arena and more importantly in regional issues. The Saudis began to realise Beijing's importance as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and an independent as well as impartial international party with a long evenhanded history of supporting the Arab legitimate rights in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, the Chinese official stand transformed from supporting Palestinian militant groups to encouraging a peaceful settlement based on negotiations and, in fact, became pretty compatible with Prince Fahd's peace plan (*Beijing Review*, November 30, 1979 p. 8-9).

The Saudi recognition of the importance of the PRC's global role was obvious in the Saudi Foreign Minister's statement following a trip he made during the first week of December 1982 to Beijing¹⁴² along with six other representatives of the Arab League to brief the five permanent members of the UN Security Council on the Fez peace plan and to gather international support for it. In his statement on accomplishing his visit, Prince Al-Faisal in a meaningful tone stressed that 'The other Security Council members also have influence to bear in the region' in an indication that the US was not the only significant player in the regional situation (*Arab News* December 8, 1982).

The Chinese, on their side and as usual, spared no opportunity to reveal to the Saudi Minister their wish of creating formal ties between the PRC and the Kingdom. The PRC's foreign Minister announced that 'I had expressed to him China's wish in

¹⁴¹ Such Saudi doubts had significantly stimulated Riyadh to make the East Wind missile deal with Beijing in 1985 as will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴² At that time, Prince Saud was the first Saudi minister and the highest-ranking official to visit the PRC.

increasing understanding, through which we may establish diplomatic relations ... Faisal agreed on the principle of improving the understanding of each other as first step leading toward establishing diplomatic relations' (Shichor 1989: 23). In its coverage of Al-Faisal's visit, *Arab News* reported that the two countries had the desire to advance their economic and 'other relations'. The Saudi Daily went on to applaud the Chinese stand towards the Arab-Israeli conflict as 'clear and steady' (*Arab News* December 7, 1982).

In such encouraging atmospheres, and in an attempt to exploit the momentum created following these accelerating developments, the PRC resorted to the good offices again and approached for this purpose Pakistan¹⁴³, China's traditional ally and one of the KSA's best regional friends. Beijing asked Pakistan to take part in convincing Riyadh about the normalisation of Sino-Saudi relations and it seems that Islamabad did play a role in this regard (Garver 1993: 276). Some political commentators claim that there were some secret Saudi-China contacts¹⁴⁴ to discuss the possibility of exchanging diplomatic ties between the two countries. Yet, these covert negotiations were doomed to failure as the Saudis insisted on keeping their official relations with Taipei as a precondition for forming official relations with the PRC (Shichor 1989: 21; Harris 1993a: 224). This, of course, was thought not only to be unacceptable but also to be utterly non negotiable by Beijing.

In any event, it would seem that Prince Saud's statement and the recent developments in the Saudi-China connection since the early 1980s marked a Saudi growing welcome of a greater Chinese presence in the regional scene. Such progress and increasing rumours of *rapprochement*, however, made the Taiwanese¹⁴⁵ worried and anxious that the Saudis might sacrifice them for the sake of official relations with Beijing. The Taiwanese fears were dispelled by Riyadh which told Taipei that the Kingdom for the time being had no intention to establish official ties with Beijing and

¹⁴³ Islamabad had played a key role in making *rapprochement* between the PRC and Shah's Iran during the early 1970s (Abidi 1982: 46-47, 54-56, 62-64).

¹⁴⁴ Harris denotes that the Saudi Minister of Petroleum, Sheikh Ahmad Z. Yamani, had made a clandestine visit to the PRC in 1982 (Harris 1993a: 224).

¹⁴⁵ Despite the growing commercial and cultural relation between Riyadh and Taipei, the Taiwanese were worried about recent progress in the Saudi-China connection especially following the announcement of a visit by Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz (half-brother of King Fahd but holds no official governmental post in the KSA) as a special international envoy of the UNICEF. Prior to his trip, The Prince held a press conference during which he stated that Riyadh regards the PRC as a 'friendly country' (*Xinhua*, August 10, 1984). Talal's visit was cancelled due to 'sudden family circumstances' (*Xinhua*, November 6, 1984). Some political commentators interpreted the cancelation of the trip as a response to Taiwanese diplomatic movements and pressures (Shichor 1989: 25; *Republic of China, 1987: A Reference Book*, p. 437-438).

it seems that 'in order to balance against the United States, the Saudis were happy to accommodate on most issues save diplomatic ties' (Harris 1993a: 224).

5.3.3. Overcoming the Absence of Official Contacts through *Hajj* Messengers

Realising the key role Chinese Muslims and *hajj* missions could undertake in making *rapprochement* between Riyadh and Beijing, the Chinese authorities cleverly resorted again to utilising those missions throughout the 1980s as their messengers to further and enhance the Saudi tentative image about the change in Mainland China. Beijing, hence, wisely continued to regularly and increasingly send *hajj* annual missions to the Holy Sites in the Kingdom.

Historical evidence suggests that the news these missions conveyed to the Saudi leaders about the religious life of Chinese Muslims following the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping was influential on the course of Saudi-China relations. Such a conclusion is legitimate bearing in mind the influential stature of Islam and the religious leaders in the Saudi political system. It can be said that these religious visits and contacts contributed to the establishment of an unprecedented 'favorable opinion' of China among Saudi religious and political leaders (Bin Huwaidin 2002: 221).

For instance, as the Saudi Monarchs regularly used to receive Muslim *hajj* delegations from all over the world to inspect and get to personally know the conditions under which they live¹⁴⁶, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz in 1984 gave audience to the PRC's official *hajj* mission led by the Vice President of China Islamic Association, Ilyas Shen Xiaxi. During the meeting the Saudi Sovereign expressed his pleasure to see pilgrims of the PRC in *Mecca*, hoped to see bigger numbers the following year and wished the Chinese Muslims and other people of China happiness (*Xinhua*, September 14, 1984). Husain Hei Boli, Chairman of the Muslim-populated Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and the head of the PRC's official *hajj* mission in 1984, regarded his visit to the Kingdom as a 'complete success' and said that 'it had reaped a "bumper harvest" in political terms' (Shichor 1989: 8).

¹⁴⁶ These meetings with heads of *hajj* missions after they accomplish their pilgrimage rituals are annually carried out. The Saudi King who is officially named as the 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' is the supreme supervisor of the comfort of pilgrims (known as Guests of God). These meetings with leaders of Muslim communities from all over the world are seen as a coherent part of the legitimacy and prestige of the Saudi Royal Family. According to Piscatori, 'For the government, the pilgrimage is a self-imposed opportunity to demonstrate its paramount commitment to Islam and thus to certify its legitimacy' (Piscatori 2005: 222).

In a significant development and a positive response to the Saudi suggestion, the Chinese authorities relaxed their restrictions on China's Muslim minorities in the subsequent year and allowed more numbers of them to perform *hajj*. As a result, the official *hajj* mission witnessed a remarkable increase from only 330 pilgrims in 1984 to more than 2100 pilgrims in 1985. Not only that, but the Chinese authorities also established a special passport office to help process the *hajj* applications (*The Middle East*, September 1986, p.36).

The Chinese official *hajj* mission in 1985 under the lead of Ismail Amat (Ahmed), the Chairman of the Muslim-populated Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, was received by several senior Saudi officials including Prince Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz, the Saudi Deputy Minister of Defence and Aviation, who told them that he hoped the visit would reflect positively on enhancing mutual understanding between Saudi Arabia and China. Abdulrahman, moreover, hoped that more Chinese Muslims and 'other Chinese friends' would visit the KSA (*Xinhua*, December 3, 1985).

It is worth mentioning that the Saudi Pilgrimage Company inaugurated a special 'China Hajj Affairs Office' in the early 1980s as a result of the growing numbers of Chinese Muslims performing annual *hajj* (Harris 1993a: 224). The main task of this office was to facilitate and coordinate all the Chinese pilgrims' affairs including obtaining visas, organising their flights, residence, arrival and then departure¹⁴⁷.

The frequent positive messages carried by Chinese *hajj* missions appeared to have finally born fruit and thus there was an important meeting in Oman on November 19, 1985 between Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, then Saudi Crown Prince, and Yao Yilin, Chinese Vice-Premier which seems to have undertaken some good offices between the two countries. The Chinese media reported the meeting as 'a new page in the annals of relationship between China and Saudi Arabia' (*Xinhua*, November 19, 1985; *Beijing Review* December 16, 1985, p. 9).

In another significant development, Wu Xueqian, the Chinese Foreign Minister, expressed during a press conference held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that the PRC holds identical viewpoints with Saudi Arabia in many Middle

¹⁴⁷ China's Islamic Association (CIA) extended an invitation to the office to visit the PRC. Indeed Jamil Abdulrahman, the deputy director of the office, paid a visit to China and held some talks with the CIA's personnel related to the Chinese *hajj* missions in March 1987 (*Xinhua*, March 22, 1987).

Eastern issues including Iran-Iraq War and Afghanistan and that both countries have no conflict of interests. The minister clarified that there are some contacts between Riyadh and Beijing in all fields and that his country is ready to wait until the Saudis become convinced of the worthiness of normalising their relations with the PRC (*Xinhua*, December 22, 1985).

5.4. THE PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE PRC's QUEST FOR OFFICIAL RELATIONS WITH THE KSA

The recurring question of why the PRC was so committed to have official diplomatic relationships with the KSA during the 1980s remained without a full answer. Besides being a spiritual home to China's Muslim communities and a leading regional power, Saudi Arabia from a Chinese strategic perspective was a promising potential ally in its anti-Soviet foreign policy especially following the assassination of Sadat and the topple of Shah and in coincidence with constant Soviet flattering of Riyadh. The Kingdom also proved to be the only Arab party capable of influencing the American policies in the region especially following their success to pass the AWACS deal in spite of Israeli opposition. Unlike Egypt or Iran, the Saudis due to their religious and financial stature were not only expected to be regionally but also their survival through some domestic crises enhanced their image as less vulnerable to social, economic and religious instability in Beijing. Managing to establish diplomatic ties with Riyadh would be a huge diplomatic breakthrough for Beijing as this would mean that Taiwan has lost one of its main supporters in the international arena (Shichor 1982: 107; Gill 1992: 117).

Besides these strategic incentives, one might add another dimension worth noting related to getting access to the huge consumption market of Saudi Arabia and enhancing the existing bilateral economic and commercial ties. In fact, Beijing was eager to 'bag Saudi Arabia which was one of the few important countries still to recognize Taiwan, and as a country which offered commercial openings for Chinese goods and labour' (*Economist Intelligence Unit, Saudi Arabia*, No. 3 1984, p. 7).

Actually, this factor became in general one of the main determinants in shaping the PRC's foreign policy orientations throughout the 1980s as will later be discussed in the upcoming chapter. Despite the nonexistence of official diplomatic ties between Beijing and Riyadh, on the one hand, and the prosperous commerce relations between the latter and Taipei, on the other, trade exchange between the PRC

and the KSA continued to steadily operate and considerably grow after 1978. The Chinese goods found in the Kingdom a lucrative consumption market and since the mid 1980s the latter has become one of the PRC's largest trade partners in the Middle East. The Sino-Saudi commercial exchange has reached roughly USD 167 million in 1983, USD 161 million in 1984 and USD 156 million by 1985. Needless to say that during this era the trade balance was hugely in favour of China (*Direction of Trade Statics*, IMF).

It became clear that the Chinese stipulation of cutting diplomatic relations with Taipei as a precondition to form ‘fruitfull Sino-Saudi ties’ seemed to be mutely suspended in the Saudi case (*The Times*, August 1978; Calabrese 1991: 122, 147-148). It also became apparent that establishing official relations between the two capitals would undoubtedly give a strong push to the existing commercial and economic relations and take them to a higher level.

Table 1: Bilateral Trade exchange between the KSA & the PRC between 1980-1985*

Year	PRC Exports to KSA	KSA Exports to PRC
1980	\$ 136,100,000	\$ 15,500,000
1981	\$ 219,900,000	\$ 12,200,000
1982	\$ 182,700,000	\$ 10,000,000
1983	\$ 149,100,000	\$ 18,600,000
1984	\$ 132,900,000	\$ 28,000,000
1985	\$ 132,900,000	\$ 22,300,000

*Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics*, IMF.

5.5. WHY RIYADH REFUSED TO ESTABLISH FORMAL RELATIONS WITH BEIJING AT THAT TIME?

The recurring question is related to the Saudi motivations to refuse establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC despite evidence of a consensus among several diplomats and observers interviewed by the researcher, both Saudis and Chinese, that

the pragmatic shifts that occurred in Beijing's foreign policy in the late 1978s and the improvements in the fashion it began to treat its Muslim minorities since then had had notable positive impacts on the way the Saudi leadership came to view the PRC¹⁴⁸.

One cannot deny the fact that neither these Chinese positive transformations nor the Sino-Saudi common anti-Soviet regional interests during the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Middle Eastern arena that prompted the Saudi-Chinese *détente* that followed were enough to prompt Riyadh to make a substantial move towards establishing formal relations with Beijing. Most likely Saudis preferred a gradual *rapprochement* formula with Beijing for three reasons. The first, arguably, was in order to gain themselves extra time to inspect the authenticity of China's newly announced orientations. From a Saudi point view, if Beijing was willing to restore and bridge the trust gap between the two sides, its new policies would have to stand up to the continuity and credibility test.

The second reason sensibly stemmed from the fact that the newly emerging *rapprochement* between Riyadh and Beijing could not be allowed to outweigh the long-standing and multi-aspect Riyadh-Taipei relationship, especially in the economic field. Whereas trade exchange between Riyadh and Beijing in the best time during the first half of the 1980s was not more than USD 235 million/year and with a balance of payment hugely in favour of China as has earlier been indicated, Saudi-Taiwanese economic relations were 10 folds far better than that modest number. For example, trade exchange between Riyadh and Taipei between (1982-1984) has reached USD 2.7 billion and with a balance of payments enormously in favour of Saudi Arabia¹⁴⁹.

The third and most important reason seemed to be Riyadh's concerns that forming official relations with the PRC (as a Communist country) and exchanging embassies¹⁵⁰ at this stage could shake its political and religious credibility in the eyes of the Islamic world. The Saudi ruling elite knows very well the sensitivity of the position of their country as the cradle of Islam in the hearts and minds of Muslims all

¹⁴⁸ Author's private interviews with: H.E. Ambassador Dr. Yousef Al-Saadon (Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic & Cultural Affairs), H.E. Ambassador Dr. Raaid Ghermely (Director of West Europe Department), Dr. Saleh Al-Khathlan (Head of Department of Political Science, King Saud University) & Mr. Yuan Yuan (Attaché, Political Section - Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Riyadh). All of these interviews were conducted during April, 2008.

¹⁴⁹ While Saudi annual exports to Taiwan (mostly oil) during that era were worth more than USD 1.9 billion/year, the Taiwanese annual exports to Saudi Arabia were worth more than USD 700 million/year (Shichor 1989: 37-38).

¹⁵⁰ Security considerations cannot be downplayed in Riyadh's preference to have friendly relations with the PRC all over the 1980s yet without exchanging embassies with as Communist countries used to exploit and misuse such diplomatic mechanisms to serve their ideological purposes!

over the world. Not only that but Saudi subsequent Kings call themselves the custodians of the two holy mosques and derive a considerable portion of their legitimacy from this religious status and the support they provide to Muslims all over the world. They also have repeatedly and publicly expressed their principal antagonism to atheist and revolutionary doctrines, and it was in the name of Islam and countering atheist Communism¹⁵¹ that Riyadh opposed the USSR during the Soviet-Afghani war. Thus, instead of a sudden shift that could sharply contradict with its high-profile stated anti-Communist foreign policy and until the time becomes ripe for making such huge move, Riyadh throughout the early and mid 1980s seems to have favoured a long process of guarded yet steadily-growing nonofficial *rapprochement* with Beijing. This *rapprochement* took the form of rising religious visits and commercial exchange between the two sides to pave the way for enhancing mutual trust and understanding.

5.6. CONCLUSION

Adopting the policy of 'open door' and the four-point modernisation programme as a national strategy after the arrival of Deng Xiaoping to power in late 1978 were positively reflected on the way China treated its Muslim minority and its international behaviour. On the one hand, Muslims in China began to be tolerantly treated by the central authorities in Beijing and, therefore, they resumed their religious life and sending *hajj* missions to holy sites in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, pragmatism as well as national interest rather than Mao's ideology became the main determinants of China's foreign policy. These positive transformations contributed to make a slight change to the way through which Saudis used to perceive the PRC.

As China continued its efforts to contain Moscow's aspirations in the Middle East, the dramatic regional developments during late 1970s and early 1980s played a key role in creating a form of convergence of political interests between Riyadh and Beijing. The overthrow of the Iranian Shah in January 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 together overshadowed the course of Saudi-Chinese relations. Riyadh and Beijing shared not only antagonism to the increasing Soviet regional influence, but they also began after

¹⁵¹ Despite that Beijing relaxed its policies towards China's Muslim minorities and participated in the war effort against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, for the majority Muslims all over the Islamic World, Communist countries be it the USSR or the PRC are the same and Communism is an atheist doctrine that fights religions and faithful.

1982 to share, although for their own separate reasons, a growing disillusionment with the US. Such spontaneous but similar political inclinations have continued to positively impact the Saudi-China connection in some way or another.

For its part, the Chinese side seemed to have become aware of the existence of a distrust crisis between the PRC and the KSA in this era as a result of China's previous revolutionary practices in the region, side by side with its maltreatment of Muslim minorities during the CR period. Beijing, therefore, sought not to rush a quick Saudi diplomatic recognition but rather pursued a long-breath and a step-by-step strategy with Riyadh. Given the absence of any official contacts with the KSA and taking into account the important diplomatic role their Muslim minority could undertake in conveying a positive image about Mainland China, the Chinese resorted regularly to *hajj* missions as their diplomatic messengers and a stepping-stone to the Saudi political leadership.

While during the preceding period the Chinese had failed to gain the Saudi trust, it seems that as of 1979 there were some indirect contacts between Saudi and Chinese officials. The Saudis appear to have needed to see some tangible changes similar to those carried out after late 1978 and after Deng Xiaoping took office and hence they sent delegations of the Muslim World League to inspect the improvements that took place to the conditions under which Chinese Muslim live. Also they began to show some symbolic changes to the language in which they used to address the PRC in their media. The remarkable improvements of the Saudi-China economic relations and trade exchange rates reflected an obvious Saudi satisfaction with the new Chinese domestic and foreign orientations.

Although the PRC not only ceased to be a challenge to Riyadh since mid 1970s but also became an asset to the Saudi national security since the early 1980s through their bilateral indirect military cooperation against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Saudis preferred a gradual rapprochement with Beijing. This position stemmed from various Saudi considerations including having more time to examine the validity of China's reforms, avoid losing a profitable trade partner such as Taiwan and maintain their credibility in the Islamic world during the Soviet-Afghani War.

CHAPTER 6

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING AND POLITICAL NORMALISATION (1985-1990)

The PRC continued its economic and modernisation policies during the mid-1980s. With the passage of time, those policies gained more momentum and the Chinese leaders came to realise their vital need for international peace and stability to carry on their ambitious programme. China's foreign policy, as a result, reflected this realisation and themes such as: 'economic diplomacy', attracting foreign investments and 'independent foreign policy of peace' became major components of Beijing's discourse to the outside world. As the Chinese economic reforms accelerated, geostrategic considerations became less significant in shaping Beijing's policies in the Gulf region. Instead, an economic-oriented foreign policy surfaced and became more dominant in guiding the Chinese regional agenda.

The deterioration of Saudi Arabian regional security environment, on the one hand, and the US Congressional frequent refusals to provide Riyadh with some of its military requirements due to Israeli pressures, on the other, led the Saudis to seek an alternative source for their arms supplies. This source was ought to be away from Tel Aviv political influence and hence outside Riyadh's traditional western basis. Beijing was the new Saudi destination for this purpose.

This chapter will firstly discuss the determinants of China's new economic-motivated 'independent foreign policy for peace' and its reflections on Beijing's objectives in the Middle East. It will then discuss the motivations that led Saudi Arabia to approach Beijing with the intention of buying CSS-2 missiles. It will also shed light on the Chinese motivations to provide the Kingdom with strategic missiles. Then it will focus on the major religious and economic developments that took place on the pace of the two countries relationship during this era. Lastly, it will touch on the final touches that preceded the normalisation of Saudi-Chinese relations and the establishment of diplomatic relations in July, 1990.

6.1. CHINA'S 'SECOND REVOLUTION': THE END OF IDEOLOGY, THE DOMINANCE OF ECONOMICS AND THE INTERDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY

The reform policies adopted by Deng Xiaoping after late-1978 placed an emphasis on modernisation programmes, the expansion of foreign trade and incorporating China into the world economy¹⁵² at the expense of ideological aspirations and contention with superpowers. These policies found their way into the realm of foreign policy and clearly became increasingly embodied in China's external behaviour throughout the 1980s. This new trend was enhanced by a growing realisation of the realities of international economic interdependence and China's need for a peaceful environment to better serve its development program. It can be said, therefore, that since the mid 1980s, the 'fine-tuning' of China's foreign policy was the focal point of Deng Xiaoping's initiatives and policies (Hamrin 1990: 84).

With the economics taking the lead in the country's foreign agenda, this orientation came to be regarded by some political observers as China's 'second revolution'¹⁵³. This was justified since it entailed subjecting pivotal concepts such as ideology, revolution and development to a comprehensive appraisal and as such adopting a new world strategy that transcends narrow ideology and places emphasis instead on building foreign economic relations in international relations (Zhang 1998: 99, 127). As an indication of the Chinese transformations and Beijing's obsession with the issues of economic development and modernisation, it was not a surprise, for instance, that a number of China's senior leaders including Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and Zhao Ziyang, the Chinese premier of State Council, paid a noteworthy attention in lectures to the PRC's ambassadors at a meeting in 1985 on the importance of the concept of 'economic diplomacy' by which they meant utilising foreign relations as a means to serve development and modernisation (Harding 1987: 242).

Two important developments in the sphere of foreign policy came as direct outcomes of China's new way of thinking in the 1980s. The first was the proclamation of China's 'independent foreign policy' on September 1, 1982¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Especially after introducing the new economic strategy of Coastal Development Plan in 1987-1988, which aimed at closely linking the development of these coastal regions to international markets.

¹⁵³ See the works of Harding (1987) and Zhang (1998).

¹⁵⁴ This policy was announced for the very first time by Hu Yaobang, General Secretary of CPC, who stressed in his report to the 12th National Congress of the CPC that Beijing will adhere to an independent foreign policy and 'definitely not be swayed by expediency or by anybody's instigation or

(*Beijing Review*, September 13, 1982, p. 29-33). As per this new policy, Deng Xiaoping (1987: 47) announced that, China 'will not play the "United States card" or the "Soviet Union card". Nor will it allow others to play the "China card".'. In the same direction and as the 1980s progressed¹⁵⁵, the Chinese leadership perceived the inevitable relationship between international peace and their desire to achieve developmental objectives. In order to be able to accomplish their reform and modernisation aspirations, the Chinese became more and more interested in having a secure and stable international environment. In 1984, Deng Xiaoping (1985: 23-24) made that point clear when he stated that 'China needs at least twenty years of peace to concentrate on our domestic development'.

This conclusion prompted the second key development during this era, which came into existence in March 1986 through the announcement of China's 'independent foreign policy of peace'. After emphasising the importance of world peace for economic development and his country's desire to catch up with the developed countries economically through achieving the four modernisations programme, the Chinese premier of State Council, Zhao Ziyang (1985: 578), stressed that 'to achieve this end, we need an international environment of lasting peace, and the friendship and cooperation of all nations'. He added that 'Having learned from its experience since the end of the Second World War, China will not allow the state of its relations with other countries to be predetermined by considerations such as whether or not our social systems and ideologies are similar'. He elsewhere stressed that 'in the conduct of international affairs we determine our attitudes according to the merits of each case. The basic criterion by which we judge the right or wrong of a case is the contribution to peace, international friendship and world economic prosperity'. In sum, 'in the view of the People's Republic of China, there are two principal global and strategic issues: the East-West issue, or the issue of peace, and the North-South issue, or the issue of development' (1985: 577).

provocation' (the whole report is available at: *Beijing Review*, September 13, 1982, p. 11-40). This practically means that while the West has been seen as the major source of technology, equipment and Capital, a limited *détente* or *rapprochement* in its tentional relations with the USSR was in the best interest of China's four modernisation agenda. The Chinese leaders, thus, adopted a more relaxed and conciliatory attitude towards their security environment (Su 1984: 245-248; Su 1989: 109-127).

¹⁵⁵ Especially after carrying out the major changes in China's economy and applying a semi-capitalist reforms or what the Chinese officials like to call 'socialist modernisation' and 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' (*Beijing Review*, December 8, 1986, p. 14-17; Deng Xiaoping 1985 23-24; Schram 1993: 408-433). For the whole report delivered by the Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang, that discusses the state of the PRC's economy and also places emphases on the independent foreign policy of peace, see: (*Beijing Review*, April 21, 1986).

6.1.1. Altering China's Regional Objectives in the Middle East

In view of its fresh world outlook and the overriding priority it attached to economic modernisation and reform aspirations, China's regional objectives in the Middle East became subject to a fundamental change. The new Chinese regional goals might be summarised as: seeking credits or loans from rich Arab countries to feed its urgent need for development capital funds; coordinating and harmonising its oil policies, as an oil exporter, with those of the Arab states (*The Times*, August 29, 1978); getting access for China's industrial products to Gulf active and lucrative markets with the purpose of increasing its exports and improving its trade balance; obtaining the foreign currency it needs to finance its ambitious industrial modernisation programme, raise the competency of production and expand its share in the technological field (Tenirah 1988: 61); and encouraging and attracting foreign investments in mainland China especially from the Gulf states which own hard currency surpluses (*Beijing Review*, February 15-28 1988, p. 6-7 & June 6-12, 1988, p. 6-7). Above all the PRC was concerned about making a breakthrough in its relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which at the late-1980s was the only regional country that had no official relations with Beijing. Accomplishing this diplomatic target will definitely enhance and maximise the PRC's fortunes to achieve the objectives above-mentioned.

6.2. NEW CHAPTER IN THE SINO-SAUDI RELATIONSHIP

China's new international tendency in the mid-1980s to attach overriding priority to economic diplomacy and the adoption of the concept of 'independent foreign policy of peace' must have significantly enhanced the Saudi positive impression that had been initially made during the early 1980s about the PRC. The Chinese proved once again that they were trustworthy and that the transformations in their domestic and foreign policies were genuine and durable.

Besides the simple improvement that took place since the late 1970s, it can be argued that the real progress in the Saudi-Chinese relations owed more to the period between 1985-1990 which pivotally contributed to the restoration of mutual trust between Riyadh and Beijing, and eventually paved the way for the normalisation of their obstructed official bilateral relations. In this era, as will be discussed later, tangible and meaningful progress in the Sino-Saudi relationship was made in various

fields including the significant agreement on the Saudi purchase of the Chinese-made CSS-2 missile deal, conducting for the first time several Saudi-Chinese direct official interactions and last but not least an extraordinary growth in the commercial exchange and religious visits between the two sides. At this stage, it seems that strategic, economic and religious factors have worked together to create a favourable atmosphere of establishing formal relations with Beijing.

6.2.1. The Saudi Quest for Regional Military Deterrence

From 1982 onwards, the US-Saudi ties began to be characterised by tension¹⁵⁶ over some issues; these included differences on the Camp David Accords, the US policy in Lebanon, the American unenthusiastic stand towards Prince Fahd's peace plan and arms sales difficulties and resulting negative responses. It can be noted that by April 1984, the US-Saudi ties had considerably cooled as a result of two additional main developments. The first was the possibility to move the US American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem and the second was the US Congress refusal to sell Stinger antiaircraft missiles to Riyadh in the same year (Freedman 1987: 67). Such rejection demonstrated to the Saudis how hand-tied and deficient the US Administration was in the face of a Congress that was perceived in the Arab world as being Israeli-controlled¹⁵⁷ and which proved to have the upper hand in respect of arms and military equipments sales to Arab countries. Bearing in mind that the KSA since late 1970s began to consider the American responses to its demands of military equipments as a 'litmus test' of friendship, one can realise the far-reaching implications of any potential American refusal to provide Riyadh with the arms it needed to protect its national security (Long 1985: 137).

The Saudi intention, at that time, to consider shifting an air defence system deal worth USD 4.5 billion from the US to France and the invitation that was extended to the Soviet Ambassador to US to a dinner at the Saudi Embassy in Washington seemed to be clear manifestations of a Saudi 'move away from' Washington. This negative trend, according to Freedman, in Riyadh-Washington connection was only reversed when Saudi Arabia gained unequivocal security guaranties from the Americans following the Iranian attack on one of its oil tankers in

¹⁵⁶ As has earlier been outlined in chapter 5.

¹⁵⁷ The Pro-Israel lobbying groups in the U.S. Congress insisted that selling sophisticated armaments to any party in the Middle East (including the KSA definitely) would pose a threat to Israel's national security (Ryan 1987: 159-165).

the Gulf water in May 1984 during the Iran-Iraq War (Freedman 1987: 67). This incident appears to have led Riyadh to the conclusion that the US Administration was neither willing nor able to assist Riyadh and escape the Congress rejection except in critical times.

This Saudi deduction gained more reliability after a visit of King Fahd to Washington in February 1985 during which the White House announced a postponement of a huge new US-Saudi arm-sale awaiting further study. The influence of the AIPAC (American Israeli Public Affairs Committee) seemed self-evident in this decision¹⁵⁸. Moreover, during the period between February 1986 and April 1988, the KSA failed to obtain US armaments and military equipments due to Congressional block on five major deals including the supply of F-15s fighters, Maverick missiles, Stinger missiles, short-range surface-to-surface Lance missiles¹⁵⁹ and AWACS ground-support equipments¹⁶⁰ (Simons 1998: 247, 251; Harrison 1995: 20).

6.2.2. Turning towards the Eastern Warehouse

As a country that is located in one of the most important regions in the world and taking into consideration the mounting regional threats and dangers, the KSA needed to gain sufficient arms that would protect its national security and territorial integrity in addition to deterring any other country from waging any attack against it. Amid such growing security concerns, the American procrastination and the complicated restrictions on the usage of the US-origin armaments suggested to Riyadh that its 'special relationship'¹⁶¹ with the US was not adequate to justify its possession of weapons systems sufficient to protect its national security in the face of growing regional menaces. There can be no doubt that the Saudi questions about the US

¹⁵⁸ For an excellent and detailed account on the tremendous influence of the Israel lobby on the U.S. foreign Policy in general, see (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007).

¹⁵⁹ The U.S. refusal can be read also in the context of the noticeable deterioration of the USSR's danger to Saudi Arabia in this era along with the warmth that characterised Washington-Moscow relationships during the mid 1980s in what came to be known as superpower *détente* which was followed by the signature of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty in December 7, 1987. The INF treaty was designed to impose a global prohibition on both the deployment and transfers of missiles with range between 500-5000 Kilometer.

¹⁶⁰ For further information on those transactions, see (Cordesman 1987: 196-230).

¹⁶¹ Riyadh has considerably helped US efforts in fighting Communism internationally. For instance, in accordance with the U.S. foreign policy and were the Administration was restricted by Congressional objections, the KSA played significant world roles in protecting conservative regimes and countering revolutionary forces all over the world including Zaire, Angola and Nicaragua. For further details about this strong nexus, see (Miglietta 2002: 247-248; Marshall 1988: 12-13).

reliability¹⁶² as a provider of armaments were again brought to the surface and led the senior decision-makers in Riyadh to make the strategic decision of diversifying their military equipment providers and seeking another source that was free of Israel's¹⁶³ robust and decisive influence¹⁶⁴ (Al-Alkim 1994: 137).

Saudi security concerns became more urgent following two key dramatic developments that affected Riyadh's regional security milieu. On the one hand, the eruption of the 'war of the cities'¹⁶⁵ in the mid 1980s as one of the main stages of the Iran-Iraq War as part of which Iran considered Riyadh as a partner in the war against it and threatened to target its civilians as well as national interests including oil installations on the Gulf. On the other, the rising Israeli threat after Tel Aviv's successful test-launching of the newly developed Jericho-II long-range strategic ballistic missile (Calabrese 1991: 149).

Prince Bandar bin Sultan, former Saudi Ambassador to the US (1983-2005) and the co-architect of the missile deal along with his brother Prince Khalid¹⁶⁶, pointed out that following the American refusal to supply KSA with the F-15 aircraft and Lance missiles, he was instructed by King Fahd to ask the Chinese whether they would agree to provide the Kingdom with the missiles it needed. Under the guise that he will attempt to convince the Chinese to stop selling armaments and anti-ship Silkworm missiles to the Iranians by offering to buy these weapons and transfer them to Iraq. While the Americans believed that he was doing a deal on behalf of Iraq, he covertly ended up making an agreement with the Chinese for purchasing the

¹⁶² The U.S. credibility in Riyadh suffered a major blow following the outrageous revelations of secret U.S. arms transfers to Iran in 1987!

¹⁶³ In this regard, the KSA was also denied in 1984 to German battle tanks (Leopard-2) because of Israeli pressures exerted over Helmut Kohl, then the German Chancellor, during his visit to Tel Aviv in January of the same year (Al-Ghaderi 1985: 217-221).

¹⁶⁴ The American procrastinations led the Saudis to make a strategic choice of diversifying their armament suppliers and to turn towards Britain for USD 5 billion fighter air craft deal in 1986 (best known as (Al-Yamamah) project), France for air-defence radar, Brazil for artillery and China for the CSS-2 missiles. The diversification of arms sources became since then a mainstream orientation in the Saudi armament policy (Faaour 1989: 129). A political observer had earlier predicted that the U.S. 'refusal to sell military equipment to Saudi Arabia will open the door for someone else and in no way bring about greater restraint in worldwide arms sales' (Laird 1979: xi).

¹⁶⁵ In which both Iran and Iraq had used missiles to bombard each other's capitals inflicting heavy civilian casualties.

¹⁶⁶ Both of whom are sons of Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, The Saudi Defence Minister. Prince Khalid is a veteran soldier and a retired General. He was the Commander of both the Air Defence Forces and Strategic Missile Force, and then he became the Joint Forces Commander during the Gulf War in 1991. Prince Khalid currently is the Deputy Minister of Defense for Military Affairs since January 2001.

intermediate-range, surface-to-surface CSS-2¹⁶⁷ (known in China as DF-3¹⁶⁸ IRBMs “*Dongfeng*, namely East Wind”) ballistic missiles to the KSA¹⁶⁹.

Bandar, consequently, contacted Han Yu, the Chinese Ambassador to the US, and told him that he wished to visit Beijing for the purpose of buying strategic missiles. Since it was eager to score a diplomatic breakthrough in its relations with Riyadh, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted the visit¹⁷⁰ (Ning 1997: 113-114). During his trip¹⁷¹ to Beijing in the second half of March 1986, Prince Bandar indicated that when he spoke with the Chinese officials about the real reason for his visit and the Saudi desire to buy the CSS-2 missiles they were astounded by the Saudi request not only because of the absence of bilateral diplomatic relations and the fact that Riyadh at that time was still engaged diplomatically and officially with Taiwan¹⁷² as the sole legitimate representative of the Chinese people but also due to the fact that such strategic missiles could alter the regional power balance. Yet, after long negotiations¹⁷³, the Chinese side accepted in principle to approve the deal^{174, 175}.

In his biography, Prince Khalid bin Sultan, describes the key operational role he undertook both in Riyadh and during his four confidential visits to Beijing (the first of which took place in February 1987) to negotiate the technical details of the East Wind missile deal with the Chinese authorities. He reveals that ‘*al-Saqr*’ (the falcon) was the coded name he chosen for the shrouded in secrecy mission and that in

¹⁶⁷ Their range is usually between 2500-3000 km.

¹⁶⁸ For a useful discussion of the technical aspects of the DF-3 & DF-3A missiles, see (Di 1994: 170, 172).

¹⁶⁹ Documentary on: *King Fahd Diplomacy during the Iran-Iraq War* (in Arabic); also available at: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=FQnQ5Oqet6s&feature=related>.

¹⁷⁰ Prior to getting the Chinese initial approval of the Saudi request, Pakistan was the venue in which the elementary contacts during July 1985 took place between Prince Bandar and the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian. In his memoirs Prince Bandar indicates that following the Chinese acceptance in principle of the Saudi demand, he was invited to visit Beijing (Simpson 2006: 152).

¹⁷¹ Under the guise of selling some petrochemical products, Bandar went to Beijing again in 1986 and in order to camouflage the real purpose of his trip he was accompanied in his private jet by some Saudi specialists in the petrochemical industry including Prince Abdullah bin Faisal bin Turki the Director-General of Al-Jubail and Yanbu Civilian Authority.

¹⁷² It was obvious at that stage that Saudis were merely interested in acquiring the deterrent Chinese surface-to-surface missiles against any possible threat from Israel or Iran. Though they were not yet ready to give up official ties with Taipei, they showed willingness to continue to improve ties with Beijing. This promise seemed reasonable to the Chinese side, which showed understanding of this offer (Ning 1997: 114; Simpson 2006: 153).

¹⁷³ Prince Bandar ironically describes that situation by saying that ‘I was in the middle of Communist officers and generals. And I had spent my life fighting Communism’ (Simpson 2006: 155).

¹⁷⁴ Bandar was taken by his hosts of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to view an indoor demonstration of preparations and mock firings of the DF-3 IRBM. The PLA hosts told the Saudi Prince that he was the first foreigner to attend such show (Ning 1997: 114).

¹⁷⁵ Documentary on: *King Fahd Diplomacy during the Iran-Iraq War* (in Arabic); also available at: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=FQnQ5Oqet6s&feature=related>.

the wake of getting the Chinese initial approval of the deal he was commissioned to start seven-day negotiations between the Saudi side under his command and the Chinese side under the lead of Lieutenant General Cao Gangchuan in Riyadh between December 16-23, 1986. Their negotiations pivoted around drafting an outline of the project including technical and logistic issues such as shipment, constructing launch sites along with ground support systems and training.

In his trips to Beijing, Prince Khalid indicates that he used to directly contact Yang Shangkun, then a member of the Politburo and First Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, who in a meaningful sign, arranged for him to visit a Chinese missile base where he saw the DF-3A missile armed with a nuclear warhead and powered by a liquid-fuel rocket motor in an operational setting. Prince Khalid, mentions that he was told he was the first foreigner to be given such privilege (Bin Sultan & Seale 1996: 137-150).

6.2.3. The Chinese Motivations to Make the Deal

The repeated American refusal to sell arms to Saudi Arabia during the mid 1980s represented a window of opportunity to the Chinese officials who had the hope of making some headway in breaking the present deadlock in their relation with Riyadh. The Chinese probably thought that through providing Saudi Arabia with an unknown number¹⁷⁶ of CSS-2 missiles, Beijing could show and materially substantiate to the Saudis that it could serve as an asset to their stability and security. In this sense and in view of the strategic and financial benefits of such deal to Beijing, it can be said that the Chinese officials wanted to hit two birds with one stone.

China's established tactic of refusing to sell military equipments and only granting or providing arms in limited cases for the sake of creating or furthering its political leverage in the Third World was abandoned¹⁷⁷. 'Over the past few years, however, the need for foreign exchange to support economic modernisation has led to

¹⁷⁶ The number of missiles is unrevealed officially. While *The Guardian* (March 19, 1988) said that they were 36 missiles and 9 launchers, other sources reported varied numbers such as: at least 25 missiles, 36 missiles and 50 missiles. See respectively (Harris 1993a: 225; Mullins 1995: 140; Documentary on: *King Fahd Diplomacy during the Iran-Iraq War* (in Arabic); also available at: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=FQnQ5Oqet6s&feature=related>).

¹⁷⁷ The central government starting from the 11th CCP Congress in December 1978 not only decided a gradual reduction in its contribution to the national defence budget but also encouraged military institutions to assume greater responsibility in funding their own operations and modernisation needs, including purchasing advanced foreign military technology, via seeking various ways to raise their profits (Woon 1989: 607-608; Hyer 1992: 1107).

a reversal of this policy. Military sales are now a significant foreign exchange source and should become even more important in the future' (Jammes 1984: 128). Within this context, the commercial dimension was one of Beijing's main motivations to approve the Saudi package¹⁷⁸. This deal, firstly, allowed the Chinese military institutions to finance its modernisation needs and obtain the hard currency it needs¹⁷⁹. Secondly, it gave the PRC an opportunity to increase its stakes-holding in the Gulf lucrative arm market¹⁸⁰ as well as breaking the Western monopoly¹⁸¹ of the Saudi imports of armaments in particular.

Having said that, one should not neglect the geostrategic dimensions of such arms deals as a vital instrument of the PRC's foreign policy and after being 'motivated primarily by economic and technological considerations, [they became] supplemented lately also by political and strategic ones' (Shichor 1988: 320). In fact, taking part in the international arms market besides the US, USSR and West European suppliers could contribute to asserting the PRC's genuine desire for a prestigious or 'big power' status (Woon 1989: 610). Calabrese, similarly, attributes China's arms transfers to the region in general to two motivations. The short term one was creating foreign exchange and the long term one was establishing a regional political influence (Calabrese 1990: 873).

In this matter, Garver and Kim argue that besides being a significant addition to China's commercial exports during the 1980s, 'the sale of CSS-2 intermediate range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia in 1987 was influenced by a desire to lure away one of Taiwan's few remaining significant international supporters' (Garver 1993: 229-230; Kim 1994: 149). Gurtov and Hwang share the same opinion and argue

¹⁷⁸ During his negotiations with the Chinese representatives, Prince Khalid puts the accent on the notion that his main card was 'evident eagerness that we should pay in cash' (Bin Sultan & Seal 1996: 141). This statement refutes the press report that claims that the deal was financed by barter trade in which the Saudi Government paid for the deal through oil exports and a shipment of 300,000 tonnes of Saudi wheat (*Financial Times* March 22, 1988). The deal, according to various resources, was worth between 3-3.5 USD billion (*Wall Street Journal* April 4, 1988; Woon 1989: 604; Harris 1993a: 225; Eikenberry 1995: 9; Mullins 1995: 141).

¹⁷⁹ From a financial perspective, the Chinese praised their missile deal with Riyadh as '*gande piaoliang* (beautifully done)' (Di 1992: 176). According to some unofficial estimates, the Chinese military institution was allowed to keep up to 85% of the revenue of arms sales and such thing explains its enthusiasm to conduct these deals (*The Economist*, May 14, 1988).

¹⁸⁰ The Gulf levels of military expenditure per capita were the highest worldwide during the mid 1980s and 1990s (Gause, III 1997: 12-14).

¹⁸¹ The media furor made following the revelation of the Saudi-Chinese missile deal led Wu Xueqian, China's Foreign Minister at that time, to say that the PRC was not the only country that provides arms to the region in a unmistakable reference to the U.S., the USSR and Western Europe (*Los Angeles Times* July 6, 1988).

that the Saudi-Chinese missile deal exemplified the various motivations behind arms sales as it was intended to convince Riyadh to swap diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC and it succeeded¹⁸² in doing so (Gurtov & Hwang 1998: 214).

Both Gill and Mullins read the Chinese endorsement of the Saudi missile deal within the context of furthering Beijing's influence and presence in the Middle East and its traditional opposition, based on its perceptions of threat and national security, to the dominance of any single superpower in the region (Gill 1992: 116; Mullins 1995: 140). This is arguably true especially following the announcement of Beijing's independent foreign policy in 1982 and the Chinese genuine desire to deliver a clear message to the Saudis that it could be a key figure in the calculation of its security and political stability.

It is worth mentioning that while some observers (Lewis et. al. 1991: 96; Bachman 1994: 51) argue that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) objected to the deal and it was only approved following the personal intervention of Deng Xiaoping, Ning (1997: 145) confirms that such claim is 'erroneous' and that '[n]either did the MFA object to nor was Deng Xiaoping personally involved in the decision'. Ning stresses that following Prince Bandar's departure, there was an inter-ministerial discussion of the suggested deal and it was obvious that both the MFA and the PLA were in favour of the package albeit for their own different motivations. Whereas the former saw in the deal a platform through which they advance engagement with the Saudis in additional bilateral relations in various fields which would ultimately end up by forming diplomatic ties as promised by Prince Bandar, the latter was mainly motivated by commercial reasons as the transaction would be a bonus for the 'cash-starved PLA' (Ning 1997: 115).

It is believed here, however, that the Chinese MFA had had no objection to the deal since it had agreed to extend the invitation to Prince Bandar to visit Beijing in the first place and that this evidently implies its early approval of the deal. It can be argued, moreover, that it was indeed Deng Xiaoping who personally took such

¹⁸² Still others who insist that the Chinese in the CSS-2 deal were exclusively motivated by financial reasons and argue that the establishment of Sino-Saudi diplomatic relations in 1990 'should be viewed merely as a by-product of the sale' (Hyer 1992: 1114; Eikenberry 1995: 8-9). Such argument, in our opinion, is mistaken because, on the one hand, they lack accuracy and comprehensiveness and they pay no attention to the fact that normalising Riyadh-Beijing relations was a core issue during the talks held between Prince Bandar and the Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang, before making the missile deal (Simpson 2006: 154).

decision¹⁸³ because of three logical reasons. The first might be attributed not only to the absence of official relations between Beijing and Riyadh but also to the insistence of the latter on preserving its diplomatic ties with Taipei and its refusal to break them as a precondition to get the Chinese green light for the deal. Providing Riyadh with the missiles in this situation would score a huge Saudi diplomatic success especially if we know that the PRC refused to normalise its relations with the US until the latter complied to its precondition of breaking its diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The second reason might be related to strong Chinese concerns that such a deal could contradict with the Chinese policy of non-alliance and the five principles of peaceful coexistence¹⁸⁴. The third reason lies in the sensitive nature of the topic concerned and that such strategic decision might have entailed it being taken at the summit level.

6.2.4. Straining Saudi-American Relations Following the Discloser of the Deal

In March 4, 1988 *The Washington Post*, and after that most of the American leading newspapers, revealed the Saudi acquisition of the CSS-2 missiles¹⁸⁵ with a range of over 1500 miles stressing that they are capable of carrying nuclear warheads and hitting targets across the Middle East. This news provoked some unhappy official American responses and resulted in increased tensions in the US-Saudi relation (Simpson 2006: 157-167). These were to last for some time, especially following Congressional calls to the administration to re-examine the US policy on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and in parallel with a delay in a package of military equipments worth 450 USD million that was planned to go to Riyadh (*The Washington Post* March 4, & March 29, 1988; *The New York Times* March 18, March 29, & April 15, 1988).

One of the manifestations of such tension was the expulsion of the US Ambassador to Riyadh, Hume Horan, after only six months of his appointment following his importunate and indecorous protests over the deal before King Fahd¹⁸⁶ (*International Herald Tribune* April 2-3, 1988; *The New York Times*, December 11,

¹⁸³ In his biography, Prince Bandar reports that he was told such thing (Simpson 2006: 154).

¹⁸⁴ These concerns were assured by the Saudi government which made a clear pledge of 'no transfer [to third party], no first use, and to use these missiles entirely for defensive purposes' (*Los Angeles Times* July 6, 1988).

¹⁸⁵ The missile virtually started to arrive from the PRC to the KSA by late 1987 (Mullins 1995: 140).

¹⁸⁶ Some experts in China's Middle East foreign policy, Westerns and Arabs, inaccurately believe that the American Ambassador, Hume Horan, to Riyadh was summoned by Washington as a result of his failure to discover and report the Saudi-Chinese missile deal. For such viewpoint, see (Ahmed 2004: 32; Shichor 1989: 31; Harris 1993a: 225). The factual reality is that he was expelled as the Saudi Monarch regarded this action as 'undue interference in the Saudi defense policy' (Bin Sultan & Seal 1996: 151).

1988). In the same context, General Norman Schwarzkopf underlines that during his visit to the KSA in 1988 following his appointment as the Commander-in-Chief of the US Central Command in the Middle East, he had received a cold reception from the Saudi high command (Schwarzkopf 1992: 275). In a special interview given to the *Middle East Insight*, Walter Cutler, the former American Ambassador to Riyadh, 1986-1988, said that 'being perceived as an unreliable partner, it was very unfortunate. That was perhaps the low point in our security relationship, and its effects persisted for a while' (*Middle East Insight* 1995: p.49).

Related to this, an American request later on to inspect the missiles ascertain if they carry nuclear heads was declined by the Saudi government which rather preferred to give assurances¹⁸⁷ that those missiles merely held conventional high explosive warheads¹⁸⁸ (*Xinhua*, June 28, 1988; Faaour 1989: 119; Bin Sultan & Seale 1996: 150). King Fahd clearly stated that

I believe that you are aware of the row made about the missiles. The Kingdom is free to purchase arms from any country where it thinks it can find the kind of arms it needs ... We confirmed to those who asked us that the missiles which we possess have neither nuclear heads nor Chemical materials. They are just defence missiles and nothing else. It is not strange for the kingdom to purchase defence weapons to defend its belief and country (*Saudi Gazette*, April 9, 1988).

The American unwelcoming reaction to the deal might be attributed to the notion that the acquisition of strategic missiles 'represented a turning point in Saudi Arabia's defense strategy' that gave the Saudi decision makers a leverage and larger margin of maneuver regarding the Kingdom's relations with superpowers¹⁸⁹ and had definitely lessened Riyadh's reliance on the West as the sole provider of expensive¹⁹⁰ arms and military equipments (Bin Sultan & Seal 1996: 138; Bitzinger 1992: 108; Lee 1987: 34).

¹⁸⁷ Those assurances were also enhanced by the Saudi Government's announcement that it will join the treaty limiting the spread of nuclear arms (*The New York Times* April 26, 1988).

¹⁸⁸ Tel Aviv declared that it considers launching a pre-emptive strike against the Saudi CSS-2 sites (may be on the model of its pre-emptive blow against alleged Iraqi Osirak nuclear facilities in 1981), yet the U.S. and France (*The Times* March 21 & March 26, 1988; *The New York Times* March 26, 1988; *Financial Times* March 26, 1988; *Al-Watheghah Al-Islamiah*, April, 1988, p. 4).

¹⁸⁹ Cordesman stresses that in its relations with the U.S., Saudi Arabia 'felt the purchase would be a major demonstration of its independence' (Cordesman 1997: 179).

¹⁹⁰ One political observer argues that clienteles of the PRC's armaments find them attractive as 'representing relatively low technology, easy maintenance and operation and fairly low cost' in comparison with high priced Western equivalents (Woon 1989: 604).

Needless to say the Sino-US relations had also suffered tensions over China's arms sales to the Middle Eastern countries in general including the Silkworm and CSS-2 deals which were seen by Washington as conflicting with its regional interests along with its international endeavours to prohibit the transfer of strategic intermediate missiles and as a result imposed economic sanctions restricting the export of high technology products to Beijing (Ross 1995: 243; Sinha 2003: 75).

Though it is sometimes argued (Abidi 1981: 115; Harris 1993a: 223) that the Chinese arm sales to Iran was a key 'stumbling block' on the route to developing Saudi-Chinese relations, it is contended here that the opposite might be true. The Sino-Iranian military relations had alerted the Saudis to the importance of having strategic relationships with the Chinese side as a backdoor for their military needs wherever they were confronted by US Congressional constraints or rejections.

The missile deal, on the other side, represented an historical turning point in the course of the Saudi-Chinese relations and unlike in the past, the Chinese proved to be an important asset for the national security and stability of the Saudi Kingdom. The package, furthermore, allowed the KSA and the PRC to achieve a closeness that was not conceivable a few years previously. That could be attributed to the fact that the negotiation process of transaction technical details allowed the Chinese officials to get to know firsthand the Saudi senior officials and establish personal relationships with them¹⁹¹.

6.3. A POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGH: ESTABLISHING DIRECT OFFICIAL CONTACTS

Late 1986 saw the first ever direct and public official contact between Riyadh and Beijing. This remarkable watershed arose from the economic gateway and represented a new breakthrough from the indirect basis that governed the Saudi-China relationship for a very long time after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The initiative was

¹⁹¹ In this regard, for example, Prince Khalid mentions that following his retirement from the armed forces in June 1991, he was visited in Riyadh by a Chinese delegation that told him that 'We will always remember you. We have for you the same regard we have for Dr. Henry Kissinger!' (who played a key part in the normalisation of the Sino-U.S. relations during the early 1970s. Prince Khalid indicates that he was touched to hear such statement (Bin Sultan & Seal 1996: 142). After his retirement, Prince Khalid paid two visits to China in March 1995 and in May 1996 to 'lecture Chinese on Gulf War' and then to attend the inauguration marking the publishing of the Chinese edition of his autobiographic 'Desert Warrior', respectively. During both visits, Prince Khalid held meetings with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Premier, Li Peng, and Vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), Liu Huaqing. Chinese senior officials praised him as a 'good friend of China' (*Xinhua*, March 28, 1995; *Xinhua*, May 21, 1996; *Riyadh Daily* May 19, 1996).

given by the economic sector and a Saudi official trade team under the lead of Abdulaziz Al-Qurayshi, then the Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, paid for the first time ever on November 9, 1986 a ten-day visit to the PRC with the intention of exploring the possible investment and business opportunities and boosting the exports and imports between the two countries. In a meaningful gesture, the twelve-member Saudi entrepreneurs delegation was received by Zhao Ziyang, the Chinese Premier, who clearly attached great importance to reinforcing Sino-Saudi relations and economic cooperation and showed his respect to the Saudi neutral and nonaligned policies. At the end of the visit, the Saudi delegation was keen to extend an official invitation to the Chinese side to visit the KSA (*Xinhua*, November 9, November 15, & November 16, 1986; *Arab News*, November 17, 18, 1986; *Al-Riyadh*, November 17, 1986).

This fundamental transformation in the Saudi attitude towards Beijing was an outcome of a number of subsequent developments in the Sino-Saudi relationship: the noticeable improvements of China's Muslims' state of affair in comparison with the previous bad situations during the pre-1978 period; the step-by-step and persistent strategy Beijing patiently pursued in its *rapprochement* with Riyadh which focused on continuing sending positive and friendly gestures¹⁹² to Riyadh, maintaining its stated 'independent foreign policy of peace' as well as 'economic diplomacy' hand in hand with nonstop endeavours to project itself as an emerging peaceful international power and an asset to the peace and stability of the region; the Saudi-China regional convergence of interests and indirect successful cooperation during both the Iran-Iraq and Soviet-Afghan Wars respectively; and finally the Chinese positive response to the Saudi request of acquiring the CSS-2 strategic missiles and the secret diplomatic and military contacts that followed since the mid 1985 contributed to the creation of a better mutual understanding between Riyadh and Beijing and thus paved the way for bridging the confidence gap the Saudis have always felt towards the PRC.

¹⁹² The last gesture, for example, was in August 1987 in which the PRC sought to assert its interest in the stability and security of the KSA following *Mecca* riot incidents made by some Iranian pilgrims on July 31, 1987 during *Hajj* season resulting in the death of 402 people after clashes with Saudi Police forces. The Chinese Foreign Ministry on August 4, 1987 described the incident as 'deplorable'. *Beijing Review*, on its side, warned that 'the incident might lead to a new wave of terrorism and set the stage for a new theater of war in the Middle East and Gulf area' (*Beijing Review*, August 17, 1987 p. 13). For further details about this incident, see (Aborhmah 2005: 32; Goldberg 1990: 159, 165; Rezun 1990: 18).

In return and for the first time-ever in the history of Saudi-Chinese relations, a thirteen-member Chinese delegation of entrepreneurs arrived in Riyadh on November 17, 1987 for a ten-day goodwill visit. The Chinese economic delegation led by Jia Shi, the Director of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) toured several Saudi cities including Riyadh, Jeddah, Jubail and Yanbu and on November 24, 1987 was received by Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, the Second Deputy Prime Minister and the Defence and Aviation Minister. During the important meeting, the Saudi senior official stressed free movement of goods between the two countries, showed his happiness about recent progress in economic and trade ties and hoped to set up a greater cooperation in the fields of trade, investment, industry and labour services.

For its part, the Chinese side expressed its hope that Chinese companies would qualify for project loans and assistance provided by the Saudi Development Fund every year to developing countries. The Chinese thirteen-member delegation comprised some officials, bankers and experts in the petrochemical industry and held several meetings with Saudi officials and businessmen¹⁹³ (*Xinhua*, November 16, 18, 24, 25, 1987; *Arab News* November 20, 24, 1987; *The Middle East*, March 1988, p. 41; *China Daily* December 6, 1987).

Shortly and within the framework of enhancing direct bilateral relations, the Saudi Minister of Agriculture, Abdulaziz Al-Ashaikh, flew to the PRC in January 1988. During his visit, Al-Ashaikh held meetings with President, Li Xiannian, and Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian. The Saudi minister was described by *Xinhua* as a 'special envoy' of King Fahd and was quoted to have praised the progress in the Saudi-Chinese bilateral relations during the last few years (*Xinhua*, January 23, 1988).

6.4. A QUALITATIVE MOVE IN RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

China's *Hajj* missions continued to play an important role in enhancing *rapprochement* between Riyadh and Beijing. It seems that the missile deal and the establishment of direct official contacts as well as the improvement of Saudi-Chinese trade relations were positively reflected in the volume of these delegations that saw also another increase in the number of their members. While official sources states

¹⁹³ One can notice from the way those delegations were received in both Beijing and Riyadh that the leaders of the PRC and KSA have attached a great significance to improve bilateral relations between the two countries through the commerce gateway and that those visits have borne more than merely economic connotations.

that 1000 *Hajj* applications were granted, unofficial estimates stress that the number of Chinese Muslims who performed *Hajj* in 1987 was approximately 5000 (*The Middle East* September 1987, p. 21).

Religious ties between the Saudis and China's Muslim communities, on the other hand, witnessed remarkable breakthroughs. The first was the another visit to China by Sheikh Muhammad Al-Oboudi in June 1987 to inspect Chinese Muslim communities in the areas that were not covered during the last visit in 1984 and to organize a training course for mosque imams and Islamic leaders in cooperation with China's Islamic Association (CIA). Yet, this proposal was rejected by Central authorities in Beijing under the excuse that accepting foreigners as teachers will represent an intervention in Chinese domestic affairs and will open the door for non-Muslim Chinese believers to ask for a similar treatment. Thus the two sides instead agreed to organize a five-day international Islamic conference in Beijing during the same year (Al-Oboudi 1999: 24, 56-57).

Indeed the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL) in cooperation with CIA managed to fund and organise a five-day international Islamic conference in Beijing on December 4, 1987. The conference¹⁹⁴, which was attended by 300 renowned Muslim leaders from all over the Islamic World including Turkey, Sudan, Egypt, Pakistan and Ghana held several working sessions all of which have received a high-profile coverage in the Saudi and Chinese media. The (Saudi) Secretary General of the MWL, Dr. Abdullah Naseef, stressed in his opening speech that 'laying bridges of cooperation with China's Muslims' was one of the main targets of this conference (*Xinhua*, December 3, 1987; *Al-Riyadh*, November 25, & December 3, 1987; *Okaz*, December 6, 1987 & January 14, 1988).

During the conference, it was announced that Saudi Arabia will provide one million copies of Holy Koran to China's Muslims and will participate in Mosque construction and Islamic education in China (*Al-Riyadh*, December 3, 1987; *Okaz*, December 6, 1987). The conference also resulted in the decision to hold two symposiums in Beijing University in conjunction with the Islamic scientific foundations including the MWL one of which about the Islamic civilisation and the other one on the means and ways to develop teaching Arabic in China (Yamani 1990:

¹⁹⁴ The conference was aimed at discussing the ways and means of promoting the Islamic awareness among Chinese Muslims. For a comprehensive coverage of the conference, see (*The Journal of Muslim World League* January & February 1988, p. 14-17).

121). In his interview with *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Dr. Naseef emphasised that the MWL was encouraged to hold such international conference because of both 'the openness shown by Peking towards the outside world and its fresh attitudes towards the Muslims' (*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, December 21, 1987).

An expert in China's Middle Eastern foreign policy commented on that conference as follows: 'The largest contingent to the conference, the first of its kind to be held in a Communist country, was provided by Saudi Arabia. Willingly or not, Islam had become intertwined with politics' (Shichor 1989: 10). Taking into account that China since the mid 1980s started to explicitly urge its Muslim minorities to boost links with the Islamic countries in the hope that the latter will result in an increase in economic investment in the PRC, it is believed that Dr. Shichor may have omitted to pinpoint as well that not only politics but economics too have become intertwined with religion (*The Middle East* March 1988, p. 42).

Following his participation in the conference, Muhammad Abdu Yamani, the former Saudi Minister of Information, wrote a small booklet under the title *قادم من بكين والإسلام بخير* (*Coming back from Peking and Islam is fine*), about his memoirs and what he saw during his trip to Beijing. The title plainly indicates that he was relatively satisfied about the situations and conditions of Chinese Muslims at that time. Dr. Yamani (1990: 57-83) made an attempt to highlight the main positive changes undertaken by the Communist authorities in Beijing towards its Muslim communities after late 1978 such as the relative religious freedom policy applied by the local authorities which resulted in allowing China's Muslims to practice their religious rituals more freely and the relaxation of the previous strict restrictions on performing annual *Hajj*.

The conference seems to have achieved China's political, economic not to mention religious goals. This conclusion can be drawn from Dr. Yamani's remarks about the fundamental economic changes that occurred in the PRC and also his strong recommendations to Riyadh to support China's Muslim minorities particularly in Ningxia and Xinjiang through importing workforce from these regions to work in the huge Saudi construction projects, establishing joint investment, and enhancing economic relations with those regions (Yamani 1990: 27-36). The booklet, also, sent a clear, encouraging message to Riyadh to pursue a policy of openness and cooperation with the PRC in various fields including the economic and cultural spheres as a potential economic and political superpower, given that any progress or improvement

in relations between Riyadh and Beijing would be positively reflected on the Chinese Muslim minorities¹⁹⁵ (Yamani 1990: 110-130).

6.5. THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION IN THE RAPPROACHEMENT CALCULUS

Realising that Riyadh at this point was not quite ready to exchange official diplomatic relations with it, Beijing thought that it could benefit from its improving relations with the Saudi side by promoting trade relations between the two countries. It would seem that the Chinese showed their faith in building the confidence bridges through the economic and trade gateway after religious contacts had made a considerable success in this regard. It can be said, therefore, that in the absence of official and diplomatic relations, commercial contacts and exchanges had played a significant part in enhancing the Saudi-Chinese *rapprochement*.

By doing so, the Chinese practically satisfied the Saudi demand not to rush an official political relationship with them and also reasserted their pursuit of a new world outlook that gave overriding priority to promoting China's modernisation and development programme through focusing on economic diplomacy and attracting foreign investments¹⁹⁶. Likewise, through enhancing this dimension of Saudi-Chinese relationship they could try to balance or at least catch up with the advanced and excellent Saudi-Taiwanese commercial exchanges.

Thus, it can be said that the two countries decided during the period (1985-1989) to temporarily put aside the more complicated political and diplomatic issues. The focus in this era was rather paid by the two sides to the much easier but still significant economic and commercial issues that were regarded as a necessary step in the right direction to achieve and enhance mutual trust and understanding.

¹⁹⁵ One cannot rule out the notion that this small book was originally an assessment report submitted in the first place to the Saudi senior foreign policy makers following Dr. Yamani's trip to Beijing since it has come in the form of a general assessment not only of the situation of Chinese Muslims before and after the Communist rule but also it discusses the economic transformations that took place in the PRC and contains some executive recommendations, suggestions and visions similar to those given to decision makers in certain key issues. The date of its publishing, furthermore, indicates possibly that it was only revealed to public 3 years after the trip took place and following the establishment of Saudi-Chinese diplomatic ties.

¹⁹⁶ Yang Fuchang, the PRC Ambassador to Kuwait (1984-1987), summarises Beijing's vision to its relations at that time with the Arab Gulf states especially Saudi Arabia which represented its prime target as follows: 'We can complete each other. Arab Gulf capital and China's mineral resources and manpower' (*The Middle East* September 1986, p. 33).

Accordingly, China¹⁹⁷ in this period encouraged the Saudis to visit and to develop economic relations in particular with China's autonomous Muslim minorities areas of Xinjiang and Ningxia. These Chinese efforts bore fruit and succeeded in obtaining some loans and investments from Saudi Arabia. Not only that but, the Saudi government encouraged the private sector¹⁹⁸ to inject money into the Chinese economy either directly through joint venture investment or indirectly through equity holdings in some banks and financial institutions in Hong Kong (*The Middle East* September 1986, p. 33, 39; *The Middle East* September 1987, p. 20; Calabrese 1992-1993: 472).

In this context and with the special permission of Chinese government, the Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt¹⁹⁹ entered a joint venture with Ningxia Islamic International Trust and Investment Corporation in March 1986 to establish China's first Islamic bank in Yinchuan, the regional capital of mainly Muslim Ningxia autonomous region. The new bank was the first Sino-foreign trust and investment joint venture in inland China. It was named The Islamic International Investment Company (IIIC)²⁰⁰ and was said to operate according to Islamic banking principles (*The Middle East* September 1986, p. 39; *Beijing Review*, February 1-7, 1988, p. 15). It was reported, as well, that a group of Saudi businessmen under the leadership of Ismail Abu-Dawood paid a several-day visit to the PRC during November 1988 with the purpose of exploring potential business opportunities (*The Washington Post* October 28, 1988; *Asharq Al-Awsat* November 12, 1988).

Relatedly, the Saudi-based Al-Baraka Group concluded an agreement with the Ningxia Islamic International Trust and Investment Corporation to establish a joint investment company in Yinchuan to further economic cooperation among Muslim's region. Al-Baraka Group, hence, agreed to pay USD 48 million out of USD 80 million which represents 60% of the capital and assets of the newly established Al-Baraka- Ningxia Islamic International Trust and Investment Company (*FBIS/CHI/89/065*, April 6, 1989, p. 15-16).

¹⁹⁷ Chinese regarded this as a model for South-South cooperation.

¹⁹⁸ In this regard, for instance, it was reported that some personnel of the Saudi-based Islamic Development Bank had participated in an international conference on boosting Ningxia's economic and technical cooperation with Islamic countries, which was held in Yinchuan during September 1985 (*Xinhua*, September 28, 1985; *The Middle East* September 1986, p. 34).

¹⁹⁹ This bank is part of a Saudi Islamic banking group established privately by the Saudi Prince Mohammed Al-Faisal (son of King Faisal) in some Arab and Islamic countries.

²⁰⁰ Another source refers to the bank as the Ningxia Faisal Islamic International Financial Investment Co. (*Beijing Review*, February 1-7, 1988, p. 15).

While a commercial team made the first Saudi direct and open official contact with the PRC in late 1986, the Chinese response came one year later through a Chinese economic delegation in November 1987. The Chinese successful visit, for example, resulted in China agreeing to buy 340,000 tonnes²⁰¹ of petrochemical products (including Plastic, Chemical fertilisers and Urea) of the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) at an estimated cost of USD 65 million²⁰² (*Arab News*, November 26, 1987; *China Daily* December 7, 1987; *The Middle East* March 1988, p. 41).

Moreover, the Grain Silos and Flour Mills Organisation (GSFMO) in Riyadh agreed at the end of this year to provide the PRC with some of its needs of the Saudi wheat. The shipment was said to be roughly 300,000 tonnes of wheat (*Al-Riyadh*, December 29, 1987; *Asharq Al-Awsat* December 29, 1987). The GSFMO, also, was reported to have shipped another 141,000 tonnes of Saudi wheat to the PRC in 1989 (*The Middle East* March 1990, p. 45). In order to convey the ever-growing tonnage of cargo exports between Saudi Arabia and China, the two countries agreed to establish a direct maritime line between them. Guangzhou Ocean Shipping Company and the Saudi Orri Navigation Lines Company run services between Dammam and Guangzhou for this purpose since December 1985 (*The Middle East* March 1990, p. 45).

The Sino-Saudi economic cooperation was not confined to merely direct dealings but it actually extended to encompass indirect collaboration in construction projects in Third World countries. In this regard, the Saudi Government financed in early 1990 the building of a second bridge in Bamako the Capital city of Mali and the USD 4 million worth project was commissioned to a Chinese construction corporation (*The Middle East* March 1990, p. 45). Not only that but by early 1990 the Saudi-

²⁰¹ SABIC had exported 105,000 tonnes of urea, polyethylene and other petrochemical products worth USD 15 million in 1986. The new deal of 1987 was worth four times more than what SABIC exported in the preceding year.

²⁰² The Saudis since late 1980s have gradually become more convinced about the strategic significance of strong economic partnership with Beijing. In this regard, an economic report issued by the Saudi Commerce Ministry revealed that the PRC is one of the major buyers of the Kingdom's petrochemical and fertiliser products in world market. The report recommended the Saudi Government to build the bridges of economic cooperation between the KSA and the PRC. Stressing that the importance of reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping in late 1970s and the growing Chinese purchase power, the report described this new orientation as a strategic and promising one that has no less importance in the long term than the Saudi economic cooperation with East Asia countries including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (*Al-Majallah Al-Arabiah*, March 1989, p. 76). In fact, even some Japanese media reports began to focus on SABIC's petrochemical sales to the PRC since the mid 1980s (*Jiji Press* June, 6 1985).

China cooperation expanded to include the technological field. Hence the Chinese launched a communications satellite to the Saudis in 1990 and promised to sell other satellites to Riyadh (CNA, July 12, 1990).

It is against this background that Saudi-Chinese commercial relations managed to achieve remarkable growth rates during the second half of the 1980s. In more concrete terms and according to IMF statistics, while the volume of trade exchange between Riyadh and Beijing in 1985 and 1986 was roughly USD 155 and 186 million respectively, it swiftly doubled in 1987 and reached more than USD 354 million²⁰³. The commercial exchange rate in the following year continued to rapidly grow by nearly 20% and reached more than USD 425 million. Whereas the year 1989 witnessed a retreat in the commercial exchange rate which was approximately USD 319 million, the year 1990 restored the uptrend again and the trade exchange jumped consequently to more than USD 417²⁰⁴ million (*Direction of Trade Statistics*. IMF).

Table 2: Bilateral Trade exchange between the KSA & the PRC between 1985-1990*

Year	PRC Exports to KSA	KSA Exports to PRC
1985	\$ 132,900,000	\$ 22,300,000
1986	\$ 133,700,000	\$ 52,200,000
1987	\$ 247,300,000	\$ 107,100,000
1988	\$ 229,900,000	\$ 195,300,000
1989	\$ 249,098,000	\$ 70,165,000
1990	\$ 337,444,000	\$ 79,652,000

*Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics*, IMF.

The commercial exchange statistics illustrate that what might make trade exchange with Saudi Arabia quite appealing to the PRC during this period was the fact that the

²⁰³ It seems that this noticeable increase in commercial exchange came as a direct outcome of the first official visit of the Saudi trade team to Beijing in late 1986 and following the agreement to provide Riyadh with the East Wind missiles.

²⁰⁴ Needless to say that the IMF's statistics do not take into account the USD 3 billion worth missile deal conducted in 1986.

trade balance was as it has been since the late 1978 enormously in favour of China. While Beijing imports wheat, chemicals, iron, steel and petrochemical products from Riyadh, the latter almost imports all sort of consumptive goods including textiles²⁰⁵, light industrial and electrical products, cereals and edible oils, sugar, fruit and vegetables.

6.6. THE FINAL TOUCHES

It appears that the disclosure of the Saudi-Chinese missile deal in March 1988 and the media fuss that accompanied it offered a golden opportunity to the Chinese side, on the one hand, to assure the Saudis of its unyielding support on this issue and, on the other, to discuss the possibility of upgrading their political relations or at least exchanging a sort of permanent representation in their respective capitals. This perhaps was the theme of the official visit made by the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Qi Huaiyuan, just one month following the unveiling of the missile deal. The Chinese senior official, who was the highest to visit Riyadh, delivered a message from the Chinese leadership to King Fahd and was received by Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al-Faisal (*Al-Riyadh*, April 3, 1988; *Xinhua*, April 3, 1988).

In an extraordinary political progress in relations between the two countries, the Saudi positive response to the Chinese request came six months later in a message carrying Riyadh's acceptance to exchange trade representative offices in each other's capital. The message was delivered on October 12, 1988 by the Saudi Ambassador to Washington, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, who acted as a special envoy of King Fahd. On November 11, 1988, both Prince Bandar and the Chinese Ambassador to US, Han Xu, signed in the Saudi Royal Embassy in Washington a Memorandum of Understanding that stipulated that the KSA and the PRC would exchange trade representative offices. It was reported that the Memorandum also gave these offices and representatives' quasi-diplomatic privileges and immunities given to embassies and diplomats including the use of diplomatic plates in their cars (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, November 12, 1988; *AP*, November 12, 1988; *Japan Economic Newswire*, March 4, 1989; *South*, February 1, 1990, p. 65).

In an interview with the Saudi daily *Al-Riyadh*, China's Ambassador, Han Xu, considered this agreement as a clear indication of the progress in the Saudi-Chinese

²⁰⁵ Those in charge of China's textile industry believed that the free-quota Saudi market has a huge potentiality for their textile exports (*Xinhua*, October 13, 1989).

relations in all fields and that the final aim of such move was to realise the entire normalisation of relations between the two countries. The Chinese diplomat added that by doing so the PRC hopes that its relation with Saudi Arabia could serve their mutual interests, world peace and stability and set the pattern for 'friendship and cooperation between countries with different social systems and beliefs' (FBIS/CHI/88/248, December 27, 1988 p. 13-14).

The move of exchanging commercial representative offices followed naturally after the decline of Saudi security and religious concerns towards China. This represented the culmination of the two-sided confidence and support that characterised Riyadh-Beijing relationship throughout this period heralding an imminent change that was looming on the horizon. Although at this stage Riyadh and Beijing scored no progress on some highly important differences over key issues notably the Taiwan question and its aftermaths including that of swapping official recognition from Taipei to Beijing²⁰⁶, one might assume from a strategic-political standpoint that they achieved a certain convergence of interests regarding various key issues including the conditions of China's Muslim communities, a Chinese recognition of the Saudi regional role, a Saudi comfort to the Chinese peaceful presence in the regional theatre and their joint steady support of the Arab stand in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Those considerations perhaps led the Saudis to adopt the formula of exchanging trade representation offices as a step in the direction of forming full diplomatic relations with Beijing and to grant their Taiwanese friends extra time to accept the new *fait accompli*²⁰⁷.

The Saudi daily *Ukaz* dedicated its editorial on November 14, 1988 to discussing the various dimensions of the developing Saudi-Chinese connection following the agreement to establish commercial representative offices. Under the title 'We and Beijing', the newspaper wrote that this step represented a 'practical formula' to organise the longstanding and growing commercial interests between the two countries. It was, moreover, a response to international and regional

²⁰⁶ It sounds that this was not an easy task for the Saudi foreign policy maker as the Saudis have always proud themselves that their foreign policy proceeds from idealistic and ethical considerations, (in this matter, see for example, Al-Omary & Hashim 1990: 117).

²⁰⁷ By this, Riyadh sent an implicit message to Taipei that setting up official relations with Beijing was a question of time. In August 1989, Riyadh suggested that Taiwan opens a trade office in the Arabian Gulf city of Dhahran to further promote economic and trade relations between the two countries (CNA August 17, 1989). By such move, the Saudis perhaps have wanted to set up an alternative Taiwanese body in order to take care of trade relations before Riyadh proceeds to establish formal relations with the PRC.

transformations and a prevailing international mood that principally promotes exchanging interests among the world's states. More importantly, *Ukaz* emphasised that

The major change that has occurred in Chinese conditions has helped encourage the world's states to deal and cooperate with the PRC. *This is because the changes have helped build bridges of confidence and cooperation on a clear basis, whereby economic interests are separate from ideologies. This is because the PRC itself has been convinced of the need to reconsider past experiences and change the nature of its relations with other states* (italic added). It has practically and constantly stressed respect for and commitment to the principal of equal and positive cooperation with others on sound and clear terms (*Ukaz*, November 14, 1988).

Al-Riyadh daily, for its part, placed emphasis over the fact that the PRC is a regional power that cannot be ignored forever. It, furthermore, stressed that the recent policies of the PRC's clearly show, on the one hand, respect and non-interference on other states' internal affairs and, on the other hand, a genuine desire to enhance international peace and security. As such, the Saudi newspaper concludes, the KSA and the PRC can be said to share the same ideals and principles (*Al-Riyadh*, November 13, 1988).

The Saudi-Chinese agreement entered force in March 1989 during which the Chinese side delegated Dong Shaoqin to head the PRC's Commercial Representative office in Riyadh²⁰⁸, which included another seven Chinese members²⁰⁹. Five months later, the Saudis, in turn, appointed General (retired) Tawfiq Alamdar, a soldier turned diplomat and the former Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, who handed in his credentials as Riyadh's commercial representative in Beijing on August 28, 1989²¹⁰ (*Asharq Al-*

²⁰⁸ A diplomatic source claimed that the Chinese rejected a Saudi proposal to locate its trade office within the building of Riyadh's Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Chinese insisted on getting their office placed within the Diplomatic Quarter where most of the diplomatic missions and embassies are situated. With the exception of flying their national flag, the Chinese wanted their trade office to look like other diplomatic missions. This issue, the diplomatic source alleged, was behind the Saudi decision to delay sending its trade representative to Beijing until August 1989 (*Japan Economic Newswire* March 4, 1989).

²⁰⁹ The office commenced to virtually work in April 1989 and eight months later, particularly in December 1989, it contributed in the organisation of the first-ever Chinese export exhibition in Riyadh. The exhibition which attracted more than 30000 visitors and comprised nearly 56 Chinese companies which showed more than 4000 export products including machinery, textiles, handicrafts, white goods, carpets and silk fabrics. The participated companies were reported to have succeeded to sign USD 40 million worth of export contracts (*FBIS/CHI/89/243*, December 20, 1989, p. 15; *The Middle East* March 1990, p. 45).

²¹⁰ Following his appointment, Alamdar announced that in the past two months, Saudi Arabia has sent two sports delegations and an anti-drug delegation to visit China and that China will hold a large export commodity fair in Riyadh during December this year (*Xinhua*, October 20, 1989).

Awsat March 31, 1989; *Xinhua*, August 29, 1988). The selection of a former ambassador and a retired general to assume this post probably mirrored two important matters. The first is that there was a tacit Saudi approval of setting up full diplomatic relations with Beijing in the near future and that it was only a matter of time before this development take place on the ground (*The Washington Post* October 28, 1988; *Journal of Commerce* April 3, 1989). Another is the importance of the military²¹¹ aspect in the Saudi-Chinese relations at that time following their strategic missile deal.

6.7. FORMING FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP

As the late 1980s progress the Saudis appeared to have reached a turning point in their relations with the PRC and that their common interest have furthered and gained a solid ground. The Saudi decision to exchange trade offices with Beijing was a clear sign of Riyadh's satisfaction of the fundamental transformations that occurred in Beijing's foreign and domestic²¹² policies and a prologue to establishing formal diplomatic relation between the two capitals.

Alongside China's endless endeavours to win the Saudi recognition, the missile deal signed in 1986 represented a decisive issue in the history of Saudi-China relation and for a number of reasons played a key part in normalising their relationship. While the Chinese pragmatic economic and religious transformations led to a change in the stereotypical images about 'atheist', 'anti-Islam', and 'radical' China, the missile package contributed to the dominance of pragmatic calculations over idealistic considerations and changed the way through which the Saudi officials came to approach the importance of their relations with the PRC vis-à-vis Taiwan. Thus, the prevailing anti-China mood among Saudi senior officials had been replaced with a new persuasion of the strategic importance of China as a rising and reliable peaceful international power.

²¹¹ The military institution played a key role in Alamdar's nomination to assume this post. Prince Khalid stresses that (he would understand the importance of the [missile] deal, and if we were to do more business with the Chinese, he was the man we needed in Beijing' (Bin Sultan & Seale 1996: 152). In the same context, a press report claims the existence of 1000 Chinese military experts in the Kingdom to provide the missiles maintenance and training services (*South*, February 1, 1990, p. 68).

²¹² Chinese media intensified its coverage of China's Muslim communities during this period. In this regard, see for example a cover story about: *Tianmu - A Muslim Village* (*Beijing Review*, July 9-15, 1990, p. 21-25).

In other words, the deal managed to bridge the distrust gap between the two countries on the basis of a friend in need is a friend indeed. To quote Prince Khalid, 'The deal we eventually signed was to our mutual benefit, paving the way for political recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia' (Bin Sultan & Seal 1996: 141-142). The Prince adds, elsewhere, that 'Seeing that our strategic links were so close, it made no sense to delay mutual recognition - and indeed it was something Beijing had insisted on from the start' (Bin Sultan & Seal 1996: 151).

In view of all these considerations, it was not long before Riyadh agreed to establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC, the first ever with a Communist country²¹³. The Saudi consent came, as previously happened with the trade representative office, in message delivered by Prince Bandar during a special visit to Beijing on July 9, 1990. The Saudi Prince extended an official invitation to the Chinese Foreign Minister to visit Riyadh (*Xinhua*, July 12, 1990; *BBC*, *SWB*, *FE/0815/A4/2*, July 13, 1990). Bandar's visit to Beijing attracted the attention of the Taiwanese senior officials and while he was in the PRC, the Taiwanese Foreign Minister, Fredrick Chien, announced that Taiwan will do whatever possible to maintain diplomatic relations with Riyadh (*CNA*, July 12, 1990).

The Taiwanese diplomatic endeavours to dissuade Riyadh from breaking relations with it, however, were doomed to failure and their worst fears shortly came true. On July 17, a Saudi special envoy, Minister of Industry and Electricity, Abdulaziz Al-Zamil arrived in Taipei for a one-day visit carrying a written letter from King Fahd to the Taiwanese President, Lee Teng-hui, in which the Saudi Sovereign revealed his country's intention to establish official diplomatic relations with the PRC and as a result asked that Riyadh and Taipei downgrade their respective embassies to representative offices (*CNA*, July 17 & July 19, 1990; *BBC*, *SWB*, *FE/0821/i*, July 20, 1990).

On July 20, 1990, Qian Qichen paid the first visit ever for a Chinese Foreign Minister to Saudi Arabia. The purpose of his official three-day visit to Riyadh was to sign a joint Communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the

²¹³ Dr. Saleh Al-Khathlan (Head of Department of Political Science at King Saud University) argues that diminish of Saudi security and ideological concerns after the end of the Cold War have contributed to the Saudi openness towards the Communist countries including PRC (private interview with the author in April 2008).

KSA and the PRC on July 21, 1990²¹⁴ (*Xinhua*, July 21-22-23, 1990). Saudi press, on its part, hailed the move as a realistic and sound decision by Riyadh after positive transformations in China's foreign and domestic political behaviour (*Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Jazirah*, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, July 23, 1990; *Xinhua*, July 23, 1990).

Commenting on this event, Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, stated that 'mutual trust between the Chinese and Saudi leaders had already been built up before formal diplomatic links were cemented between the two countries'. The Saudi-Chinese relations 'can be developed into a model of friendly cooperation between countries with differing social system, belief and cultural tradition', he added (*Xinhua*, July 22, 1990).

His Saudi counterpart, Saud Al-Faisal, said that China 'enjoys a high international prestige that attracts the attention of all peoples'. In an implicit reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Al-Faisal emphasised that Riyadh attaches great hopes on for its official relations with Beijing because 'The establishment of diplomatic ties is an important move that will benefit not only Saudi Arabia and China, but also the Arab nations and the Islamic countries' (*Beijing Review*, July 30-August 5, 1990, p. 4).

6.8. CONCLUSION

The Chinese awareness that the Saudis were not yet ready to exchange official relations with them due to religious and confidence considerations led them to focus on economic and religious contacts as a means to bridge the existing confidence gap between the two sides. Chinese, also, recognised the Saudi pressing need during this period to acquire a strategic military deterrent weapon to protect its national security against rising regional threats.

Beijing thought that by providing the Saudis with the CCS-2 missiles they required, they could substantially help their efforts to cultivate an official relationship with Riyadh and attracting away one of Taiwan's few remaining significant international supporters. Beijing, accordingly, responded favourably to Riyadh's request to buy the strategic missiles. This move seems to have born fruit and the Chinese side succeeded by every measure to steadily gain the Saudi's trust in various levels. Riyadh-Beijing relationship, accordingly, witnessed during this era a number

²¹⁴ For the full text of the communiqué, see (*Beijing Review*, July 30-August 5, 1990, p. 4).

of religious, economic and political breakthroughs one of which was establishing direct official economic contacts in 1986.

Chinese serious reforms adopted in late 1978 towards its Muslim minorities along with its economic-oriented independent foreign policy for peace and finally the East Wind missiles deal have led the Saudis to conclude in 1988 that establishing official relations with the PRC has become a strategic necessity dictated by national interest considerations. Yet, the issue of Taiwan was an obstacle on the way of normalising Riyadh-Beijing ties. Hence, by exchanging commercial offices with Mainland China in 1988 it seems that Saudis wanted to send a message to their Taiwanese friends that establishing official ties with Beijing was a question of time. Indeed, two years later the two sides announced the normalisation of their political relations and the establishment of diplomatic ties.

CHAPTER 7

ENHANCING THE EMERGING OFFICIAL RELATIONSHIP (1990-1997): ECONOMIC FACTOR ENTERS THE SAUDI- CHINESE EQUATION

Saudi-Chinese relationships witnessed a remarkable growth and improvement during the 1990s. Taking the emerging official relationship between the two sides into a higher level through furthering their mutual understanding, trust and cooperation in various fields were among the tactical objectives Riyadh and Beijing sought to achieve throughout this stage. More importantly, it was obvious that leaderships of both countries have shown great interest in enhancing their economic and petroleum relationships on a complementary basis. Consequently, it can be said that this era has served as successful platform to lay down a solid foundation for their upcoming future strategic partnership.

This chapter will firstly talk about the considerations that motivated the two countries to boost their relationship during this era. It will, then, discuss in detail the impact of the 1991 Gulf War to liberate Kuwait on Riyadh-Beijing relations and its role in the emergence of a kind of political coordination between the two capitals for the first time. After that, it will highlight the military aspect in the two sides' relationship with special attention to the issue of the alleged Sino-Saudi nuclear cooperation during this stage. It will, next, underline the positive improvements that occurred in the religious dimension of the relationship between Riyadh and Beijing and its reflections on Chinese Muslims as a result of the progress in the official relationship between the two sides. Last but not least, it will focus on the huge progress the two countries managed to make in their two-way trade exchange and the rise of the Sino-Saudi petroleum nexus during the mid 1990s.

7.1. THE RATIONALE OF POST-1990: SAUDI ARABIA AND CHINA IN A CHANGING WORLD

With no tangible external military threat to China's heartland for the first time since its establishment in 1949, Chinese leaders became more confident about their country's security environment during the 1990s (Glaser 1993: 252). In the post-Cold War period, they came to the realisation of the ascendance of economic issues and that economics has taken priority over politics, and that such fundamental shift will be

reflected in the foreign policies of the whole world governments (Calabrese 1998: 353). In fact, such secure environment made them more than any time determined to continue their pursuit of a policy aiming at achieving economic modernisation for their country.

However, the Chinese ambitious economic modernisation programme and domestic reform policy that started after 1978 was challenged by a Western-imposed political and economic international isolation in the aftermath of the tragic Tiananmen Square incident in June 1989. Led by the US, Western countries as well as Japan a sort of diplomatic rupture and economic ban was imposed on foreign investments and transactions with Beijing following that bloody incident (Kim 1994: 153; Hsu 2000: 926-940). Under such circumstances, the importance that the Middle East assumed both in the minds of Chinese geo-strategists and foreign policy makers has noticeably increased.

This growing importance stemmed from four Chinese considerations. From a political perspective, Middle Eastern countries were perceived by Beijing as more familiar with and understanding of the imperativeness of stability and national security issues than Western democratic countries. Thus, the Chinese expected that they would respect and show sympathy toward China's viewpoint regarding the governmental measures taken by Beijing to handle the critical incidents of Tiananmen Square (Shichor 1992: 89).

Secondly, in order to pursue its cash-starved modernisation programme despite the Western ban on foreign investment and break its international isolation, China continued its economic diplomacy and efforts to enhance its commercial relations with the Middle Eastern countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular as a window of opportunity or a potential 'super bazaar' for Chinese various goods and labour. Also, rich Middle Eastern countries could serve as an alternative source for private and governmental investment, fund and loans in China (Harris 1991: 117-120; Gladney 1994: 677).

Thirdly, China's isolation was accompanied by a number of fundamental transformations on the international arena during the early 1990s. Such key transformations included the second Gulf War 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union which brought to an end the Cold War and the bi-polar world order, and paved the way for the US to enjoy a predominant position in world politics in general and in the vital Middle East region in particular (Godwin 1994: 173).

It can be said that the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War that followed to liberate Kuwait provided China with a rare opportunity to overcome its isolation and secure an esteemed restoration of its international position as a great power whose cooperation in international forums and world politics issues was crucial to resolve regional problems across the world (Shichor 1992: 86-87). In this respect, one may also argue that the expected US predominance position in the Middle East as a result of its leadership of the international collision to liberate Kuwait was to be counterweighed by Beijing if not politically then at least economically.

Fourthly, because it turned out to be a net oil importer since 1993, the Chinese government was required to pay more attention to its relations with oil exporting countries in the Middle East especially bearing in mind that Beijing as per estimates of the mid-1990s was expected to face a major oil shortage by 2000 and will probably need to import 40% of its crude needs by 2010 as the country continues to industrialise and modernise (Rynhold 1996: 110; Pan 1997, <http://www.meforum.org/article/373>).

On the other hand, the Saudi outlook towards China during that phase was similarly governed by both economic and political considerations. It can be said that Saudi officials as well have come to the same conclusion reached by their Chinese counterparts that the international fundamental transformations mentioned had paved the way for shifting the general focus of international units from issues of ideology, security and high politics to those of economics and low politics²¹⁵. Such transformations allowed East Asian countries to emerge as potential economic powers and shifted the world attention including the Saudis to their fast economic growth. In this sense, Riyadh began to see these Asian markets headed by China as promising commercial partners with huge markets that could swallow its petroleum and petrochemical products (*The Middle East*, January, 1991, p. 31). This new Saudi orientation was furthered in the wake of China's statements about its desire to increase its petroleum cooperation with the Kingdom after it became a net importer of oil in 1993 (*Riyadh Daily*, June 4, 1994). Emanating from this conviction, Saudi-

²¹⁵ Author's private interview with H.E. Ambassador Dr. Jamil Merdad, (Head of the General Department of Islamic Affairs at the Saudi Foreign Ministry), May 2008. The Chinese also had the same realization of the ascendance of economic issues and that economics has taken priority over politics and that such shift was reflected in the foreign policies of world governments (Calabrese 1998: 353).

Chinese economic relations have enjoyed a unique opportunity to score tangible progress and reach a new peak.

From a political and strategic perspective, China since the 1991 Gulf Crisis appears to have begun to assume a greater importance to decision makers in the Kingdom. Despite the fact that the Gulf War and its aftermaths made the Kingdom in favour of close security cooperation with the Washington²¹⁶ and the West in general (Kechichian 1999: 252), the crisis itself and the way through which it was internationally handled especially in the UN Security Council seems to have alerted the Saudis to the vital significance of having first-rate political ties with an important country such as China. Hence, this phase saw the birth of a Sino-Saudi official political coordination and a distinct Saudi desire to enhance political relationships with a permanent member of the UN Security Council and one of the international forthcoming great powers.

7.2. THE GULF CRISIS: THE FIRST POLITICAL TEST FOR THE EMERGING RELATIONSHIP

Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 represented a quick practical test to the Riyadh-Beijing newly-born official relationship. The Iraqi action besides being an aggression against a sovereign state and hence a violation of the UN Charter, that stipulates that disputes between states should be settled by peaceful and diplomatic means, was regarded by Saudi Arabia as a direct threat to its national security. On the one hand because it resulted in a grave change of the regional balance of power and on the other since it raised the possibility of an Iraqi attack against the Saudi North-eastern borders. Riyadh, thus, sought to diplomatically muster both Arab and International support with the purpose of exerting political pressures on Baghdad to withdraw from the Kuwaiti soil.

As one of the key capitals of international decision-making, Beijing was one of the centres with which Riyadh sought to communicate and consult. In this regard, both Saudi and Chinese foreign ministers were keen to exchange visits to discuss the Gulf situation and coordinate their viewpoints during the crisis (*Xinhua*, June 29, 1991). In fact, the Saudis sought to know the Chinese position towards the crisis since its early stages. On August 7, 1990, just five days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait,

²¹⁶ The US-Saudi military ties at that time exceeded the stage of merely supplying military equipment and training to having an actual presence of nearly 5,000 US troops in the Kingdom (Niblock, 2006: 90).

Tawfiq Alamdar presented his credentials to the Chinese President, Yang Shangkun, as the first Saudi Ambassador to Beijing. It seems that the Saudi diplomat wanted to explore during that meeting the Chinese attitude towards the situation in the Gulf. The Chinese President, on his part, made it clear that his country is strongly opposed to 'Iraq's invasion and call on it to pull troops out of Kuwait promptly'. He also 'urged Iraq to respond to the opinions of the international community and settle disputes through negotiations' (*Xinhua*, August 7, 1990; *Beijing Review*, August 20-26, 1990, p. 4).

The Chinese position was further explained during the press conferences of the Chinese Premier, Li Peng, held on August 8 and 12, 1990 both in Jakarta and Singapore respectively. He stated that China is against Iraq's military invasion of Kuwait and that Beijing had voted for the UN Security Council Resolutions 660²¹⁷, 661 and 662 all of which calling on Iraq to immediately and unconditionally pull its forces out of Kuwait and hopes that these resolutions will be implemented effectively²¹⁸ (*Xinhua*, August 12, 1990). Li illustrated that China favours a peaceful settlement of the crisis through friendly consultations within the framework of the Arab world²¹⁹. He added that 'We support the statements issued by the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council on the event. We hope the conflict will be settled under mediation of the two organizations' (*Beijing Review*, August 20-26, 1990, p. 10).

When he was asked about China's response to the stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia at the invitation of the Saudi Government, the Chinese Premier expressed China's principal opposition to regional military involvement by big powers²²⁰. However, he stressed that taking into account Riyadh's security concerns,

²¹⁷ Some press reports claimed that China's decision to support the UN Security Council resolution 661 imposing sanctions on Saddam's regime was a result of 'an intense American lobbying effort' as Washington 'showed a willingness to tone down its criticism of Chinese repression' (*The Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 1990). Such allegations were reinforced by China's Foreign Minister two-day visit to Washington on December 1, 1990 which came, according to Chinese media, 'after 18-month chill' in official relations during which high level visits between Beijing and Washington were suspended (*Beijing Review*, December 10-16, 1990, p. 4-5).

²¹⁸ Li Peng, also, vowed to halt Beijing's arms exports to Baghdad under these circumstances (*Japan Economic Newswire*, August 8, 1990).

²¹⁹ Chinese Premier reiterated the same opinion during a meeting held in Beijing with Taha Yassin Ramadan, the Iraqi First Deputy Prime Minister On September 7, 1990 (*Beijing Review*, September 17-23, 1990, p. 7).

²²⁰ The Chinese attitude seems to have proceeded from Beijing's geo-strategic concerns that the military involvement of big powers, namely the US, would grant the latter a dominant position in this important buffer region and hence bring back its traditional fears of encirclement (*Beijing Review*, September 10-16, 1990, p. 4).

Beijing respects and understands the Saudi right to seek the cooperation of the US and to invite foreign forces to the Kingdom (*Japan Economic Newswire*, August 8, 1990; *Beijing Review*, August 20-26, 1990, p. 10 & Aug. 27-Sep. 2, 1990, p. 9). Such Chinese stance must have been welcomed and appreciated by Riyadh.

With the exception of Resolutions 678, Beijing supported all subsequent UN Security Council resolutions related to the Gulf crisis including resolutions number 664, 665, and 670 which called for imposing air embargo and economic sanctions on Iraq (*Beijing Review*, October 8-14, 1990, p. 6-7). Given their repeated insistence that they principally do not support a military solution for the Gulf crisis, the Chinese abstained from voting on Resolution 678 which authorises member states to 'use all necessary means' including military force to drive Iraqi troops out of Iraq. In fact, this attitude was expected as the Chinese had for instance refused to vote on Resolution 665 until the Chinese motion to delete the wording 'resort to armed forces at a minimum level' from the draft, was accepted²²¹ (*Beijing Review*, September 10-16, 1990, p. 4).

Despite Beijing's decision to abstain from voting on Resolution 678, which was derived from relatively unrealistic insistence on a peaceful settlement of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti conflict regardless of the nature and development of political facts on the ground, the Chinese acceptable position throughout the crisis won Beijing the appreciation and respect of the Saudi leadership. It seems that Riyadh was happy about the Chinese positive statements about the presence of international coalition forces on its soil and satisfied with the fact that Beijing did not resort to use its Veto right to impede the adoption of Resolution 678. In this respect, King Fahd delegated his special envoy, Abdulaziz Al-Thonayan (Vice-Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs), to visit China on December 11, 1990 with the purpose of delivering a personal letter to the Chinese President, Yang Shangkun.

The Saudi King expressed his 'country's appreciation to China for its position' that is 'worthy of universal praise'. The Chinese President, on his part, reiterated Beijing's understanding of the Saudi decision to invite foreign troops to stay in its territory in order to protect its territorial integrity. He also re-stressed that China did

²²¹ For a complete understanding of the Chinese viewpoint on refusing to vote for Resolution 678, see the statements of China's Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen (*Beijing Review*, December 10-16, 1990, p. 4 & December 17-24, 1990, p. 28).

not support the adoption of Resolution 678 because of its principal opposition to military resolution to the Gulf crisis (*Beijing Review*, December 24-30, 1990, p. 5).

While Harris (1991: 116, 123) predicted a drop in China's political and economic relations with Arab Gulf states as a price for Beijing's uncertain attitude during the crisis and its failure to support the use of force against Iraq in an attempt to please all parties concerned, China's ties with the Gulf states including Saudi Arabia were not actually negatively affected. In contrast, it would seem that the Chinese attitude throughout the crisis and even since its early stages was highly esteemed and openly praised by a number of Saudi senior officials who found it reasonable and balanced. For example, after a visit to Beijing, Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faysal, praised Beijing's supportive attitude and stated that China voiced its 'full support' for measures taken by Riyadh to defend itself against Iraq (*The Independent*, September 21, 1990).

In his four-nation Middle East tour -which included Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and also Iraq²²²- the Chinese Foreign Minister was received in Riyadh on November 8, 1990 by his Saudi counterpart who welcomed his visit 'at a critical moment of the Gulf crisis'. During the meeting, Al-Faisal unequivocally expressed to Qian Qichen the Saudi 'appreciation for the just position taken by China on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait'. The visit illustrated an agreement by both the Saudi and Chinese sides on the need to continue consultations on the Gulf situation and to 'find a just and reasonable solution to the Gulf crisis on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions' (*Xinhua*, November 8, 1990).

In what can be perceived as a clear indication of Riyadh's satisfaction with the Chinese attitude during the crisis, the Saudi side suggested that the Chinese foreign minister come back to Riyadh after he finishes his Middle East tour in order to be received by King Fahd. Indeed, On November 12, 1990 Qian Qichen returned to Riyadh where he met the Saudi King and delivered a letter from the Chinese President, Yang Shangkun, in which he invited the Saudi head of state to visit China. King Fahd accepted the official invitation and welcomed the Chinese diplomatic efforts to reach a peaceful and political solution for the crisis. He, moreover, expressed his satisfaction with the development of Saudi-China relations and

²²² *Beijing Review* described the diplomatic efforts made by Qian Qichen during his tour as 'drum[ming] up peace in the Gulf' in an attempt to explore the possibility of a peaceful solution of the Gulf crisis between these Arab adversary capitals (*Beijing Review*, November 19-25, 1990, p. 4-5).

expected further enhancement of Sino-Saudi cooperation in various fields (*Xinhua*, November 12, 1990).

In the final analysis and from a strategic viewpoint, it seems that there was a Saudi understanding of and satisfaction with the Chinese relatively positive attitude during the Gulf crisis. Thus, it can be said, that Beijing has successfully passed its first political test in the annals of its official relations with Riyadh and that this crisis has positively served as a cornerstone in cementing their political mutual understanding and trust and was reflected as well on their economic relations as will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

7.3. THE BIRTH OF OFFICIAL POLITICAL COORDINATION

The Chinese officials strongly believed that the establishment of diplomatic relations with Riyadh in July 1990 would open a new chapter in the bilateral relations between the two countries (*Beijing Review*, August 6-12, 1990, p. 10). Hence, they did not waste much time before taking the initiative and making their first high-ranking political contact with Riyadh. This contact came only a short time after the end of the Gulf crisis and within the context of the Chinese Premier's six-nation tour that included Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Kuwait. By making such a move, the Chinese seems to have wanted to make sure that their abstention from voting on resolution 678 did not affect their evolving relation with Riyadh, on the one hand, and to reaffirm their interest in the security and stability of the Middle East, on the other (*Xinhua*, June 29, 1991).

On July 9, 1991, the Chinese Premier, Li Peng, arrived in Jeddah in a three-day official goodwill visit, the visit was the first ever to Saudi Arabia by such a high-ranking Chinese leader (*Xinhua*, July 9, 1991). During his 'cordial and friendly' meeting with the Saudi Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Defence and Aviation, Prince Sultan, Chinese Premier stressed that the Kingdom is 'an important country in the Middle East'. Sultan, on his part, hoped that 'Li's visit will be a new starting-point for the development of Saudi-Chinese relations and will help boosting economic and trade relations, as well as in other areas' (*Xinhua*, July 10, 1991).

During the meeting that comprised the Saudi Under-secretary in charge of political affairs of the Saudi Foreign Ministry, Abdulrahman Al-Mansouri²²³ and Qian Qichen, the Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister, the Saudi official stressed that there are no more obstacles for the Kingdom to develop its relations with China. The Chinese Minister similarly stressed that 'potentials are vast for the expansion of Sino-Saudi co-operation in all fields'. With regard to the Palestinian question, the two sides reached a consensus. While the Saudi senior official said that his country supports the cause of Palestine and the convention of the Madrid Middle East peace conference, Qian emphasised that 'China and Saudi Arabia shared identical views on the Middle East issue' (*Xinhua*, July 10, 1991).

At the end of the Premier's visit, the two sides issued a joint communiqué that reflected their identical views towards all issues discussed including the necessity to strengthen bilateral ties, regional stability and security, the shape and characteristics of the upcoming international order. According to the communiqué, the two sides agreed to further mutual understanding and reinforce their relations. The communiqué underlined the importance of signing an agreement between the two sides on trade, investment and technological co-operation 'as soon as possible'. In an indication of China's support of the Kingdom, the Communiqué also stressed that the sovereignty and independence of all nations in the Middle East must be respected.

The communiqué also reflected the two countries, agreement on achieving peace and stability in the Middle East region, seeking a peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue and taking into consideration preserving the legitimate right of the Palestinian people. Regionally, they hoped that international détente would put an end to the present tensions, sort out differences between various parties and lead to a rapid resolution of conflict in the region. Internationally, the communiqué stressed the need for setting up a new international order that should be founded on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's domestic affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence (*Xinhua*, July 11, 1991).

In another development, Samir Shihabi, the Permanent UN Representative of Saudi Arabia and President of the 46th UN General Assembly, paid an official visit to Beijing on April 27, 1992. It was reported that the purpose of his visit was to discuss

²²³ Al-Mansouri apologised for the absence of Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al-Faisal, who happened to be outside the country.

the UN's current issues in addition to conveying the appreciation and gratefulness of Riyadh for the diplomatic support he received from Beijing to assume this position. During his meetings with both the Chinese Premier and President, both told Shihabi that they attach great importance to their relations with Riyadh. They praised the Saudi role in safeguarding security and stability in the Gulf region and expressed their desire to develop friendly cooperative relations with Riyadh (*Xinhua*, April 27 & 29, 1992).

It can be said that there was clear evidence that the two sides had reached a mutual understanding in which China's actual employment of the five principles of peaceful coexistence in dealing with state-to-state relationships along with their policy of reform and opening-up to the outside world was seen as equivalent to the Saudi approach of pursuing independent and peaceful foreign policy on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs²²⁴.

Indications, moreover, show that as time progressed, the Saudis and Chinese senior officials became more and more inclined towards discussing regional security issues during their meetings. Such thing clearly demonstrates that the two sides shared the same viewpoints towards these key regional issues. For instance, despite the economic nature of the visit of China's Deputy Premier, Li Lanqing, to Riyadh in 1993, he was granted a reception by King Fahd who was keen to discuss with him the Arab-Israeli conflict developments and his hope for a just, comprehensive and peaceful solution²²⁵. He also raised 'security and stability' issues in the Gulf and their importance to his country. The Saudi sovereign told the Chinese guest that he was happy with the development of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and China and that Riyadh 'is ready to further such cooperation'²²⁶ (*Xinhua*, June 27, 1993). In return, the Chinese repeatedly reaffirmed that the Kingdom 'is an important country for us. Our

²²⁴ In this regard, see the text of the speech of, Zheng Dayong, China's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Beijing (*Riyadh Daily*, July 20, 1995).

²²⁵ This was the case, also, during China's State Councillor and Secretary General of the State Council's, Luo Gan, four-day visit to Jeddah- in August 1995- in which he discussed with the Saudi Crown Prince and the Second Deputy Prime Minister regional issues including the peace process and security in the region (*Xinhua*, August 13 & 15, 1995).

²²⁶ Within the same framework, Beijing was interested in discussing with the Saudi Ambassador in China in bid to defuse crisis that broke out between Washington and Bagdad over the latter's intransigence on UN weapons inspections and the U.S. threat to use force against Iraq. Saudi Arabia was one of four nations with which China consulted including Russia, Britain and France (*AFP*, February 6, 1998).

policies are aimed at resolving all disputes anywhere in the world by peaceful means and contributing to international stability'²²⁷ (*Riyadh Daily*, June 4, 1994).

With regard to the Taiwan issue, the Saudis became aware of the sensitivity and significance the Chinese side attaches to the 'one China' policy as one of the primary components of China's national security. Therefore, Riyadh began to openly place emphasis on its support to Beijing in this matter. Prince Sultan, Saudi Minister of Defence told his Chinese counterpart, General Haotian, during the latter's visit to Saudi Arabia in June 1996 that the 'policy of recognizing one China is an established policy of Saudi Arabia'. The Chinese guest, in turn, was thankful to such Saudi advocacy and voiced that Beijing and Riyadh should 'establish long-term ties of cooperation compatible with the 21st century requirements' (*Xinhua*, June 1, 1996).

The two sides, likewise, enhanced their political relations on the parliamentary level. Sheikh Muhammad Bin Jubair, President of *Shoura* (Consultative) Council (Saudi Parliament) led a delegation to pay a visit to China on October 23, 1995. During his meetings with China's Premier, Li Peng, and the Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Li Ruihuan, Bin Jubair affirmed that China's consistent position of supporting the just cause of the Arabian and Palestinian people won it the praise and respect of Saudi leadership (*Xinhua*, October 23 & 24, 1995).

In return, a delegation of the Chinese People Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) headed by its National Committee Vice-Chairman, Ye Xuanping, made a visit to the Kingdom on November 11, 1996. During its meeting with the Saudi Crown Prince, Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz, and the Second Deputy Prime minister, Sultan Bin Abdulaziz, the Chinese delegation expressed gratefulness to the Saudi leadership for its stand on the one-China policy. When the delegation told the Saudi Crown Prince that China hoped to further develop the friendly bilateral relations of cooperation with the Kingdom, he told them that 'Saudi people take China as one of the most close and intimate friends and are willing to promote the friendly relations' (*Xinhua*, November 11, 1996).

It would seem that China's desire for greater involvement in the Gulf region had become a reality in late September 1996 following the announcement of the establishment of a regular political and economic consultation mechanism between

²²⁷ This was a statement issued by the Chinese Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs during his visit four-day visit to Riyadh.

China and the GCC states. This considerable progress came after a meeting that included the Chinese Vice Premier and Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, and ministers of foreign affairs of six GCC member nations and the GCC's Secretary-General, Jemil Al-Hujaylan, in the UN headquarters. The meeting was planned to discuss regional and international issues of common interests including the Iraqi situation and the Middle East peace process (*Xinhua*, September 27, 1996).

In view of this, China and the GCC issued a communiqué within which they reiterated their common desire to enhance their political consultations, carry on their effort to consolidate their cooperation in the economic, commercial and investment fields and adopt measures to push and provide convenience for such cooperation. The two sides, moreover, announced that they would hold annual political and economic consultations alternately in Beijing and Riyadh, the headquarters of the GCC secretariat²²⁸ (*Xinhua*, September 28, 1996). Needless to say the recent positive developments in various Sino-Saudi relations made such mechanism possible due to the great weight Riyadh enjoys in the GCC.

7.4. THE SAUDI-CHINESE MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

7.4.1. The Alleged Nuclear Cooperation

The covert manner in which the CSS-2 missile deal was conducted in the mid-1980s and the media fuss that afterward accompanied its disclosure seem to have contributed to the emergence of a western press report based on US intelligence data in the early 1991 suggesting an alleged secret nuclear cooperation between Riyadh and Beijing. An article in the British magazine *Foreign Report* cited a CIA report claiming that the PRC had shipped 12 nuclear warheads to Saudi Arabia to be fitted to the Chinese-made CSS2 missiles during the Gulf crisis (*Foreign Report*, January 10, 1991). This report²²⁹ was squarely denied by both Riyadh and Beijing who described

²²⁸ For the 'full text' of the China-GCC communiqué in Chinese, please see (*Renmin Ribao* 'People's Daily', September 29, 1996, p. 4). An English version of the communiqué is also available at, (*BBC, SWB, FE/D2742/G*, October 14, 1996).

²²⁹ The allegations on a Saudi-China nuclear cooperation surfaced again in August 1994, in the wake of the defection of Mohammad Al-Khilewi, the former second-ranking diplomat at the Saudi Mission to the UN, and his application for a political asylum in the US. Al-Khilewi claimed that Riyadh sought to buy nuclear research reactors from China and also from an American company as part of a secret long-term plan to acquire nuclear weapons. A spokesman of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, then, denied these claims and challenged their authenticity. In any event, experts, according to the *New York Times*, regarded this kind of reactors as 'small models suitable for research, with relatively simple applications' (*The New York Times* August 7, 1994; *The Sunday Times*, August 7, 1994).

it as 'totally groundless' (*Xinhua*, January 14, 1991). Later on, an American request to inspect the CSS2 missiles following that report was rejected by the Saudi Defence Ministry (*The Independent*, January 14, 1991).

It seems that some Israeli circles also found in the Saudi-Chinese rapprochement during the 1990s an exit to escape from the American pressures because of the Israeli military and technology cooperation with Beijing. The *Sunday Telegraph* reported that Tel Aviv told Washington that *Mossad* (Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations of Israel) claimed to possess evidence that US Patriot technology (defence systems) was illegally transferred by Riyadh to Chinese technicians who maintain and service Chinese-made CSS2 missiles in Saudi Arabia (*The Sunday Telegraph*, March 29, 1992).

An Israeli newspaper commented on this report by raising a number of questions all of which indicate that Riyadh had nothing to do with the scandal and that it might be an attempt from Tel Aviv to exonerate itself from this charge before the American fact-finding delegation who came to 'probe a possible unauthorised Israeli transfer of the missile's technology to Israel' (*The Jerusalem Post*, March 30, 1991). Needless to say that, the Sino-Israeli extensive military and technological cooperation since the mid-1980s is an open secret as Beijing perceived Tel Aviv as a source for the restricted Western and American advanced military technology that cannot be acquired directly from them (*The New York Times*, July 22, 1985; *Saudi Gazette*, October 24, 1993; *Asia Times*, December 21, 2004).

7.4.2. The Sino-American Rivalry for the Gulf Arms Market

It seems that the Chinese concerns that the military involvement of the US in the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait in 1991 might result in bestowing Washington a dominant position in the region came true (Rynhold 1996: 103). According to a report by the Congressional Research Service, the outcomes of the Gulf War enhanced the US power in the Middle East and allowed it to control the Third World arms market, which reached the value of \$ 23,9 billion in 1992. As a result, instead of acquiring merely 13% of this market five years ago, the US share increased to 57 % in 1992²³⁰. The report shows that whereas China had 12% of global sales in 1987, it nearly made no sales during 1992 (*The Independent*, July 23, 1993).

²³⁰ New Saudi orders for US arms were worth \$ 4.2 billion in 1992.

The huge drop in China's arms sales in the 1990s due to the embargo on Iraq, according to US intelligence reports, pushed Beijing to rigorously to compensate for its losses in arms markets by exporting prohibited chemical weapons technology to Iran²³¹ (Gill 1998: 374-376). The 'top secret' CIA reports claimed that Beijing may have violated its commitment to arms control regime by supplying Tehran during the 1990s with missile technology in addition to a complete factory to produce chemical weapons including nerve agent precursors²³² (*The Washington Post*, March 8, 1996; *The Washington Times*, March 7, November 21, 1996; *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1997; *The Washington Times*, October 30, 1997).

In parallel with these CIA allegations, the US government asked its Saudi counterpart in mid August 1993 to take part in the inspection process of the Chinese 'Yin He' cargo-liner owned by the China Ocean Shipping Company which had been stranded in the east entrance of the Gulf of Oman since August 2, 1993. The US claimed that the ship destined for Iran contained a shipment of banned chemicals including Thiodite glycol and Thionyl Chloride used to produce mustard and nerve gas agents. The Saudis accepted the US request to play the role of host to the process of inspection and allowed the Chinese freighter into its eastern port of Dammam (*The New York Times*, September 3, 1993).

Accordingly, Saudi and Chinese representatives carried out the process of inspection on August 27, 1993. It was also said that representatives from the US as technical advisers to the Saudi side participated in the process (*Xinhua*, August 27, 1993). Ultimately, the week's inspection results of all the cargo on the ship found no illegal chemical weapons cargo as the CIA and US Administration earlier asserted (*The New York Times*, September 3, 1993).

Besides causing great embarrassment to the American administration, the episode itself irritated US allies in the Gulf and raised questions about the credibility of its intelligence reports about China to the extent that made some US circles

²³¹ Such reports appeared despite that the PRC's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sun Bigan, stated during an interview with the Saudi daily *Arab News* that his country's policy towards arms control policy had not changed following the US decision to sell 150 F-15s to Taiwan. The Ambassador stressed that China 'believes in promoting stability in the Middle East based on a lower level of armaments', and hence is 'actively participating in the Middle East peace process, armaments control and regional security multilateral working group meetings' (*Arab News*, October 3, 1992).

²³² Shrike, however, pinpoints that for the sake of improving relations with the US and as a reflection of a new Chinese conviction that its own security interests as an oil importer might be jeopardised by such sales, Beijing in 1997 made some concessions to Washington in issues like nuclear and missile technology sales and became supportive of the nuclear nonproliferation regime (Shrike 2007: 223).

concerned believe they fell victim of a 'sting' operation with the purpose of embarrassing Washington²³³ (*The New York Times*, September 6, 1993; *Federal News Service*, September 7, 1993; *The Washington Times*, September 8, 1993).

For its part, China through its representative in the incident, Sha Zukang, asked the US to make a public apology, compensate for all losses in the 'Yen He' incident and to pledge not to create such an incident in the future²³⁴. He also waged a war of words against the US accusing it of violating the basic norms of international law and indulging in 'hegemonism and power politics'. He concluded by expressing his appreciation and thanks to the Saudi government for the cooperation it has offered in the inspection of the 'Yin He' ship (*Xinhua*, September 4, 1993; *SCMP*, September 6, 1993).

One cannot be sure about the extent to which this incident did shake the Saudi confidence in the US intelligence reports regarding the Chinese activities in the region. However, what one can be positive about is that the episode provided the Saudis with a unique opportunity to play for the first time a direct and successful conciliatory part in solving an open Sino-American dispute. The handling of the inspection, according to the *New York Times*, 'proved to be a bonus for Saudi Arabia, which was able to undertake a delicate mission both for the Clinton Administration and for Beijing'.

The Saudis, on the one hand, managed to 'accommodate American insistence that its technical advisers on chemical and biological agents should be allowed to assist in the inspection'. On the other, Saudi Arabia saved China the embarrassment of any discovery as it 'may have sought assurances from Beijing that no unpleasant discoveries would be made on board the ship before agreeing to allow the freighter into its port' (*The New York Times*, September 3, 1993).

7.4.3. Re-activating the Military Bond

Since the 1986 orphan *East Winds* missile deal, the Saudi-Chinese military relations witnessed a long period of quietness and low-profile. This, probably, does not mean

²³³ Despite the negative outcomes of the inspection, Some American officials insisted that the Chinese ship was carrying the illicit chemicals and that the cargo could have been unloaded somewhere between China and Saudi Arabia. For more information in this regard, see the State Department Regular Briefing (*Federal News Service*, September 7, 1993).

²³⁴ The US administration refused to offer such apology.

that bilateral cooperation and coordination in related issues such as operation, training and maintenance have been brought to a halt (*IISS Strategic Dossier*, May 20, 2008, p. 43). It is believed that the retired General Prince Khalid bin Sultan had continued to play an influential and constructive part in this regard especially through the significant visits he made to Beijing during the mid 1990s. Actually, Khalid's statements during these visits reflect a genuine Saudi belief that ties with China are crucial for the national security of the Kingdom.

After his retirement from the army, Prince Khalid paid a ten-day visit to China in March 1995 to 'lecture Chinese on Gulf War' (*AP Worldstream*, March 18, 1995). During his visit, he held a meeting with the Chinese President, Jiang Zemin, who praised his role in facilitating contacts between leaders of both countries. The President, then, told him that 'The strengthening of Sino-Saudi Arabia friendly relations constitutes an important factor in keeping Asia stable and in maintaining world peace'. The Prince replied favourably that he 'believed a strong China would contribute to the peace and development of Asia and the world' (*Xinhua*, March 28, 1995).

One year later, Prince Khalid paid another visit to China to attend the inauguration marking the publishing of the Chinese edition of his autobiographic 'Desert Warrior' (*Riyadh Daily*, May 19, 1996). Throughout his visit, the Prince held several meetings with Chinese senior civilian and military officials including the Chinese Premier, Li Peng, the State Councillor and Minister of Defence, General Chi Haotian, as well as Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the state, Liu Huaqing.

The Chinese media reported that the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the state, Liu Huaqing, told the Prince that he appreciated the prince's endeavours in strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries. The Prince, in turn, stated that 'King Fahd and other leaders all give much heed to consolidating and strengthening Saudi Arabia's friendship and relations of cooperation with China. He went on saying that 'The maintaining of a good relationship between the two countries and the two armies benefit both countries, and the peace in Asia and even the world' (*Xinhua*, May 21, 1996).

It appears that during the talks that comprised Prince Khalid and the Chinese Minister of Defence, General Chi Haotian, the former extended an invitation to the Chinese minister to visit Saudi Arabia (*Xinhua*, May 17, 1996). The Chinese minister,

thus, was shortly due in Jeddah- for the first time ever in the annals of the Sino-Saudi relationships- to hold a meeting with the Saudi Second Deputy Premier and Defence Minister, Prince Sultan who told his guest that this visit was regarded 'a historic one' and a 'landmark in Sino-Saudi relations' (*Xinhua*, June 1, 1996). Within the same context, the Commander of China's Second Artillery Corps, Lt. General Yang Guoliang, paid a visit to Saudi Arabia in late November 1996. The senior Chinese military officer held a meeting with Saudi Minister of Defence with the purpose of discussing 'means to develop military cooperation' between Riyadh and Beijing (*AFP*, November 27, 1996).

Without citing a reference for this information, two political observers mention that China has offered to provide Riyadh with several things among which modern solid-fuelled intercontinental ballistic missiles with a range of up to 3,500 miles (Mezran & Mastrelia 2005: 79). In any case and despite the absence of plausible evidence, one cannot rule out the possibility of raising a Saudi proposal to replace the ten-year old CSS-2 missiles during those talks especially given that in March 11, 1997 the Saudi Military Chief of Staff Lt. General Saleh Mohaya stated that Saudi Arabia 'is now considering replacing or refurbishing the desert missile force' (*AP*, May 12, 1997).

7.5. SAUDI-CHINESE RELIGIOUS NEXUS

It is known that during the period in which there were no official relations between Riyadh and Beijing, religious parties on both sides played a considerable role in bridging that gap. Alongside some other Chinese parties concerned, they positively helped in paving the way for the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries in 1990²³⁵. After achieving that goal, they continued to fulfill their part in enhancing official relations between the two sides²³⁶.

One aspect of this effort was the good will visit of a Chinese Muslim delegation to Saudi Arabia in late 1991 (*FBIS-CHI-91-247*, December 24, 1991, p. 11). Another was the visit of a Chinese Islamic trade delegation from Jinan City in Shandong Province to the Kingdom in August 1993. The purpose of the visit was

²³⁵ In coincidence with the establishment of diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Beijing, Premier Li Peng publicly reiterated his country's policy of protecting the 'freedom of religious belief' (*Beijing Review*, December 18-23, 1990, p. 5-6).

²³⁶ For an interesting account on the influence of Chinese Muslims on their country's foreign policy towards the Middle East- especially in the post-1990 period including the Gulf War issue, see (Gladney 1994: 677-688).

exploring the possibility of exporting Chinese labour to the Kingdom; the joint exploitation of Jinan's mineral resources such as coal, iron ore, potassium, cobalt, fire-resistant clay and conducting joint ventures in the building materials, contracting, foodstuffs, consultancy and livestock sectors with companies such as Jinan's Islamic Industrial Company (*The Middle East*, October 1, 1993, p. 29).

Riyadh, in return, was keen to show Beijing its care for the welfare of Muslim communities in China. Towards this end, a Saudi delegation led by Sheikh Muhammad Al-Oboudi, the MWL's Assistant Secretary-General for Islamic Propagation, paid a visit to China in July 1992. The visit was planned to cover the Qinghai Province, Tibet and some central provinces of China. In his book *فوق سقف الصين: رحلة في الشمال الغربي من الصين وحديث عن المسلمين* (Above China's Roof: A Voyage to the North-West of China and a Speech about Muslims), Sheikh Al-Oboudi underscores that the main target of the visit was to inspect the conditions of Muslim community in the Chinese regions that they visited, holding meetings with Islamic renowned personalities and offering them some financial support²³⁷ in order to fund Islamic projects including the reconstruction and restoration of old and destroyed mosques and also the building of new ones (Al-Oboudi 2003: 18-19).

During the 1990s, the Kingdom financed the restoration of a number of ancient Chinese mosques and offered great support for the construction of a number of Islamic institutes in various Chinese cities including Beijing, Yinchuan (in Ningxia Province), Kunming (in Yunnan Province) and Zhengzhou (in Henan Province). The Saudi government also sponsored Islamic culture and Arabic language schools and provided them with books, translated copies of *Holy Quran* and equipments needed, and sent qualified teachers from Saudi universities to teach there²³⁸ (Zhong 1999: 27-28; Harris 1993b: 120). The Saudi government also granted Chinese Muslim students hundreds of scholarships to study Arabic language, history, Arabic literature and Islamic religious studies in its universities in Riyadh, Mecca and Al-Medina (*Riyadh Daily*, October 1, 1994; Zhong 1999: 29). During his visit to China in 1995, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Jubair, *Shoura* Council President, asserted in his address before the Deputy Mayor of Shanghai City that Riyadh pays attention to and cares for the

²³⁷ Al-Oboudi mentions that after getting permission from the Chinese central government, he carried with him some sums of U.S. Dollars to bestow upon Muslim people in charge of Islamic projects, mosques and religious schools as donations from the WML (Al-Oboudi 2003: 19-20).

²³⁸ For instance, *Nour Al-momineen* Institute for Arabic language and Islamic culture in Zhengzhou, Arabic language and Islamic culture school in Ge Dong Dian, the Islamic school in Chang Zhi in Shanxi Province and the polytechnic school for Muslims in Tian Jin (Zhong 1999: 28).

welfare of Muslims all over the world, including the Chinese ones (*Riyadh Daily*, October 29, 1995).

Within the same context, former Saudi Ambassador to Beijing, Tawfiq Alamdar, accentuates in a private interview in 1995 that 'the situation of Chinese Muslims has always been of great concern to the Saudi government, and especially to the religious authorities' in the Kingdom who in turn used to exert considerable domestic pressure on the Saudi royal family to financially and diplomatically advocate the Chinese Muslim communities (Obaid 2002: 36).

It can be said that the establishment of official relations between the two countries was positively reflected in the Muslim communities in China. For instance, the China Islamic Association was allowed to hold, for the first time, a national contest on reciting *Holy Quran* in Beijing both in 1995 and 1997. Both occasions witnessed the participation of hundreds of young male and female Muslims from different provinces across China. They were, also, attended by the Saudi Ambassador to Beijing alongside a number of other diplomatic representatives of some Islamic countries (*Xinhua*, March 6, 1997).

In addition, the number of Chinese *hajj* missions saw a remarkable increase during the 1990s. Statistics indicate that during the period between 1994-1996 more than 20,000 Chinese pilgrims performed *hajj* in a roughly basis of 6000-7000 per year.²³⁹ Chinese Consul General, Ali Li Jinren, expected that at least 5000 Chinese pilgrims would perform *hajj* in 1997 (*Arab News*, September 28, 1997). However, according to Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xingzhi, the actual number of Chinese pilgrims reached more than 10000 in 1997 (*Al-Riyadh*, October 14, 1998).

7.6. THE PRIMACY OF ECONOMIC ISSUE AT THIS STAGE

Since the early 1990s, it was obvious that enhancing economic ties would be the headline of this stage of the Saudi-China relations. In fact, the senior leaders of both countries showed an unmistakable common orientation towards promoting bilateral commerce and pledged that their economic ties will enter a new phase of development in the wake of forging official relations between Riyadh and Beijing (*Xinhua*, July 28, 1990 & November 12, 1990).

²³⁹ In comparison with merely 19 Chinese pilgrims in 1979.

The primacy of bilateral economic issues for both sides was noticeable during the Chinese Premier's visit to Riyadh in July 1991 in which he stated that 'there are vast potentials for developing bilateral economic and trade ties' and that 'the two countries should speed up the development of these ties' (*Xinhua*, July 10, 1991). The Premier and his Saudi hosts also publicly voiced their common desire to strengthen commercial relations and sign an accord on trade, investment and technological co-operation 'as soon as possible' (*Xinhua*, July 11, 1991).

This joint surge towards improving bilateral economic relations reflected a persuasion in Riyadh and Beijing that both countries' markets could be important and promising for each other's products, Chinese various goods²⁴⁰ and Saudi oil and petrochemicals products²⁴¹. It, furthermore, stemmed from the notion that both China and Saudi Arabia could 'complement each other in economic development ... and there exists great potential economic co-operation based on mutual benefits', according to Yang Fuchang, the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister (*Xinhua*, June 29, 1991). The Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Sun Bigan, offered a further elaboration of the China's view in this regard by saying that

The Chinese government is steadfastly pursuing its reform and open-door policy and has adopted socialist market economy. China is abundant in resources of manpower and technology and has great potentials of development. Saudi Arabia is rich in petroleum, chemicals and mineral resources and is abundant in capital. Economies of China and Saudi Arabia are highly complementary to each other and are promising in development (*Riyadh Daily*, June 24, 1993).

Against this background and in correspondence to the Sino-Saudi common desire to invigorate and strengthen their bilateral economic ties, the Saudi Minister of Finance and National Economy, Muhammad Aba Al-Khail, and his Chinese counterpart, Li Lanqing, signed in Beijing a wide-ranging of economic, commercial, technical and investment agreements (*China Daily*, November 6, 1992; *Xinhua*, November 6, 1992).

²⁴⁰ For further details about the Chinese view regarding the attractiveness of the Saudi market for Chinese goods, see China's Ambassador interview with *Riyadh Daily* (January 10, 1994).

²⁴¹ A report issued in 1997 by the Department of Exports Development in the Saudi Eastern Province Chamber of Commerce & Industry regarded China as a 'promising market' (for further details please, see "الصين: السوق الواعدة", 1997). Like wise, it is believed that the Saudi petrochemical companies (including giant Saudi Basic Industries Corporation SABIC) found the Chinese market attractive for exporting their petrochemical products especially in comparison with the then European Community tariffs and quotas against the petrochemical exports (*The Middle East*, October 1, 1993).

In another significant development, Aba Al-Khail's four-day visit to China witnessed the first high-level Sino-Saudi meeting on technology. The meeting comprised from the Chinese side Song Jian, Chinese State Councilor and Minister in charge of the State Science and Technology Commission (SSTC) and from the Saudi side Dr. Salih Al-Athil, President of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST). The meeting focused on the ways to further the cooperation in science and technology between the two countries (*Xinhua*, November 5, 1992).

In a further step in this regard, (KACST) and (SSTC) agreed to sign Memorandum of Understanding in 1994 during a symposium that was held in the former. The purpose of this memorandum was to encourage and support a formal exchange of scientific and technical information in various fields between the two sides including remote sensing, solar energy environmental protection, with emphasis on the prevention and treatment of desertification, desalination techniques and the related application of nuclear energy, seismic forecasting, formulation of national science and technology policy (*Riyadh Daily*, January 14, 1994). The MOU was signed in early 1996 (*Arab News*, August 11, 1996).

On the other hand, there has been a distinct Chinese effort during this phase to diversify trade between the two countries including encouraging exports of Chinese heavy construction machinery and the supply of skilled manpower (*Saudi Gazette*, March 14, 1996; *UPI*, April 14, 1996). It seems that the Chinese were eager to enter the Saudi market of labour contracting as the largest in the Middle East. By 1993, there were 40,000 Chinese working in Saudi Arabia, according to the outgoing Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Sun Bigan (*Riyadh Daily*, September 30, 1993).

The then, newly-appointed Chinese Ambassador, Zheng Dayong, in the Kingdom, stated that there was a feasibility to broaden cooperation between Riyadh and Beijing in this respect (*Riyadh Daily*, October 1, 1994). For her part, China's Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (FTEC), Wu Yi, expressed her hope that there will be cooperation on contract projects and labour services between the two countries (*Xinhua*, February 29, 1996). Likewise, the Chinese Commercial Councillor at the Chinese Embassy in Riyadh repeatedly said that China would look to carve out a niche in the Saudi labour market and through supplying qualified technicians and labourers (*UPI*, April 14, 1996; *Saudi Gazette*, December 15, 1996).

In fact, Riyadh's actual situation towards importing more Chinese manpower was unclear at that stage and there have been some conflicting reports in this regard.

While Abdulrahman Al-Jeraisy, head of the Saudi side in the Saudi-Chinese Friendship Society, informed *Riyadh Daily* that this matter was at that time under study by the Saudi authorities concerned (*Riyadh Daily*, November 2, 1997), the Saudi daily *Saudi Gazette* (May 21, 1998) reported that the Saudi government decided to open its labour market for Chinese workers in October 1997. In addition, The Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xingzhi, said that his government welcomes the Saudi decision to allow Chinese engineers and technicians to work in the Kingdom since October 1997 (*Riyadh Daily*, October 11, 1998).

As part of a concerted and programmed drive to consolidate bilateral trade and pave the way for greater business investment between the two countries, Riyadh and Beijing resorted to various modus operandi. These included, First, opening a consulate general with economic and commercial section in Jeddah in late 1993 to serve and enhance bilateral trade and economic relations between the two countries (*Arab News*, December 19, 1993). The Kingdom, in turn, opened its first consulate general in Hong Kong in April 1998 (*Al-Riyadh*, April 15, 1998).

Second, they intensified a high-level official visits between the two countries. In this regard, one can for instance cite the Chinese Vice premier's, Li Lanqing, two-day visit to Saudi Arabia accompanied by a trade delegation. The Chinese delegation held talks with the Saudi senior leadership including King Fahd and Prince Sultan. The main purpose of the visit was to discuss ways of promoting trade fairs, boosting commercial exchange between the two countries and opening new investment opportunities for the businessmen of the two countries (*AFP*, June 26, 1993; *Riyadh Daily*, *Saudi Gazette*; *Xinhua*, June 27, 1993). In return, the Saudi Ministers of Commerce, Suleiman Al-Suleim, and Finance, Ibrahim Al-Assaf, paid official several-day visits to the PRC in March 1994 and February 1996, respectively. The Saudi ministers were accompanied during their trips by large teams of high-ranking economic officials and businessmen (*Xinhua*, March 20, 1994 & February 29, 1996).

Third, they intensified the visits of Chinese and Saudi businessmen delegations to explore investment opportunities in each other's country (*China Economic Review*, May 1995, p. 23; *Saudi Gazette*, October 6, 1995; *Arab News*, December 7, 1995);

Fourth, they held several trade exhibitions in each other's major cities with the purpose of penetrating and targeting local markets in the two countries. It can be said that the Chinese side showed greater interest and was more active than its Saudi

counterpart in holding these exhibitions. For instance, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) used to annually organise a number of Chinese exhibitions in different Saudi cities including Riyadh, Jeddah and Dhahran²⁴² (*Xinhua*, May 26, 1991; *Arab News*, October 3, 1992).

Fifth, they organised investment symposiums in each other's country to boost bilateral trade and attract funds and investments for venture projects (*Arab News*, August 11, 1996; *Saudi Gazette*, September 29, 1996; *Xinhua*, November 11, 1996).

Sixth, they enhanced trade shipping routes through expanding air²⁴³ and sea transport links between the two countries. Whereas the National Shipping Company of Saudi Arabia (NSCSA) decided to expand its cargo services to China to reach Shanghai, Tianjin and cover northern markets centred on Beijing and the ports of Qingdao and Dalian, central areas were covered by the Shanghai operation and the southern were covered by the Company's Hong Kong service (*China Economic Review*, May 1995, p. 23).

Seventh, they set up of a Sino-Saudi Arabian Mixed Trade and Economic Committee with the purpose of widening bilateral economic relationships (*Xinhua*, February 28, 1996). During its 1st meeting which was co-chaired by the Saudi Finance Minister, Ibrahim Al-Assaf, and Chinese Minister of FTEC, Wu Yi, in Beijing, the two sides signed an agreement for encouraging and protecting investment for both parties, particularly government investments, ensure transfer of profit and capital, ensure admission of insurance agents on behalf of investors if requested and

²⁴² The first trade fair after establishing official relations, for example, was a seven-day trade exhibition that was held in Jeddah during the period between May 19 and 25, 1991. Nearly 100 Chinese companies took part in the expo and was visited by 120000 Saudi people. The sum of trade contracts signed during the exhibition has reached USD 65 millions (*Xinhua*, May 26, 1991). China held its second exhibition in Dhahran from October 10 to 16, 1992, then it held another weeklong exhibition in Riyadh from November 30, 1994 and also another weeklong one in Jeddah in March 20-28, 1995 (*Arab News*, October 3, 1992; *Riyadh Daily*, December 7, 1994; *Arab News*, March 28, 1995). The Saudis, on the other hand, took part for the first time in a conference held in Beijing on October 11, 1992 to promote joint industrial ventures (*Arab News*, October 3, 1992). A top delegation of Saudi officials and businessmen, also, visited China in May 1994 to explore possible investment opportunities there (*Saudi Gazette*, June 13, 1994). However, it was until the last quarter of 1995 when the Saudi Ministry of Industry and the Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry decided to hold their first industrial fair in China (*Arab News*, December 8, 1994).

²⁴³ According to the Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Zheng Dayong, there was a Chinese proposal in 1994 to establish direct commercial flights between the two countries (*Riyadh Daily*, October 1, 1994). It seems that the Saudi side, however, did not accept this proposal. In November 1997, Mr. Abdulrahman Al-Jeraisy, head of the Saudi side in the Saudi-Chinese Friendship Society, denied that he had discussed with the Chinese side opening of airline routes between the two countries (*Riyadh Daily*, November 2, 1997).

arbitrations in cases of disputes (*UPI*, February 25, 1996; *Riyadh Daily*, February 29, 1996; *SPA*, March 1, 1996; *Saudi Gazette*, March 2, 1996).

Eighth, they added another cornerstone to Riyadh-Beijing economic relations when they signed a Cooperative Document to exchange the most-favoured nation-Status which stipulated that each other's products would enjoy trade advantages in the other's country. Both countries, under this agreement, should provide convenient visa issuing facilities and work approvals and entrance registrations for each other's personnel to work in the two countries (*Xinhua*, February 29, 1996).

Finally, they established a Saudi-China Friendship Association on October 16, 1997 to empower bilateral economic relationships (*SPA*, August 10, 1997; *Arab News*, August 11, 1997; *Xinhua*, October 17, 1997). In the wake of this move, another memorandum of understanding for construction cooperation between the two countries was signed (*Riyadh Daily*, November 2, 1997).

7.6.1 Oil Factor Enters the Saudi-Chinese Equation

Despite the fact that Sino-Saudi cooperation in the oil sector can be regarded as part of their overall economic cooperation, the nature and the importance of the topic along with the strong thrust that typified the Riyadh-Beijing relationship in this field called for allocating a special section to discuss this matter in depth. The first reference to the importance of enlarging petroleum cooperation between the two countries was made during the visit of the then Saudi Minister of Finance and National Economy, Muhammad Aba Al-Khail, to Beijing in November 1992. Until 1994, two-way trade between Riyadh and Beijing was characterised by asymmetry and there has been a long surplus that ran in favour of the Chinese side since the 1980s (for further details, see table 3). Riyadh was aware of such matters and therefore during his trip to Beijing in November 1992, Aba Al-Khail, was keen to urge the Chinese side to increase its imports of Saudi petrochemicals and steel products as a way to redress the trade imbalance between the two countries (*Journal of Commerce*, November 9, 1992).

It seems that Beijing was not willing to allow the issue of trade imbalance to be an obstacle in the way of boosting bilateral trade with Riyadh. China's favourable response to the Saudi proposal, hence, came quickly during the visit of China's

Deputy Premier for International Trade, Li Lanqing, to Riyadh on June 27, 1993²⁴⁴. The Chinese official told his Saudi hosts that China will 'increase imports of Saudi crude oil and oil by-products during the country's ongoing large-scale economic construction spurred by China's modernization drive' (*Xinhua*, June 27, 1993).

The visit, also, saw the signature of an agreement- that was designed to narrow the trade gap between the two countries- between the Saudi oil giant Aramco and China's National Oil Company (CNOOC) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The agreement stipulated that China was to import 3 million tons of Saudi crude oil (*Xinhua*, August 21, 1993; *Arab News*, October 5, 1993). Following the visit of Saudi Commerce Minister, Suleiman Al-Suleim, to Beijing in March 1994, Chinese officials, once again, offered to increase their country's imports of crude oil from Saudi Arabia to 3.5 million tons/year (equivalent to approximately 70000 barrel/day) starting in 1995. The Chinese side said that this will help balance Riyadh's \$400 million trade deficit with Beijing last year (*UPI*, March 21, 1994).

In order to open the Saudi appetite for more cooperation in this field, China's Ambassador to Riyadh, Sun Bigan, made it clear that there was a great potential for expanding Sino-Saudi partnership in areas such as oil and chemical production, and that Chinese demand for Saudi oil was likely to increase (*Riyadh Daily*, April 5, 1994).

In another development, a letter of intent to set up a \$350 million petrochemical joint venture between the private Saudi Binladen Group (51%) and China National Technical Import and Export Corp (CNTC) (49%) was signed. Intended to be in the Saudi industrial port of Al-Jubail on the Gulf, the fertiliser plant was intended to use methane to produce 330,000 tons/year of ammonia and 570,000 tons/year of urea (*Financial Times Energy Newsletter*, March 18, 1994).

It would seem that the Saudi attention to the Chinese market began to take another turn following the subsequent Chinese declarations regarding increasing Beijing's imports of Saudi crude oil²⁴⁵ along with the economic boom that South-East Asia witnessed during the 1990s offering lucrative markets for Riyadh's petroleum

²⁴⁴ Chinese acceptance should be viewed within the context of the fact that 'with the expansion of the Chinese economy, China's demand for petrochemical products will increase steadily, and that the import of crude oil from different countries and channels has become an important component of China's strategy on resources', as Chinese Vice-Premier, Wu Bangguo, told the Saudi Petroleum Minister during the latter's visit to Beijing in October 1997 (*Xinhua*, October 13, 1997).

²⁴⁵ Chinese statements in this regard have become very frequent; see for example (*Riyadh Daily*, June 4, 1994; *Xinhua*, February 29, 1996).

exports, especially with a Saudi increasing budget deficit as a result of the falling world crude oil prices at that time. It can be said that since the mid 1990s there has been a conviction among the Saudi political elite that emerging markets including China and India will be promising outlets for the Saudi crude oil and that their expected huge demand for energy will help to raise current cheap oil prices in the coming years²⁴⁶.

In this sense, one can argue that the current Saudi push towards East Asia in general and China in particular might be traced back to mid 1994 when Riyadh sent its Petroleum and Mineral Resources Minister, Hisham Nazer, to tour several East Asian capitals including Beijing (*Arab News*, June 13, 1994). The Minister's tour was aimed at voicing the Saudi acceptance of participating in a joint project that included the PRC and South Korea to set up an oil refinery in Qingdao (Shandong Province) in China for which the Kingdom will supply crude oil (*Riyadh Daily*, June 4, 1994). The giant USD 1.5 billion refinery was expected to be established in 1997 and to produce 300,000 barrel/day (*Financial Times Energy Newsletter*, October 1, 1994; *Saudi Gazette*, December 7, 1994).

During his meeting with the Chinese President, Jiang Zemin, in Beijing, the Saudi Petroleum Minister emphasised that Riyadh is 'willing to strengthen its cooperation with China in various fields, and especially supports Saudi Arabian oil enterprises cooperation with Chinese partners' (*Xinhua*, May 18, 1994). The Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Zheng Dayong, revealed in an interview with *Riyadh Daily* that Nazer had also carried a signed letter from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd, to President Jiang proclaiming the Kingdom's desire to reinforce cooperation in the oil field with China. 'We have responded positively since it is common desire shared by the two sides', and 'I believe that starting from 1995 there will be a remarkable increase because China is determined to improve the bilateral trade balance by increasing imports from Saudi Arabia, especially oil and petrochemical products' the Ambassador said. (*Riyadh Daily*, October 1, 1994). The Chinese Embassy First Secretary, Zhai Jun, commented on Nazer's visit by saying 'We need a stable oil source just as Saudi Arabia needs a stable oil market. So it is a complementary relationship' (*Arab News*, June 13, 1994).

²⁴⁶ In this regard, see Prince Khalid Bin Sultan's interview with the weekly edition of the Canadian newspaper (*The Financial Post*, June 10, 1995).

Nazer-Jiang's important meeting laid the foundation for accelerating the pace of Sino-Saudi cooperation in the petroleum sector and indicated both sides, desire for greater joint projects in this field. For example, a Chinese visiting businessmen delegation that represented the Jiangsu Yueda Industry Group proposed setting up a joint Sino-Saudi venture to be based in the Kingdom for the production of downstream petrochemicals to be exported to China. Zhang Dimo who is an economic and commercial counsellor at China's Embassy in Riyadh said 'The Kingdom has abundant raw materials and provides a package of incentives while the products can be easily marketed in China as demand for petrochemical products there is very high' (*Saudi Gazette*, October 6, 1995).

In a sign of the significance Riyadh attaches to enhancing its petroleum cooperation with the Chinese side, the newly appointed Saudi Oil Minister, Ali Al-Naimi, paid a visit to Beijing to discuss the Sino-Saudi cooperation in oil sector and to complete the job his predecessor had begun²⁴⁷. During the visit, which represented the second for a Saudi Petroleum minister in one year, he held a meeting with Chinese Premier, Li Peng, who reiterated that the 'Chinese government supports a closer cooperation between enterprises of the two countries in this field'. The Saudi Minister, in return, said that the Kingdom 'is willing to have a powerful cooperation with China in various fields, especially in petroleum' (*Xinhua*, December 19, 1995). During the meeting, Al-Naimi, according to the *UPI*, expressed his country's readiness to provide China with all its oil needs (*UPI*, December 20, 1995).

Within the same context, during the weeklong visit of the Saudi Minister of Finance, Ibrahim Al-Assaf²⁴⁸, to Beijing in late February 1996, China's Minister of Trade and Economic Cooperation, Wu Yi, announced that her country wants to increase its imports of crude oil, petrochemicals and fertilisers from the Kingdom. The prospects of cooperation between the two countries, according to Wu, were

²⁴⁷ The following day, Minister Al-Naimi was slated to meet with senior officials of Sinochem, one of China's state oil firms, to discuss the proposed joint refinery in Qingdao (*Platt's Oilgram News*, December 21, 1995, vol. 73, no. 245, p. 1). In this regard, the state-run Saudi Oil Company (Aramco) announced that it completed a study on the feasibility of a petrochemical complex in China, which was estimated to cost USD 1.5 billion (*Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 1995, p. 13 & August 6, 1996, p. 10). The proposed project was to include Saudi Aramco with majority share of nearly 45%, South Korean Ssangyong 15% (in which Riyadh already has a minority investment) and Chinese Sinochem 18% with the remaining 22% to be held by Shandong province and the Qingdao municipal government (*Platt's Oilgram News*, October 11, 1994, vol. 72, no. 196-197, p. 6). On the other hand, the Saudis also had expressed interest to take a stake in a major expansion of the existing (8.5 million meter/year) Maoming refinery in China's southern province of Guangdong and an oil tank farm in Hainan (*AP*, March 27, 1995; *Platt's Petrochemical Report*, March 7, 1996, vol. 15, no. 10, p. 7).

²⁴⁸ The visit provided the first international debut for the then new Saudi Finance Minister.

improved as a result of the Saudi 'highly efficient petroleum industry and China's great need for petroleum products' (*Xinhua*, February 29, 1996).

She admitted that her country's inability to process certain Saudi crude oils was a large obstacle in way of importing more oil from the Kingdom. However, in order to overcome such problem, China began to build a refinery to process high-sulphur crude from the Middle East, including Saudi oil. The completion of this refinery will increase the Chinese capability to import more Saudi oil²⁴⁹, the Minister stressed (*Xinhua*, February 29, 1996; *Platt's Petrochemical Report*, March 7, 1996, vol. 15, no. 10, p. 7).

Indeed, a letter of intent was signed between Saudi Aramco and its Chinese counterpart, Sinopec, On June 10, 1997. The agreement between the two state-owned companies was designed to boost Saudi oil exports to China. Besides this, Aramco announced that it would study the possibility of taking part in refining and marketing joint ventures in China²⁵⁰. According to Sinopec president, Sheng Huaren, China's imports of Saudi oil was planned to increase as from the second half of 1997. Although gave no definite figure, he revealed that the two sides planned to build a new refinery with a capacity of 200,000 barrel/day along with modernising five other costal refineries in China²⁵¹ (*AFP*, June 9 & 11, 1997). According to one source, the agreement resulted in doubling Saudi oil exports to China from 30,000 barrel/day to 60,000 barrel/day (*Middle East Economic Digest*, October 31, 1997, vol. 41, no. 44, p. 3).

In addition, it was announced that Saudi Aramco will join Exxon petrochemicals and take an equal share (25%) in the joint venture at Fujian Petrochemical Company Limited to build a multi-billion USD petroleum and petrochemicals complex in Fujian Province at Xiaocuo. The project included upgrading the existing refinery from 8 million ton/year to 12 million ton/year and building a vapour cracker with 600,000 ton/year Ethylene capacity (*Chemical*

²⁴⁹ In 1995, China imported more than 10 million tons of crude oil. Saudi oil exports to China at that time was roughly 30,000 barrel/day.

²⁵⁰ Riyadh's pursuit of refining joint ventures overseas was part of a Saudi strategy to add value to basic crude production, guarantee outlets for Saudi crude and above that by greater up and down integration it can provide security of supply for consumers (*Platt's Oilgram News*, March 15, 1996, vol. 74, no. 53, p. 3).

²⁵¹ According to *Arab News*, the Saudi decision to invest in technical revamping projects of Chinese refineries was made to enable China to import more Saudi crude directly (*Arab News*, June 9, 1997). Sheng Huaren expected that Saudi oil exports to China could reach 1000,000 barrel/day by 2000 (*AFP*, June 9, 1997).

Business Newbase, October 24, 1997). According to Saudi sources, China's imports of Saudi crude oil was expected to quadruple in 1998 to reach 1.8 million ton/year making it one of the biggest consumers of Saudi oil in Asia (*China Economic Review*, May 1998, p. 10)

By the end of this stage, the Saudi-Chinese drive to lay a solid foundation for their upcoming petroleum partnership had started to take shape following the achievements of which the state-owned Saudi Aramco and Chinese Sinopec as well as Sinochem made which owe much of its success to the great governmental support they have enjoyed from both Riyadh and Beijing. During his meeting with the visiting Saudi Petroleum Minister, the Chinese Vice-Premier, Wu Bangguo, stated that various forms of cooperation between the China petrochemical corporation and the Saudi Arabia national oil company were appreciated by the Chinese government which 'backs the two companies in establishing a direct, long term and stable cooperative relationship in oil resources' (*Xinhua*, October 13, 1997). Ali Al-Naimi who was visiting Beijing to deliver a speech on the Saudi oil policy in global market to the 15th World Petroleum Congress. In his address, Al-Naimi outlined that the Kingdom responds to markets shift and despite emphasising that it was not on the account of its traditional customers in the US or Europe, he said that Riyadh's current marketing shift was to Asia with 60% of its total oil exports (nearly 4 million barrel/day and four times what it used to be, 10 years ago) (*Arab News & Saudi Gazette*, October 16, 1997).

7.6.2. Sino-Saudi Trade Exchange in the Balance

The measures the two sides had adopted to reinforce their economic relationship along with the advances they made in their cooperation in the petroleum sector were positively reflected in the volume of their two-way trade. In view of this, it can be said that bilateral commerce between the two countries has been expanding steadily since 1990 allowing it to reach a new annual height.

In more concrete language, the two sides have managed since 1994 to double the figures of their economic cooperation to reach USD 1 billion. By 1996, the sum of two-trade made a great jump to reach more than USD 1.5 billion and the trade balance was in favour of Saudi Arabia for the first time ever as one of the fruits of the petroleum cooperation between the two countries (for further statistics in this respect,

please see table number 4). By the end of 1997, Saudi Arabia became China's largest trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa with trade exchange exceeding USD 1,675 billion (*Saudi Gazette*, May 21, 1998). While Saudi Arabia exported petrochemicals, fertilisers and crude oil to China, the latter exported to the former almost everything including machinery, textile products, agricultural goods, furniture including rugs and carpets, metal products, live sheep and frozen beef.

Table 3: Bilateral Trade exchange between the KSA & PRC between 1990-1997*

Year	PRC Exports to KSA	KSA Exports to PRC
1990	\$ 337,444,000	\$ 79,652,000
1991	\$ 387,422,000	\$ 138,246,000
1992	\$ 444,289,000	\$ 127,415,000
1993	\$ 578,750,000	\$ 118,642,000
1994	\$ 674,351,000	\$ 352,782,000
1995	\$ 734,365,000	\$ 553,046,000
1996	\$ 748,498,000	\$ 839,706,000
1997	\$ 855,092,000	\$ 824,866,000

*Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF*.

7.7. CONCLUSION

The Saudi-Chinese genuine desire and joint endeavour to enhance their relationship in all possible fields of common interest had borne fruit by the late 1990s. Starting from their complementary views toward regional security and stability issues, the two sides managed to cement their political relations. The Gulf crisis was a quick and successful test for the emerging official relationship between the two countries and the Chinese performance during that incident received the appreciation of Riyadh and

paved the way for an important development that came in the form of establishing the annual consultation mechanism between the GCC and the PRC in 1996.

In the military sphere, this period witnessed the first ever visit for a Chinese Defence Minister. Also, Riyadh and Beijing continued to develop their cooperation during this era either through undertaking regular maintenance of the ten-year old East Wind missiles or perhaps through putting forward a Saudi proposal to replace them.

Regarding religious relations, the religious organizations in both countries were able to establish direct contacts and this enabled the Saudi side to offer some financial donations to support the religious schools and institutes in the PRC. The progress in official relations was also positively reflected on the size of Chinese official *hajj* delegations during the 1990s, which witnessed a remarkable growth in number.

Economic factors began to play a crucial role in shaping the Saudi-Chinese relationship starting from this phase. The two sides realised that they could be complementary to each other especially in the energy field. The Saudi side, on its part, began to attach great importance to the Asian emerging markets in general and to China in particular as a potential outlet and thus sought to maximise the share of its petroleum and petrochemical products in the Chinese huge and promising market. The Chinese side, in turn, was keen to enlarge the presence of its various products in one of the largest consumption markets in the Middle East.

Hence, the two sides, signed a Cooperative Document to exchange the most-favoured nation-Status, which stipulated that each other's products would enjoy trade advantages in the other's country. Desirous of achieving a balance in their two-way trade, the two countries decided to activate their petroleum cooperation and lay a solid foundation for their petroleum cooperation. As a result, Riyadh for the first time achieved a surplus in its trade balance with Beijing due to daily exports of roughly 60,000 barrels of crude oil to China. This was reflected on the volume of trade exchange between the two sides allowing the Kingdom to be China's largest trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa with an annual trade exchange of approximately USD 1.7 billion. In sum, it can be said that the progress Riyadh and Beijing had made in all fields of their relationship during this era prompts one to safely say that the symptoms of an upcoming strategic partnership between the two countries had begun to appear as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMIT DIPLOMACY AND THE RISE OF THE SAUDI-CHINESE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (1998-2000)

As a result of their growing economic and petroleum interdependence during the previous era, it was natural that Riyadh and Beijing were willing to enhance their ties at the highest political levels. Indeed, during this short but important phase of the annals of Saudi-Chinese ties, both sides managed to make important breakthroughs in all bilateral fields and summit diplomacy was the centrepiece that added another qualitative dimension to Riyadh-Beijing strategic partnership. It can be said that Saudi-Chinese rapprochement at the summit level was significant in accelerating the process of laying down the main principles of their political ties. It, moreover, was an important asset for their emerging economic and petroleum partnership as it served as a platform through which both countries were able to cross towards deeper understanding and cooperation as will be discussed later on.

This chapter will examine the primary determinants that dominated the calculus of both Beijing and Riyadh towards each other at this stage as it argues that the reciprocal urge both sides showed towards enhancing their relationship was not a reflection of merely economic interests but actually an expression of a new reading that also took into account various considerations including those of a political and strategic nature. Then it will focus on the key role which summit diplomacy has played in paving the way for the evolution of strategic partnership between the two countries in all fields. This task will be done out by discussing the strategic dimensions of the official visits of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz to China in 1998, President Jiang Zemin's state visit to the Kingdom in 1999 and finally the official visit of Saudi Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Defence Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz in 2000.

8.1. NEW PERCEPTIONS: SUMMIT DIPLOMACY AND THE SEEDBED OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The relationship between Riyadh and Beijing entered into a new and important phase during the period between (1998-2000). At this advanced stage of their relationship, both sides turned, for the first time, to summit diplomacy as an effective means to

establish direct contacts and deepening mutual understanding between higher political leaders in both countries. Several political circles both in Saudi Arabia and China hold that these top-level contacts have wielded an important role not only in exploring the prospects of partnership between Riyadh and Beijing but also in enhancing and endorsing it²⁵². Moreover, it can be said that these top-level contacts were considerably influential and substantial in terms of articulating the main features of Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership. Before examining the significant role summit diplomacy has played in the evolution of Sino-Saudi strategic partnership, it is pertinent to discuss the reasons and motivations that pushed both Beijing and Riyadh to become involved in such active summit diplomacy aiming at enhancing their connections at the highest level in late 1990s.

While the second millennium was drawing to a close and as a natural outcome of the subsequent substantial progresses that took place in the Saudi-Chinese connection during the last period stretching between 1990-1997, it was expected that the two countries would continue to take further steps aiming at promoting their cooperation in all possible matters of common interest. However, what makes this phase of the Riyadh-Beijing relationship unique is the fact that the two sides seemed to have come to a conclusion that the qualitative developments in their relationship needed to be culminated by exchanging the visits at the level of heads of states. Such a process was expected to gain the Saudi-Chinese partnership a strong momentum and help to take it to another level of cooperation.

As discussed in the previous chapters, China since 1978 has become preoccupied with continuing its economic and industrial modernisation programme. As a pre-condition to achieve such objectives and as a natural outcome of its shift to a net oil importer in 1993, meeting its ever-growing domestic energy demand has become one of the main determinants of China's foreign policy during this age. Taking that fact into consideration and given that Saudi Arabia has been the world's number one in terms of oil output and proven reserves and number four in terms of gas deposits, the Kingdom became one of the main destinations on the map of China's

²⁵² Private interview with Dr. Tallal Dhahi (Vice-president of Committee for Foreign Relations at *Al-Shoura* Council), and HE Ambassador Raid Girmely (Head of the Department of Western Europe at the Saudi Foreign Ministry) April, 2008. For a similar viewpoint at the Chinese side, see for example (*Xinhua*, October 12, 2000 & November 20, 2000, *Arab News*, December 24, 2000; *Xinhua*, January 17, 2003).

active global 'oil diplomacy'²⁵³. It was self-evident that Chinese officials would seek to enhance their emerging petroleum relationships with such an important country in the international energy arena. It can be said, therefore, that maintaining a strong relationship with Riyadh has become one of the pillars of China's energy security strategy.

Economically wise and in contrast to other petroleum producing countries, China recognised Saudi Arabia's potential as an economic partner as it has one of the largest consumption economies in the region. In fact, the Saudi market serves as a regional huge outlet for all sort of Chinese products especially taking into consideration that the Kingdom has become China's largest trade partner in West Asia and North Africa since 1998. China, hence, could relatively reduce the expenditure bill of its energy imports by contracting more Saudi oil and gas. Encompassing millions of foreign workers, China also viewed the Saudi labour market as promising for exporting its abundant manpower. In the same context and in line with its policies to attract foreign capitals, Beijing also believed that the Kingdom is abundant in terms of capital and hence could be a good source of foreign investments into Mainland China.

Politically, the new Saudi momentum and orientation towards cultivating strong relationships with Beijing in all fields provided the Chinese with a rare opportunity to achieve a long-standing wish of enhancing their political relationship with one of the traditional alliances of the West. Moreover, China might have thought that Saudis could play an important role in furthering the national unity of China through their positive spiritual influence over Muslim minorities in China and all over the world.

As a multi-national state, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, China's main concern has not been an external invasion but rather domestic separation forces (Kim 1996: 7). Opposition groups, in particular those of Uyghur Muslim minority, with separation aspirations in Western Province of Xinjiang became a pressing challenges to the Chinese leaders especially following a wave of Muslim revivalism and frequent ethno-religious domestic conflicts and unrest in that region during the mid-1990s (Israeli 1997: 269-282; *Beijing Review*, January 31, 2002, P. 14-19). Hence, one might conclude that cultivating strong relationships with major

²⁵³ For further details on China's global 'oil diplomacy', see for example (Rubin 1998; Trough 1999; Jaffe & Lewis 2002; Liangxiang 2005; Lee & Shalmon 2007).

and influential Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia would be a security as well as a political bonus for Chinese authorities in their attempts to assure, contain and combat such separationist groups (Calabrese 1998: 354).

The Kingdom's willingness to foster ties with China seems to be a product of a new and 'serious' Saudi political orientation towards balancing its relationships with all international superpowers including China, which was seen by Riyadh as a key political and strategic actor in making the new future of a world heading increasingly towards globalisation (Hashim 1999: 68). This serious trend cannot be properly perceived if taken in isolation of a number of considerations and indications associated with Riyadh-Washington relations. Divergent perspectives between Riyadh and Washington about the latter's Middle Eastern foreign policy became more evident after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of their joint enemy, Communism²⁵⁴. Riyadh thought that Washington became more supportive of Israel and less concerned about Saudi and other Arab opinions towards the situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Riyadh was unsatisfied about what it believes to be American unlimited support of Israel and unfair mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that the Saudis were unhappy about the relative decline of their regional role as one of the aftermaths of the 2nd Gulf War to liberate Kuwait in 1991. This had, on the one hand, economically exhausted the Kingdom and, on the other, relatively undermined its regional position in light of the of the US direct presence in the area (Al-Hamad 1999: 207). Perhaps more importantly, Saudis were discontented about Washington's announcement of its intention to increase its imports of Caucasus oil in an attempt to diversify its oil imports away from the Gulf (Hill 2001, http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2001/02foreignpolicy_hill.aspx & Rutledge 2006: 197).

²⁵⁴ Following the collapse of their common enemy Communism and the end of the Cold War, Saudi dissatisfaction with US foreign policy in late 1990s stemmed from their different perceptions towards Clinton's administration regional policy of 'dual containment' targeting both Iraq & Iran (then was also adopted by George W. Bush's administration after adding North Korea to its newer version which became to be known as the 'Axis of Devil') which began to be criticized by some circles in the Kingdom as unproductive and troublesome especially following the noticeable improvement in Riyadh-Tehran relationships during President Muhammad Khatami's reign (1997-2005), on the one hand, and because the US policy in lieu of undermining the Iraqi regime, gave initiative to Saddam Hussein who exploited humanitarian concerns over the effects of the embargo on the Iraqi people (Al-Shayegi 1998: 1-4; Peterson 2002: 13-18). Bronson (2006: 204-231) gives important and thorough account on the slow but steady coolness and deterioration of US-Saudi ties at that era.

Against this background, it can be said that the Saudi thrust to forge a strong relationship with China stemmed from various reasons. Economically speaking, Saudis thought that by enhancing their relations with Beijing they could compensate from an expected loss in the US market by securing an access to the Chinese lucrative market, which was seen as a promising and huge outlet for Saudi petroleum and petrochemical products.

Political and strategic considerations were, also, present in the mind of Saudi decision makers while taking the decision to forge strong ties with Beijing. It can be said that Saudis seem to have come to the realisation by the late 1990s that what aligned them to China was far greater than what distanced them. Politically, both countries are conservative and they embrace non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs as part of their general foreign policy. Socially, they are strongly family-oriented societies with similar social habits and extended family values. Domestically, achieving targets of domestic development and economic modernisation rather than political liberalisation constitutes the main priority for both of them. Economically, their petroleum cooperation is a natural fit that equally benefits both of them²⁵⁵.

In fact, enhancing political ties with Beijing corresponded to Riyadh's new and serious orientation to balance its relations with the US. Moreover, it helped in restoring the Kingdom's image in the region as an important country that has excellent relations with all international superpowers that could influence the course of event on the regional scene. Riyadh, as well, thought that Beijing has an important part to play in the region and Saudis were keen to encourage China to play a more balanced part in the peace process in the Middle East and exert considerable leverage in solving the longstanding Arab-Israeli conflict.

²⁵⁵ Author's interview with Mr. Mustafa Kawthar, Head of Asian Department in the Saudi Foreign Ministry. Riyadh, March 2008. In this regard it is worth noting that the facets and aspects of resemblance between Chinese, on the one hand, and Arabic and Islamic civilizations, on the other, were at the core of a greeting message sent by Crown Prince Abdullah to the Chinese government and people during his first visit to China (*Al-Bilad*, October 16, 1998). Al-Otaibi (2006: 154-156) offers an interesting approach to arguably clarify some supposed similarities between the political systems in the Kingdom and China based on the notion that both countries adopt dominant central political systems with a legitimacy derived from spiritual and ideological systems (Islam in the Saudi case and Communism in the Chinese case).

8.2. SUMMIT DIPLOMACY: THE CROWN PRINCE IN BEIJING (1998)

As indicated above the leaders in both countries have come to a conviction that the qualitative developments in their relationship since the normalisation of their political relations in early 1990s needed to be culminated by exchanging the visits at the level of heads of states. In view of this, it seems that the Saudi top leadership thought that the time had come to take action towards repeated Chinese invitations²⁵⁶ to visit Beijing. Indeed, on October 14, 1998 and in response to an official invitation extended to him by Chinese Premier, Zhu Rongji, in November 1996 (*Xinhua*, November 11, 1996), Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz accompanied by a large high-level delegation began a four-day goodwill state visit to China²⁵⁷ (*Xinhua*, October 14, 1998). As the second-ranking official²⁵⁸ in the Kingdom, the Crown Prince was the highest Saudi of such status to pay a visit to the PRC in the history of the Saudi-Chinese relationship.

Thus, this landmark visit, according to many Saudi and Chinese dailies (*China Daily*, *Riyadh Daily*, *Saudi Gazette*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Okaz*, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, *Arab News*, October 14-18, 1998), was expected to set a 'new era' in Saudi-Chinese ties due to the size and nature of the delegation accompanying the Crown Prince, which, as *Arab News* puts it (October 14, 1998), reveal that 'he intends to lay the foundations of a long-term partnership well into the next century'. The high-profile and comprehensive press coverage of the events of the visit in both countries and the warm welcome²⁵⁹ Prince Abdullah received give more credibility to the argument that both countries appear to have resolved to take their distinguished relationship to a higher level of strategic partnership²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁶ These official invitations used to be directed to the Saudi sovereign, king Fahd since the establishment of official ties. In this regard, see for instance (*Xinhua*, July 22, 1990 & November 12, 1990.).

²⁵⁷ Yet, the Prince stayed for a week in China.

²⁵⁸ At that time, Saudi Crown Prince was actually in charge of running the Kingdom's day-to-day business due to the declining health of King Fahd since mid 1990s (*AFP & AP*, October 29, 31, 1999). This situation lasted until he ascended the throne upon the death of King Fahd on August 1, 2005. Before his arrival to Beijing, Prince Abdullah was hailed by the Chinese media as a 'valued friend of China and a wise leader of his people' (*Arab News*, October 14, 1998).

²⁵⁹ The Prince was received with red carpet and a 21-gun salute (*Saudi Gazette*, October 15, 1998).

²⁶⁰ Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xingzhi, said that the Chinese government gives 'utmost priority' to develop friendly ties with Riyadh especially with the forthcoming visit of Crown Prince Abdullah (*Riyadh Daily*, October 11, 1998).

8.2.1. Strategic Implications of the Crown's Prince Visit to China

8.2.1.1. Political implications

Prince Abdullah's visit to China had several political implications for Riyadh-Beijing ties in the following years. In fact, the visit reflected a clearly identifiable Saudi official desire to 'seek to develop strategic relations between the two countries in every sense of the word in all political, economic and other aspects', as the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, put it (*Al-Riyadh*, October 16, 1998). The expression used by Prince Al-Faisal indicates that the Kingdom wanted to build bridges between the two countries conducive to a real strategic partnership that goes beyond merely distinguished economic relations.

Such Saudi orientation can be seen throughout the meetings that Abdullah held with Chinese leaders, President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji. For instance, Crown Prince Abdullah told Premier Zhu Rongji that 'China is the closest friend of Saudi Arabia' (*Xinhua*, October 14, 1998; *China Daily*, October 15, 1998). Abdullah also told his hosts that the Kingdom has a 'true desire to take the political and economic cooperation to the optimum level' (*Saudi Gazette & Al-Riyadh*, October 18, 1998). It can be said that this Saudi call has found a positive echo in the Chinese side and Chinese officials favourably responded to it promising to work with the Kingdom towards this objective (*China Daily*, October 16, 1998; *Saudi Gazette & Al-Riyadh*, October 18, 1998).

While the Chinese leaders reaffirmed their profound belief that the Kingdom is a key power for the regional stability and security, the top Saudi official praised the efforts of China to establish world peace especially in the Middle East. He, likewise, urged Beijing to support what the Arab perceived to be just causes and to adopt an active Middle Eastern policy and play effective role in resolving regional crisis in line with its size and presence in the international arena (*Arab News, Saudi Gazette, Al-Riyadh & Okaz*, October 15-16, 1998). By doing so, Abdullah was delivering a clear message to his hosts that his country attaches great hope to the prospects of an active Chinese role in the region especially taking into account that such a Saudi request used to be directed only to traditional Western friends of Riyadh, namely the US, UK and France.

Moreover, incorporating China as one of the main destinations in the Crown's Prince world tour that included Britain, France and the USA reflects the Saudi

leadership's awareness of the important role China is playing as one of the influential centres in world politics and that Beijing began to assume an equivalent high status similar to that of Washington, London and Paris in the mindset of the Saudi foreign policy decision-maker²⁶¹. This conclusion is also drawn from the fact that Prince Abdullah was eager to discuss with the Chinese leaders the same regional and international issues (i.e. peace process in the Middle East, the situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan and countering international terrorism) on which he exchanged views with traditional Western friends of Riyadh a few weeks earlier.

Last but not least, the visit also provided an opportunity to build a personal bond between the Saudi top official and his counterparts of Chinese senior leaders. This is also very significant in the political traditions of both China and Saudi Arabia. While the Chinese believe very strongly in the concept of 'old friends'²⁶², the Saudi ruling class also affixes such attention to this matter in its conduct of foreign policy. Both dailies *Asharq Al-Awsat* and *Arab News* (October 19, 1998) wrote that Saudi Arabia has made new friends during the visit and expected that Abdullah's new personal 'rapport' that he established with Chinese leaders will promote dialogue on a host of issues, notably the need to prevent the proliferation of mass destruction weapons, chiefly nuclear arms, in the Gulf region²⁶³.

The landmark visit seems to have excellently achieved its goals as the two sides at the end of its official part issued a joint press communiqué during which they stressed that a consensus has been reached on a number of bilateral, regional and global issues including the Mideast peace process, calling on Iraq to cooperate with the UN weapons inspections commission, calling on Syria and Israel to resume their negotiations, condemning terrorist activities of any kind and from any side, and expressing their willingness to increase and coordinate their anti-terrorist endeavours.

For its part, Riyadh's reiteration that Taiwan is part and parcel of China was welcomed and appreciated by the Chinese leadership. In exchange, China praised the

²⁶¹ After visiting the UK, France, USA and China, the Crown Prince continued his world tour to Korea, Japan and finally Pakistan.

²⁶² President Jiang told Prince Abdullah that they have a Chinese maxim that says 'One look is worth a thousand words' (*Okaz*, October 16, 1998). For a better understanding of the importance of the concept of 'guanxi', which laterally means 'connections and access' or more accurately the character and quality of personal relationship, in the Chinese negotiation behaviour, see Cohen's work *Negotiating Across Cultures* (2004: 71-72).

²⁶³ Although the joint press communiqué said nothing about this issue, *Asharq Al-Awsat* stressed that the two sides have discussed it and that they are 'agreed' on it (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 19, 1998; also available in English at *Mideast Mirror*, vol. 12, no. 201).

role undertaken by Riyadh in insuring stability of global oil market as a secure and trustworthy supplier of energy. The two sides praised the 'good results' of the visit and agreed to carry on contacts at high level and strengthen ties to a strategic level in the political and economic domains²⁶⁴ (*Xinhua*, October 17, 1998).

8.2.1.2. The Saudi spiritual role in China's national unity

It seems that the Chinese leaders were keen to seize the opportunity of Prince Abdullah's visit to assure him about the conditions of Chinese Muslim communities and that Beijing respects their rights and give them a reasonable room to practice their religious rituals²⁶⁵. In exchange, and as expected from the Saudi leadership that sees its self as a supporter of Muslim minorities all over the world due to the huge weight it enjoys in the Islamic World²⁶⁶ care was taken to ask its hosts to include some stopovers in the Islamic institutions in China within the agenda of the official visit of the Prince.

Moreover, Riyadh recognised that domestic separation forces could be a great potential source of threat to a multi-national country like China. The Saudi leadership, hence, appears to have wanted to send a clear message to the Chinese leaders in Beijing that it can be an asset to China's national security not only through its support of the policy of One China but also through publicly expressing its satisfaction with the conditions under which Chinese Muslim minorities live and encouraging them to be good citizens towards their country and dismiss any ideas or attempts to gain separation and independence.

Prince Abdullah, for instance, visited both the headquarters of the Islamic Association of China (IAC) and Institute of Islamic Theology (*Xinhua*, October 15, 1998). During his meeting with the Deputy President of the IAC, Wan Yaobin, and some of the leaders of China's Islamic communities, he drew their attention to the fact that Islam is the religion of love and loyalty and that it rejects violence as well as

²⁶⁴ For the full-text of the press communiqué, see (*Xinhua*, October 17, 1998, *Okaz & Al-Riyadh*, October 18, 1998).

²⁶⁵ Before the arrival of Crown Prince to Beijing, Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xingzhi, told Saudi daily *Al-Riyadh* (October 14, 1998) that Chinese are enjoying their political rights and freedom of belief. The Ambassador went on to underscore that there exist more than 30000 mosques, 40000 *imams*, 30000 Islamic religion students and 8 Islamic institutes in the PRC.

²⁶⁶ During his meetings with the Chinese leaders, Prince Abdullah has repeatedly placed emphasis over the consideration that his country is not merely the largest oil producer but also the cradle of Islam and that its lands houses the two holy shrines of Muslims (*Al-Riyadh*, October 16, 1998).

terrorism (*Arab News*, October 16, 1998; *Al-Riyadh*, October 17, 1998). He moreover, advised them to be 'good citizens' to their home under the leadership of the PRC's government (*Riyadh Daily*; *Al-Riyadh*, October 16, 1998). At the end of his visit, Prince Abdullah presented a personal donation of USD 500,000 to the IAC and the Islamic institute (*Riyadh Daily*, October 16, 1998).

Likewise, Prince Abdullah on the following day performed *Al-Jumuah* prayer in the *Niujie* Mosque in Beijing. After the prayer he addressed the audience saying that 'the good Muslim is a good citizen' (*Okaz*, October 17, 1998). He also affirmed that 'As you know, homeland is valuable for everyone and Islam has come to enhance this and reinforce solidarity among Muslims as well as strengthen the state in which it exists' and I wish all of you will 'serve your religion and your countries where your you live' (*Al-Riyadh*, October 17, 1998).

Prince Abdullah, also, paid a visit to the *Xian* Mosque in the ancient imperial capital of China on October 19, 1998 where he was warmly welcomed by thousands of Chinese Muslims. Prince Abdullah addressed the audience saying that it is his pleasure to examine the conditions of his Muslim brothers in the PRC. He then told them that he is pleased to find out that 'intimacy and brotherhood are prevailing the relationship between this friend state and its citizens of Chinese Muslims'. All what I wish for my Muslim brothers in friendly China is intimacy, cooperation and love with their Chinese brothers since this is what our religion encourages us to do. Let us adhere to our Islam in the service of homeland and religion, he added. The Prince, then, presented a donation of USD 500,000 on behalf of his brother King Fahd to restore and refurbish the old mosque of Xian (*Saudi Gazette*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Madina & Okaz*, October 20, 1998).

Former Saudi Minister of *Hajj*, Iyad Madani, commented on the content of Abdullah's meetings with Islamic Chinese leaders. Madani said that by emphasising that the religion of Islam does not conflict with the loyalty of Chinese Muslims to their original country, the Crown Prince sought on the one hand to enhance the concept of national unity among Chinese Muslim communities and, on the other, to indicate that Islam should become a genuine part of the Chinese natural texture (Madani 1999: 136-137).

In fact, the importance of these statements stem from the fact that they reflected the Saudi official position towards Muslim Uyghur separation forces and instability incidents in the province of Xinjiang in 1997. While some Saudi religious

circles requested the Royal Family to render financial and diplomatic support to Muslim communities in China during these incidents (Obaid 2002: 36; Blumenthal 2005: 15), Saudi political establishment was careful to dissociate itself from these separatist groups and rather to reaffirm its support of the unity of China by calling on Chinese Muslims to be good citizens.

8.2.1.3. Petroleum implication

China was one of the fastest growing markets for Saudi oil and petrochemicals during the five year period 1993-98; and it also attracted more Saudi investments, both in upstream and downstream projects, than any other country (*Arab News*, October 14, 1998). It seems that Riyadh was betting on China's future growth of oil demand, as the fastest growing economy in the world, which was expected at that time to at least raise that figure from nearly 60,000 barrel/day to roughly 500,000 barrel/day (*Arab News*, October 19, 1998).

Thus, it comes as no surprise to find that among the main priorities in the agenda of Prince Abdullah's visit to China was seeking new markets and outlets for Saudi oil and petrochemical products (*Al-Riyadh*, October 13, 1998). During an interview with *Al-Riyadh* two-weeks prior to Prince Abdullah's visit to China, Ali Al-Naimi, Saudi Minister of Petroleum, said that the state-run Saudi Aramco is negotiating with US Exxon and Chinese Sinopec on a giant joint venture to expand and upgrade a number of Chinese refineries. The minister predicted that Abdullah's visit would give major support to this joint-project and will also maximise the stake of Saudi crude oil in the Chinese market (*Al-Riyadh*, October 3, 1998).

In order to serve this purpose, Al-Naimi, held a meeting with the head of the Chinese side in the Saudi-Chinese Friendship Society, Xi Hue, to discuss means and ways to boost petroleum cooperation between the two countries (*Okaz*, October 16, 1998). Likewise, during the meeting between Prince Abdullah and the Governor of *Xian* Province, Un Dong Zhun, the latter told the Saudi guest that *Xian* Province produces most of China's oil and that China looks forward to benefit from the Saudi expertise in the petroleum sector and from 'advanced Saudi technology' in digging, refining and producing oil and petrochemical products (*Al-Riyadh*, October 18, 1998).

Indeed, as the minister expected, the London-based Arab daily *Al-Hayat* (30/11/1998) reported that a joint venture agreement was reached between the KSA

and the PRC for the construction of three petrochemical plants within the framework of a tripartite cooperation between Saudi Aramco, Sinopec and US Exxon²⁶⁷. The agreement also provides for the expansion and repair of a Chinese oil refinery used for processing heavy Arabian oil, and for the exploitation of some of the refinery products in the establishment of advanced industries based on Chinese technologies. In this regard, the Chinese ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xingzhi, told the newspaper that Beijing and Riyadh agreed to establish strategic cooperation relationships notably in the oil and petrochemical sector during the recent visit of Crown Prince Abdullah to China (*BBC, SWB, FE/W0567/WG*, December 9, 1998; *Petroleum Economist*, January 6, 1999, p. 46).

8.2.1.4. Economic implications

Given that bilateral economic issues were at the heart of Prince Abdullah's visit to China, there were a number of meetings between Saudi and Chinese economic officials on the sidelines of the visit who were dedicated to reviewing these issues (*Okaz*, October 20, 1998). The visit witnessed a meeting between then Prince Abdullah and the Saudi and Chinese co-chairmen and representatives in the Saudi-Chinese Joint Commission to encourage them to increase bilateral economic exchange (*Riyadh Daily*, October 16, 1998).

There was, also, a meeting between Saudi Minister of Finance and National Economy, Ibrahim Al-Assaf, and Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, Sun Guangxiang, to discuss these issues. The two officials pledged to remove all legal, bureaucratic and technical obstacles that still existed on the way to achieving greater and free commercial exchange (*Arab News*, October 19, 1998). Moreover, the meeting resulted in a memorandum of understanding on trade and economic cooperation according to which four working panels were established under the Saudi-Chinese Joint Commission to expand cooperation in trade, oil, minerals, investment and technology²⁶⁸. The two sides also agreed to set up a joint business council to promote commercial and investment cooperation (*Okaz & Riyadh Daily*, October 17, 1998).

²⁶⁷ The co-investment agreement was to include the renovation of the Fujian Refinery and the Maoming Refinery and the establishment of a large petrochemical complex, according to Jia Chunhai, Economic Counselor at the Chinese Embassy in Riyadh (*Arab News*, August 3, 1999).

²⁶⁸ In accordance with this, China-Saudi technology trade fair was opened in Riyadh in late 1998 (*Riyadh Daily*, November 3, 1998).

In another development, the number of Chinese workers in the Kingdom was likely to multiply since Riyadh agreed to grant more work permits to the Chinese wishing to work in Saudi Arabia especially in the fields of medicine and construction²⁶⁹. It was reported also that there is a possibility of Saudi students pursuing scientific and technological studies in China (*Okaz*, October 17, 1998; *Arab News*, October 19, 1998). Likewise, the joint press communiqué issued at the end of the Prince's visit announced that the two sides agreed to carry on efforts to boost trade exchange and encourage exports (*Xinhua*, October 17, 1998).

In a tour to various Chinese cities during June 1-7, 1998, a large official Saudi trade delegation headed by Commerce Minister, Osama Faqih, had reached an agreement with Chinese Foreign Trade Minister, Shi Guangsheng, to boost bilateral trade volume to USD 5 billion in 3-5 years time and pledged to encourage investment in each other's countries (*Saudi Gazette*, May 21, 1998; *China Daily*, June 3, 1998). By that time, according to IMF statistics, the volume of bilateral trade exchange in 1998 was roughly USD 1,7 billion with a balance of trade slightly in favour of China (for further details, see table 4).

8.3. SUMMIT DIPLOMACY: CHINESE PRESIDENT IN RIYADH (1999)

The year 1999 saw a couple of important developments in Saudi-Chinese ties that came as a direct outcome of the huge momentum that the bilateral relationship had gained following Prince Abdulla's visit to China. The first event came within the framework of furthering cultural and information cooperation between the two countries following the inauguration of the Riyadh Bureau of the official news agency of China (*Xinhua*) in mid February 1999 by Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xingzhi (*Riyadh Daily & Xinhua*, February 14, 1999).

The second important event was the visit of Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz's to China at the invitation of Beijing municipal government (*Xinhua*, April 20, 1999). The importance of the visit stems from two considerations. First, Salman has personal eminence as the Governor of Riyadh Province along with being a full brother of King Fahd. Moreover, the nature and tightness of the visit schedule, which was not limited

²⁶⁹ According to Saudi press, there are merely couple of thousands Chinese working in the Kingdom (*Okaz*, October 17, 1998; *Arab News*, October 19, 1998). It is worth noting that the number given by *Arab News* (1500 Chinese workers) seems to be inaccurate and pretty small in comparison with a number previously given in 1993 by the Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Sun Bigan, (40000 workers) (*Riyadh Daily*, September 30, 1993).

to holding meetings with municipal officials but also included other meetings with several senior military and political officials including Defence Minister, Chi Haotian, Vice-Premier, Qian Qichen, and President, Jiang Zemin (*Xinhua*, April 20, 1999; *Xinhua*, April 21, 1999 & April 23, 1999; *China Daily*, April 24, 1999).

However, the most important development during this year was President Jiang's four-day state visit to Saudi Arabia, which was the first in history for a Chinese head of state (*Xinhua*, October 31, 1999).

8.3.1. Strategic Implications of Jiang's Visit

8.3.1.1. Political implications

As happened with the visit of Crown Prince Abdullah to China, Jiang's 'landmark' visit received high-profile press coverage and was featured on the front page of all Saudi and Chinese newspapers (*China Daily*, *Arab News*, *Saudi Gazette*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Okaz*, November 1, 1999). In an unequivocal indication of the weight and significance of the 'historic' incident, Jiang was accorded a reception by King Fahd, despite his poor health attended by, Crown Prince Abdullah and other senior royalties and top officials at the Riyadh Air Base (*Arab News*, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, *Al-Hayat*, November 1, 1999).

The Chinese President, who was accompanied by a 100-member contingent of high-ranking officials and businessmen²⁷⁰, held wide-ranging talks with King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah and Prince Salman Governor of Riyadh Region (*Arab News & Riyadh Daily*, November 1-2, 1999). More importantly, prior to the broad meeting between Crown Prince Abdullah and President Jiang that was attended by many officials, there was a closed meeting between the two leaders during which issues of considerable weight to both countries are believed to have been raised (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, November 3, 1999). Among the issues that have been touched on during their open official talks were the peace process in the Middle East and the issues of bilateral cooperation including mechanisms to activate the bilateral agreements that have been signed (*Al-Hayat*, November 3, 1999).

Jiang's state visit, according to Chinese media, seems to have been programmed to feature intensive talks aimed at formulating a strategic vision for

²⁷⁰ The visit was the last leg of his six-nation tour, which included France, Britain, Portugal, Morocco and Algeria.

bilateral relations (*Xinhua & Mideast Mirror*, November 2, 1999). The visit also seems to have constituted a good occasion for both sides to highly re-stress the convergence of their viewpoints on major international issues and that 'they have always sympathized with and supported each other and cooperated very well in international affairs' (*Riyadh Daily*, October 31, 1999).

The visit, which helped to create the needed momentum to build more stages of bilateral cooperation, witnessed the signature of a number of agreements. The first was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for oil cooperation between the two countries. The two sides, also, signed a higher education agreement²⁷¹ and also a report of the Saudi-Chinese economic working team. In the information sphere, a radio and television agreement between the Saudi Ministry of Information and the Chinese Authority for Radio, Cinema and Television was signed. Moreover, the two sides inked an agreement for cooperation and the exchange of news between the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) and the Chinese news agency of *Xinhua* (SPA, *Riyadh Daily & Arab News*, November 1, 1999).

On the third day of his visit, President Jiang delivered a twenty-minute lecture at the King Abdulaziz Public Library (KAPL) on 'Sino-Saudi relations and Sino-Arab relations'. The lecture which was attended by Crown Prince Abdullah, cabinet ministers and eminent personalities focused on a number of issues: the notion that China and the Arab world are 'developing countries. He praised sympathizing and supporting each other in international affairs', China's friendly relations with the Arab world and its long-standing support of their just and legitimate rights and interests; and noted how China and the Arab World 'share broad common views on human rights and a wide range other issues'. That the Arab World, including Saudi Arabia, is a resolute supporter of China on the question of Taiwan and many other issues²⁷² (*Riyadh Daily*, November 3, 1999).

It seems that the Chinese diplomacy sought to seize the opportunity of Jiang's presence in the Kingdom to send another reassuring message to the Saudis about the conditions of Chinese Muslim communities. Consul General, Ali Li Jinren, as a Muslim diplomat spoke positively about this subject. In a letter sent to *Saudi Gazette* (October 31, 1999), he averred that Chinese Muslims 'fully enjoy political rights and

²⁷¹ In this regard, Saudi Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Khalid Al-Anqari, had paid a visit to China in October 1997.

²⁷² For the 'full' text of Chinese President's lecture, please see (*Xinhua*, November 2, 1999; *BBC, SWB, FE/D3683/G*, November 4, 1999).

freedom of religion belief' and that the central government has annually allocated a considerable sum of funds to maintain and build mosques as well as subsidizing publication of Islamic classics and materials. He also asserted that there are more than 30000 mosques (one mosque per six hundred Muslims) in which there 40000 imams and 30000 students. He also pointed out that the China Islamic Association, which represents all Muslims in China has more than 400 branches across the country and that there is a national Islamic College and many Islamic colleges throughout the country in Beijing, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Ningxia, Kunming, Shenyang, Zhengzhou and so on, three of which were funded by the Saudi-based Islamic Development Bank.

At the end of the visit, the two sides issued a joint communiqué, akin in most of its content to that issued following the Abdullah visit to China, emphasising that the kingdom and China 'reached common views' during their meetings and 'expressed their readiness to promote their bilateral relations to the level of strategic cooperation in all political and economic fields'²⁷³ (*Riyadh Daily, Saudi Gazette, AFP, China Daily & Xinhua* November 3-4, 1999).

It can be said that what transpired from Abdullah-Jiang's Official talks (*Xinhua*, November 2, 1999) side by side with Jiang's lecture at KAPL and the content of the joint communiqué issued by the two sides at the end of the visit reveal the Saudi-Chinese perception of the primary bases of their upcoming strategic partnership which can be summarised as follows: a mutual recognition that China and Saudi Arabia are important countries in East and West Asia respectively, which share a common interest in ensuring security and stability in the Indian subcontinent as well as central and western Asia; a Chinese commitment as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to maintain endeavours to promote peace and stability in the Gulf region²⁷⁴ and the entire middle East including playing an active role in the regional Peace process; Stressing that both Beijing and Riyadh embrace independent and peaceful foreign policy and have identical or similar views on several international issues with reciprocal support and cooperation; Chinese recognition that the Kingdom is an important country in the Middle East and Gulf regions that plays an important role in safeguarding regional peace and stability; Chinese recognition of the essential role undertook by the Kingdom as a rational force to stabilize

²⁷³ For the full text of the joint communiqué, please see (*Riyadh Daily & Saudi Gazette*, November 4, 1999).

²⁷⁴ See Jiang's meeting with Jamil Al-Hujaylan, Secretary-General of the GCC (*China Daily*, November 2, 1999).

international energy markets²⁷⁵; Saudi Arabia's firm recognition that the government of the PRC is the legal and sole government representing the entire Chinese people and that Taiwan is an integral part of the Chinese territories; agreement on a conciliatory perception of cultural differences that regards the notion of the superiority of the civilization of a given nation over other civilizations and ignore or even despise other civilizations as a mistake in an understood reference to some Western premises; despite the fact that the social systems of the two countries are different, they acknowledge that they do not have problems left over from history and have no conflicts of fundamental interests; both countries have resolved to develop their bilateral ties on the basis of the principle of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, non-interference in each other's domestic affairs; both China and Saudi Arabia are developing countries that face the common task of developing national economy and improving the living standard of their peoples in the economic globalisation age; pushing business ties and economic cooperation between the two countries to a new high especially in the field of oil and encouraging regular visits of high-ranking officials and the expansion of cooperation fields between the two countries as they reflect a 'good momentum of development'.

8.3.1.2. Petroleum implications

Against the backdrop of the Chinese President's visit to the Kingdom, press reports predicted that it was motivated with a special reference to oil cooperation between the two countries including the signature of a MoU for oil cooperation, along with discussing the construction of a USD 1 billion refinery and petrochemical complex in China²⁷⁶ that will use Saudi crude oil (*BBC, SWB, FE/D3668/G*, October 18; *Middle East News*, October 25; *Arab News*, October 30; *Al-Hayat & AP*, October 31, 1999).

According to a Chinese diplomat, the MoU to set up a 240,000 barrel/day oil refinery in southern China's Fujian Province²⁷⁷ will result in increasing Beijing's

²⁷⁵ The Chinese ambassador to Riyadh, Yu Xin Zhi, stressed this notion within a letter sent to *Saudi Gazette* (October 31, 1999).

²⁷⁶ Prior to Jiang's visit, there was a key visit of Cao De Gan, the Governor of Fujian, where the proposed Sino-Saudi joint venture was planned to be set in collaboration with a consortium of US Exxon, Saudi Aramco and two Chinese companies Sinopec as well as Fujian Petrochemical Co.. The Governor who led a 20-member Chinese trade delegation to the Kingdom stated that the formalities of the project were finalised and it was waiting for the approval of the provincial government (*Gulf News*, September 9, 1999).

²⁷⁷ According to this agreement, the joint venture of Saudi Aramco (25%), US Exxon (25%), Sinopec and Fujian Petrochemical Company (FPC) (50%) will prepare a feasibility study for tripling the

annual imports of Saudi oil to reach 3.4 million tonnes/year (nearly 70,000 barrel/day) from its current level of 2.4 million tonnes²⁷⁸ (*AFP*, October 30, 1999; *Al-Hayat*; *Arab News*, November 2, 1999).

It seems that the Chinese head of state wanted to build on the successes and advances that Abdullah's visit to China in 1998 had scored in bilateral relations in this field. In this regard, the Chinese newspaper '*Wen Wei Po*' wrote that the Chinese President will seek to implement the Sino-Saudi 'strategic plan for oil cooperation' that was signed during Saudi Crown Prince's visit to Beijing the previous year (*BBC*, *SWB*, *FE/D3670/G*, October 20, 1999). Hence, the last day of Jiang's visit was dedicated to touring Eastern Province where most Saudi oil reserves, petroleum and petrochemical plants are centred. He, also paid visits to Jubail Industrial City, the petrochemical giant Sabic and Saudi Aramco (*China Daily*, November 4, 1999; *Saudi Gazette*, November 5, 1999).

Another significant outcome of this visit in bilateral cooperation in this sector was the announcement of China's desire to start importing natural gas from the Saudi Arabia as from the beginning of 2001. The Kingdom, consequently, became the first country to supply gas to meet China's energy needs and this development was regarded as a step forward that will open up new opportunities for joint collaboration in the gas industry (*Saudi Gazette*, November 4, 1999).

8.3.1.3. Economic implications

Improving economic ties and trade exchanges between the two countries had been a high priority on the agenda of both countries during Jiang's visit. While the Saudis saw China as unique example of economic growth and success²⁷⁹ as well as a huge

capacity of the FPC's oil refinery in Quangang from its current level of 80,000 barrel/day to 240,000 barrel/day along side with the establishment of a new petrochemical complex that will include a 800,000 tonnes/year ethylene steam cracker, polyethylene and polypropylene units, and chemical derivatives manufacturing units (*MEED Quarterly Report*, March 7, 2002, p. 27).

²⁷⁸ While its domestic consumption of oil exceeded 331 million barrels/day in 1998, China's production totals 290 million barrels/day (*Arab News*, August 3, & October 30, 1999). The annual demand for Chinese refineries at present, according to a source in the Chinese Petrochemical Company, is between 30-40 million/tons and most of it comes from Saudi Arabia and from some GCC countries. Beijing, he added, is planning to increase its oil imports from the GCC in general and Saudi Arabia in particular in the coming few years (*Saudi Gazette*, November 4, 1999).

²⁷⁹ During his meeting with the visiting President, Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz, Governor of Riyadh Province, told Jiang that 'many experiences of China's social and economic development are worth learning by Saudi Arabia' (*Xinhua*, November 1, 1999).

market for their petroleum and petrochemical products²⁸⁰, the Chinese side proceeded from the point that the two economies are 'highly compatible'. In this regard, Jiang stated that 'China has rich human resources²⁸¹, adequate commodities for consumption and advanced technologies in some fields, while Saudi Arabia has rich energy and fund and remarkable capability of consumption' (*Xinhua*, November 2, 1999). There was no wonder, therefore, that Jiang highlighted the fact that the Kingdom since 1998 has become China's largest trade partner in West Asia and North Africa and that he encouraged Saudi business entrepreneurs to visit China and invest in his country while delivering his lecture at KAPL (*Saudi Gazette & China Daily*, November 3, 1999).

In order to encourage entrepreneurs in both countries to expand their business and investment opportunities in both countries, the Chinese President held a meeting with the Saudi representatives the Saudi-Chinese Joint Economic Committee and Prince Abdullah conferred with the Chinese representatives in that committee (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, November 2, 1999). In this meeting, Jiang repeated his call to Saudi businessmen to invest in China and told them that he predicts a 'bright future' for Sino-Saudi economic cooperation since it has solid foundation as, on the one hand, economies are strongly complement with each other and that political relations are sound²⁸², on the other (*Xinhua & AP*, November 1, 1999). Prince Abdullah, on his part, told Jiang that Saudi entrepreneurs and economic ministers would tour China to look for business opportunities (*China Daily*, November 3, 1999).

²⁸⁰ The Saudi view point in this regard was fairly clear and the editorial of *Asharq Al-Awsat* (November 2, 1999 also available in English at: *Mideast Mirror*, November 2, 1999, Vol. 13, No. 211) says it all: Jiang's visit to the region is a declaration of China's political rise as well as a restatement of the way economic relations will develop in the future. China needs to build on the political successes it scored with the return of Hong Kong and the eminent return of Macao. It is also an investor's paradise. If the Arab countries wish to take part in this bonanza, they must work harder at cultivating their relations with China. Diplomatic relations and arranged business visits are not enough. China no longer poses an ideological threat, and contacts with Beijing are essential if the Arabs are to gain a foothold in this vast market. The Arabs still look overwhelmingly to the West. Part of this attention should now be shifted eastwards to China ... The Chinese are coming to do business in our region, they deserve a warm.

²⁸¹ In this regard, a Chinese diplomat revealed that a Chinese proposal to increase the number of Chinese working in the Kingdom was also on the negotiation table between the two sides during Jiang's visit. The diplomat added that the Chinese president will seek to reach an agreement with the Saudi side in this matter since at that time the number of Chinese working in Saudi Arabia was no more than 200 most of whom were nurses (*AP*, September 7, 1999).

²⁸² Under the title: *Sino-Saudi strategic cooperation*, *Saudi Gazette* (November 5, 1999) editorial noted that 'economic cooperation of a strategic nature develops smoothly when two nations hold similar opinions on important international political problems. President Jiang's visit has illustrated that Saudi Arabia and China are in agreement on resolving major world issues, and also in matters of regional importance'.

As was planned, the Saudi-Chinese Joint Economic Committee held its 2nd meeting in Riyadh under the co-chairmanship of both Saudi Minister of Finance and National Economy, Ibrahim Al-Assaf, and Chinese minister of External Trade and Economic Cooperation, Chi Guang Chiang. Both ministers reviewed bilateral economic and petroleum cooperation and emphasised that despite the growth in their countries' commerce exchanges, it was still lagging behind their aspirations pointing up the need to enter into practical steps for joint ventures to activate their economic ties²⁸³ (*Riyadh Daily*, November 2, 1999).

IMF statistics indicate that the volume of two-way trade exchange between the two countries in 1999 has relatively grown to reach approximately USD 1,850,000,000 billion with a balance of trade slightly in favour of China (for further details, see table 4). Deriving its energy from an official momentum at the summit level, the obvious positive outcomes of the recent developments on the Saudi-Chinese economic and petroleum fronts began to bear fruit in year 2000 during which the bilateral trade between the two countries dramatically increased by more than 60% to reach nearly USD 3 billion with a balance of trade hugely in favour of the Kingdom due to growing Saudi petroleum exports (for further details, see table 4).

Table 4: Bilateral Trade exchange between the KSA & PRC between 1998-2000*

Year	PRC Exports to KSA	KSA Exports to PRC
1998	\$ 895,974,000	\$ 807,979,000
1999	\$ 943,734,000	\$ 911,595,000
2000	\$ 1,144,720,000	\$ 1,953, 510,000

*Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF*.

²⁸³ In the first half of 1999, trade between the two countries reached USD 880 millions. While the Kingdom bought products worth USD 427 millions from China including textiles electronics, refined sugar, clothes and toys, most of the Chinese purchases were oil and petrochemicals worth USD 453 millions (*AP*, October 31, 1999).

8.4. SUMMIT DIPLOMACY: THE SAUDI SECOND DEPUTY PREMIER IN BEIJING (2000)

Year 2000 witnessed a number of reciprocal visits between official and business delegation from both countries²⁸⁴. However, the most important event on bilateral relations was the several-day, (October, 11-17), official visit made by Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, then Second Deputy Premier and Defence and Aviation Minister²⁸⁵, to China at the invitation of General Chi Haotian, Chinese member of the State Council, deputy Chairman of the Central Military Commission and Minister of National Defence. The purpose of the key visit, according to official news agencies, was to discuss issues of common interest especially the situation in the Gulf region and the Middle East. It also reported that cooperation in military, oil and economic fields between the two countries will be strengthened as a result of the visit²⁸⁶ (*SPA & Xinhua*, October 8, 2000).

Upon his arrival in Beijing, Prince Sultan asserted that China 'is a great country that has a lot of merits in good dealing with friends' (*Asharq Al-Awsat & Riyadh Daily*, October, 12, 2000). During his visit, Prince Sultan held several talks with senior Chinese officials including Li Peng, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress, Chi Haotian, National Defence Minister, and Jiang Zemin, Chinese President, all of which have stressed the essential role high-level visits have played in elevating Sino-Saudi relations and expressed joint desire of both countries' leaders to enhance bilateral ties in all fields (*Xinhua*, October 12, 2000).

8.4.1. Strategic Implications of the Visit

8.4.1.1. Military and security implications

In the meeting of the two defence ministers, General Chi Haotian told his guest that since the establishment of diplomatic ties 1990, Beijing and Riyadh have conducted

²⁸⁴ In this regard, for example, there was a visit of Chinese industrialists to explore economic opportunities in the Saudi market (*Arab News*, March 16, 2000). There was, in addition, a visit of the Saudi minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Abdullah bin Mu'ammir, to Beijing to discuss cooperation in the areas of agriculture and water desalinisation (*Al-Hayat*, April 24, 2000; *Xinhua*, April 25, 2000). The Chinese Minister of Water Resources, in return, paid a visit to Saudi Arabia and met Crown Prince Abdullah in October 22, 2002, according to *SPA*.

²⁸⁵ Who was in reality the second man in Saudi Arabia at that time and became Crown Prince in summer 2005 following King Fahd's death.

²⁸⁶ In an indication of the importance of the visit, *Asharq al-Awsat* daily (October 13, 2000) regarded it as a move that comes to 'further the horizons of strategic cooperation between the two countries'.

cooperation in political, economic and cultural areas and that the military relations between the two countries 'have also been promoted in recent years'. The Chinese official hoped that the Sultan's visit would further encourage friendly relations between the two states and armed forces. The visiting Prince, for his part, affirmed that Saudi-Chinese collaboration 'conforms to the common interest of the two sides' (*Xinhua*, October 12, 2000).

While the Prince told reporters that no military deals were discussed with the Chinese side during this visit²⁸⁷, he highly appreciated and thanked China for its positive and prompt response to Saudi arms requests 12 years ago (*SPA*, October 12, 2000; *Al-Hayat*, October 13, 2000). Sultan added that what we have in reality discussed with the Chinese Defence Ministry officials was concerning maintaining what we have acquired of Chinese arms several years ago and the continuation of this maintenance (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, October, 13, 2000). *Al-Hayat* daily (October 13, 2000), gave some further details in this regard and reported that the Prince raised with the Chinese side the extension of the duration of both training for Saudis and the maintenance of some equipment from one year to two years until Saudi military personnel complete the technical levels needed for undertaking maintenance requirements.

In a very crucial development that reflects the progress official bilateral ties have made during the last 10 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two capitals, the official communiqué²⁸⁸ issued at the end of the visit proclaimed that 'in the security field, the two sides underlined their determination to enhance cooperation between the concerned apparatus in their two countries and they agreed to conclude cooperation agreement in the field of security in the near future'²⁸⁹ (*Riyadh Daily*, *Asharq Al-Awsat* & *Al-Hayat*, October 17, 2000).

²⁸⁷ Prince Sultan, in fact, stressed 'No new deals with China or other countries'.

²⁸⁸ The communiqué discussed cooperation in wide range of international and regional political and economic issues including the Middle East peace process, expanding the areas of bilateral cooperation as well as encouraging two-way trade and setting up joint industrial, petrochemical and technological projects and cooperation in the electricity field. For the full text of the official communiqué, see (*Riyadh Daily*, October 17, 2000).

²⁸⁹ Saudi Council for Ministers had given the Saudi Minister of Interior, Prince Naif Bin Abdulaziz, a mandate to negotiate with the Chinese side a draft agreement on security cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the PRC (*Al-Riyadh*, October 3, 2000).

8.4.1.2. Political implications

During his meeting with the Arab diplomatic corps accredited to the PRC, Prince Sultan paid tribute to Beijing's foreign policy in general and its regional stand towards the Palestinian question in particular describing them as 'rational, moderate, positive and impartial' (*SPA*, October 12, 1999). Furthermore, the Chinese move of refusing to grant political asylum to the family of former Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic, who was accused of committing genocide crimes against the Muslim population of Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina, including his son Marco who arrived in Beijing and stayed in the plane for two hours before being turned away two days prior to Sultan's visit was welcomed with satisfaction and comfort by some Saudi media circles (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 12, 2000).

As Saudi senior leaders were used to encounter representatives of Muslim minorities when visiting non-Muslim countries, Prince Sultan also held a meeting with a Chinese delegation of Muslim leaders including Deputy Chairman and Secretary General of the Islamic Association of China (IAC) Ali Jing Wi and members of the IAC at his guest residence in Beijing to discuss matters relating to the Chinese Muslim minority. During the meeting, the Prince 'expressed his interest in being acquainted with the status of Muslims in China and affirmed his eagerness to extend support to Muslims all over the world'. The Saudi senior official, also, rendered a donation of USD 500,000 to the IAC and announced that he will construct a mosque at his own expense to serve Muslims in Beijing. The Chinese delegation, in turn, thanked the Saudi government for its services and support to Chinese and other Muslims (*Riyadh Daily, Al-Hayat & Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 14, 2000).

8.4.1.3. Petroleum Implications

As has been stated, Prince Sultan's visit to China was intended to discuss the promotion of petroleum cooperation between the two countries. Indeed, two months following Sultan's visit to Beijing, Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Wu Sike, announced that China plans to increase its oil imports from the Kingdom by one million tons every year for the next five years to reach a peak of 8 million tons/year in 2004. The Chinese diplomat, also, revealed another development in this field as Zhonguan Oil Company of China had reached an agreement with the Kingdom to

cooperate in the area of oil exploration, production and management of oil wells (*Arab News*, December 20, 2000).

8.5. CONCLUSION

As the second millennium came to a close, a Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership in all fields became evident. While meeting its ever-growing domestic energy demand has become one of the main determinants of China's foreign policy during this age, enhancing ties with oil rich countries such as the Kingdom has become vital for China's energy security and the continuation of its economic growth. The Kingdom also was attractive as one of the largest regional consumption markets in which Chinese could sell their various commodities and export their skilled manpower. Saudis, in turn, were aiming at strengthening ties with Beijing as part of their plan to balance their relations with super powers especially the US. Also they look at China as a huge market for their exports of oil, gas and petrochemical products.

Hence, both sides adopted summit diplomacy as a means to enhance mutual understanding, economic and petroleum cooperation during this stage which was rich in terms of high-level contacts that included visits of then Crown Prince Abdullah, President Jiang and Second Deputy Premier Prince Sultan in 1998, 1999, 2000 respectively. In each visit, senior political leaders both in Riyadh and Beijing showed unmistakable willingness to take their bilateral relations to a new high and publically expressed their desire to literally form a strategic partnership in all possible fields including political, energy, economic and other aspects.

This unprecedented strong language gained the Riyadh-Beijing relationship a huge momentum that was positively reflected on their economic and petroleum cooperation. By signing a series of important economic and petroleum agreements between state-owned Saudi Aramco and Sinopec, the two countries announced a kick off of their growing political coordination and economic interdependence. Saudi Aramco was allowed hence to enter into joint ventures alongside Chinese companies in downstream and refining sectors with the purpose of enlarging the Saudi petroleum exports to the Chinese market. Although the results of such agreements and joint projects will clearly speak for themselves during the period between (2001-2006) which is going to be discussed in the next chapter, economic exchange between the Kingdom and China reached a new high of USD 3 billion by 2000 as a result of growing Saudi-petroleum and Chinese-commodities exports.

CHAPTER 9

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SAUDI-CHINESE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (2001-2006)

The Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership is at its best days in the contemporary era following unprecedented harmony and coordination between the two countries in all fields. While China seeks to guarantee secure energy supplies and to forge robust ties with one of the key players in the international energy market as a result of its massive economic growth and unprecedented domestic demand for energy, Saudi Arabia wants to secure larger shares for their crude and petrochemical products in one of the largest emerging energy markets. The Chinese desire to forge robust ties with energy-rich countries as a result of its massive economic growth and unprecedented domestic demand for energy was met by a similar Saudi desire to maximise its exports of oil, gas and petrochemical products to the huge Chinese market. This energy partnership has some political dimensions too because both countries face the same US criticism in the field of human rights and religious freedom especially following the deterioration of US-Saudi 'special relationship' in the wake of 9/11 events, the war against Iraq that was perceived as illegal in most Arab countries and negative American statements about reducing dependence on oil from the Middle East.

The damage done to the Riyadh-Washington political relationship was the gain of the Saudi-Chinese partnership that witnessed exceptional warmth and rapprochement in all fields as a result of an obvious reciprocal political will. Riyadh and Beijing became supportive of each other in the political sphere as they felt that they are in the same boat and targeted by the same Western criticism in a number of political issues including human rights, religious freedom and political reforms; and that they have closer perspectives on regional security than either of them has with Western countries. Moreover, the two sides are in favour of a reduced US dominance both in the Middle East region and the world. This strong political momentum, on the one hand, and the complementary nature of Saudi and Chinese economies, on the other, were positively reflected in the depth of the new relationship, as their energy and economic cooperation enjoyed extraordinary expansion and growth.

This chapter will first discuss the main systemic and domestic motivations that prompted both Beijing and Riyadh to enhance their partnership. Then it will shed light upon the main achievements that both sides managed to accomplish in all fields including political coordination, continuing their military cooperation, enhancing their cultural ties, furthering their petroleum cooperation and intensifying their economic cooperation.

9.1. THE IMPERATIVENESS OF A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN THE POST-9/11 WORLD: NEW FACETS OF THE SAME RELATIONSHIP

Ties between Riyadh and Beijing entered into its golden age during the period 2001-2006 in which relations between the two countries seemed to have reached an advanced stage of maturity and diversity. Such progress was, arguably, a result of a fresh reading conducted by leaders in both countries to the wide-ranging prospects of their bilateral relationship. While attempting to set a new definition of the rising multi-dimensional Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership and reach major approaches to deal with it, this reading takes into account the recent developments that occurred on the international arena in the aftermath of 9/11 events and their impacts on the foreign policies of both of both countries.

Emanating from this conviction, the Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership at its golden age was not viewed as an oil-for-money connection but rather as a partnership that bears political connotations and a common desire in both capitals to go beyond that economic dimension. It actually reveals a reciprocal embedded desire to take this relationship into a broader space to cover all possible fields of cooperation in light of transformations that took place in the early 3rd millennium. This section will undertake the mission of discussing the new considerations of Saudi-Chinese multi-dimensional strategic partnership at in the post-9/11 era.

9.1.1. Intertwined Motivations: Energy, Economy, Security and Geo-Politics

Transforming into a net oil importer in 1993 forced Beijing to quit its three-decade policy of self-sufficiency in this field and rather to boost relations with oil-rich countries to protect itself from unexpected events that might disturb international energy markets. As a pre-condition for the continuation of its economic growth and modernisation, fulfilling China's ever-growing domestic energy demand has become one of the main determinants of its foreign policy during this age. Given that more

than 50% of China's oil imports come from the Middle East (*Asia Pulse*, February 28, 2005), forging strong ties with this region has become of special strategic importance for China's energy security (Kurlantzick 2007: 41; El-Khawas 2009: 70). In this sense, strong ties with a key country in the field of energy production such as the Kingdom has become, undoubtedly, very crucial to China (*AFP*, January 23, 2006).

The Chinese interest in the expansion of Sino-Saudi petroleum ties has grown slowly but surely since late 2001 and such thing was probably propelled by a number of considerations that go in line with Beijing's energy strategy. Chinese chronic geopolitical and national-security concerns of encirclement as a result of the dominance of a foreign power over the Middle East, as had been earlier touched upon in previous chapters, have been manifestly renewed and this time were maximised²⁹⁰ in coincidence with Beijing's growing reliance on the Middle East oil supplies (Klare 2004: 162, 168-169). Consequently, cultivating strong strategic relationships with a reliable supplier such as Riyadh could reduce from a strategic viewpoint the vulnerability of China's energy supplies arising from the US considerable domination over the whole Middle Eastern region including the entire sea routs from the Strait of Hormuz (Trough 1999, http://www.brookings.edu/articles/1999/fall_china_trough.aspx).

Furthermore, China's two-pillar strategy is to reduce the insecurity of its oil supplies by expanding the natural gas utilisation as an alternative to oil as well as by the internationalisation of the Chinese oil industry through a plan to get a round 30% of its energy needs from international exploration and acquisition activities (Jaffe & Lewis 2002: 122), fits very well with its desire to have a strategic petroleum partnership with Saudi Arabia. During this era, as will be discussed in greater detail later, the Kingdom agreed to open partially its upstream market to Chinese petroleum companies and China hence was able for the first time ever to gain a foothold in the Saudi upstream sector through a concession to explore and produce natural gas in around 40,000 square kilometre block in the desert of the *Rub Al-Khali* or 'Empty Quarter' (*AP*, January 27, 2004).

Being the world's number one in terms of oil output and deposits, and fourth in terms of natural gas reserves, makes the Kingdom perhaps the world's most

²⁹⁰ Contrary to this argument, some commentators debunk China's energy insecurity and regard it as a myth claiming that geopolitical threats and a US blockade of China's oil imports represent a remote possibility (Blair et. al. 2006: 34-60).

important actor in oil affairs and one of the key countries in stabilising and determining international energy prices. Hence, coordinating with such an important country became a geopolitical and geostrategic priority for the sake of maintaining the energy security of an energy-deficit economy like China which became since 2003 the second largest consumer and third importer of crude oil worldwide²⁹¹. In the eyes of China, the Saudi enormous oil production capacity (11 million barrel/day) also means that there is a huge gap between the country's output and its domestic consumption and accordingly makes it the best partner to easily secure Chinese energy needs without restriction of quantities.

From a Chinese economic perspective, the Gulf region where Saudi Arabia is located is not only the richest spot in the world in terms of oil reserves²⁹² but also the cheapest in terms of price and production costs (Shichor 1998: 427-428). This aspect in particular gives the Kingdom a relative advantage in comparison with other petroleum-rich countries and induces Chinese companies to get a slice of its lucrative downstream sector²⁹³. In this regard, Cao Zhengyan, a senior engineer with the Sinopec Economy and Technology Research Institute, sums up China's perspective on greater petroleum involvement with Saudi Arabia by stressing that the Kingdom 'has always been an important target of national energy strategy. The low cost in its refining and petrochemical sector is especially attractive to us' (*China Energy Newswire*, November 21, 2005). Not only that but in cost terms, China could relatively reduce the expenditure bill of its energy imports by contracting more Saudi oil and gas in view of the fact that since 1998 the Kingdom has become China's largest trade partner in the Middle East and North Africa with one of the largest consumption economies in the region. In this regard, it is worth noting that two-way trade exchange between Saudi Arabia and China has reached USD 20 billion by the end of 2006.

The Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership in the petroleum field is a win-win bond for both sides as the Saudis also benefit from their strong partnership with the Chinese in several ways. Saudi officials realise that the current growth in energy

²⁹¹ Abdullah Jum'ah, the Chief Executive of the world giant petroleum company Saudi Aramco, describes Saudi-Chinese energy partnership by saying that 'the bonds that join us are one of the most important energy relationships on the planet' (*International Oil Daily*, December 30, 2005).

²⁹² Saudi oil Minister, Ali Al-Naimi, stated that the Gulf region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular will probably undertake the task of meeting China's rising oil demand (Al-Naimi 2001: 3).

²⁹³ According to *Xinhua Economic News Service* (January 25, 2006), the Kingdom represents a 'significant meaning' for helping Sinopec to implement its strategy of 'going overseas'.

demand comes mainly from Asian Markets and particularly from emerging powers such as China²⁹⁴. As such, partnership with Beijing grants them a huge outlet for their sour (high-sulphur) crude oil and that was positively reflected in the dramatic jump in trade exchanges between the two countries with a massive margin in favour of the Kingdom²⁹⁵. This partnership, furthermore, allowed Saudi Arabia to gain a toehold in the Chinese downstream sector including the refining industry (either building or expanding the existing ones) as well as marketing rights in the huge Chinese petrochemical market (Lee & Shalmon 2007: 17).

On the other hand, the Saudi governmental momentum that accompanied the Saudi-Chinese top-level contacts between the leaders of both countries between 1998-2000 as well as several workshops and repeated visits of entrepreneurs of both countries have encouraged the Saudi private sector to maximise its imports of Chinese products to include almost all categories. This, in turn, helped to maximise the purchasing power of the Saudi individual consumer and reduce the inflation levels in the economy by being able to buy more low-priced Chinese products in comparison with expensive European and US products²⁹⁶.

A thorough and careful reading of the nature of Saudi-Chinese partnership reveals that it is not simply an oil-for-money relationship but that it is in reality fraught with political and strategic considerations for both sides. From the very beginning, it can be said that Saudi-Chinese oil strategic partnership was a reflection of a political desire in both countries and a dream that came true only as a result of a series of active top-level political contacts and understandings between senior leaders in both countries without which nothing could have been achieved. This deduction is derived from the basic fact that the oil sector and giant petroleum companies in both countries are owned and supervised by the governments themselves and that they are 'largely instruments of the state. The consolidation of Sino-Saudi energy ties can thus

²⁹⁴ Author's interview with H.E. Ambassador Dr. Yousef Al-Saadon, op. cit.

²⁹⁵ Partnership with China became more valuable for Saudis especially in light of negative signals coming from Washington towards reducing reliance on the oil of the Middle East. In this regard, President George W. Bush, in the State of the Union Address in January 31, 2006, calls to put an end to US addiction to oil from volatile regions such as the Middle East (*CNN*, February 1, 2006). About the effects of this 'addiction' to Middle Eastern oil on US national security, see (Cohen 2006: 1-9). In this regard, a Chinese oil expert says that Saudi-Chinese energy cooperation 'makes a lot of sense' as 'China has the fastest growing market and Saudi Arabia has the right product to sell ... the US is the biggest market but the US is not the booming market. The US market is saturated, so growth is slower. If you want to look at the next 20 years ... if anyone wants to capture the next biggest market, that's China' (*AFP*, January 23, 2006).

²⁹⁶ Author's interview with H.E. Ambassador Dr. Yousef Al-Saadon, op. cit.

be viewed as an extension of state policy' (Calabrese, September 2005, www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=408&issue_id=347&article_id=2370272). Another indication of political implications is that senior political leaders in both countries have been keen to frankly and publicly express in their meetings, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, that they want to literally form a strategic partnership in all possible fields including political, economic and other aspects.

Actually, the serious Saudi orientation towards balancing relations with all superpowers and hence forging strong political relationships with Beijing that began in 1998 appears to have been noticeably enhanced following the damage that affected Riyadh's 'special relationship' with Washington in the wake of a number of key occurrences. These included 9/11 and its aftermaths on bilateral relations such as US allegations and accusations of top Saudi royal involvement in sponsoring terrorism and extremist Islam, US unlimited support of Israel against the Palestinians, differences over war on Iraq, the Saudi request to withdraw US troops from the Saudi soils and their actual withdrawal from the Kingdom in 2003²⁹⁷, the so-called Greater Middle East Initiative and US pressures to impose Western-modelled political reforms and values²⁹⁸. Whereas the Riyadh-Washington connection deteriorated, suffered and took a downturn, the Riyadh-Beijing connection peaked and flourished. Therefore, one might conclude that the loss of US-Saudi relations was the gain of Saudi-Chinese ties.

This harmony in political relations between Saudi Arabia²⁹⁹ and China³⁰⁰ might be attributed to the fact that both sides became more than ever convinced that they are in the same position with regard to their insistence on self-determination in internal affairs and are targeted by the same Western and US criticism in issues such as alleged human rights violations and religious freedom persecutions. More

²⁹⁷ (*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* April 30, 2003).

²⁹⁸ For further details about this topic, see for example (McMillan et al. 2002: 1-28; Habib 2003: 249-279; Kechichian 2003: 100-102, 109; Lippman 2004: 325-347; Cordesman 2006: 28-38; Freeman 2009: 73).

²⁹⁹ This issue became part of the US-Saudi thorny relationship following the Congressional adoption of the International Religious Freedom Act. of 1998 according to which safeguarding religious freedom became part of the US foreign policy. For instance, according to *The American Journal of Internal Law* (vol. 99 no. 1, January 2005, p. 264), Saudi Arabia was classified by the US Secretary of State in September 15, 2004 among eight 'countries of particular concern' for religious freedom. The issue of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, also, was discussed by Alfred Prados in a report prepared by the *Congressional Research Service* and was issued in February 24, 2006 (Prados 2006: CRS13).

³⁰⁰ For a discussion of the influence of the issue of human rights in China on Beijing-Washington relationship, see (Shirk 2007: 224-225; Dumbaugh 2009: CRS24-CRS25)

interestingly, both countries have been thrown together by Western reports in the same category in this matter despite their very different traditions and institutions³⁰¹ (*The Washington Post*, May 19, 1998; *AP*, June 18, 1999; *AFP*, June 11, 2001; *Channel News Asia*, March 5, 2002; *AFX News Limited*, December 19, 2003; *AP*, April 13, 2004; *The New York Times*, September 16, 2004; *AFP*, February 28, 2005). It can be said, thus, that the two countries became conscious that they have much in common and that their broadly defined security interests are threatened by Western countries efforts especially the US attempts to impose western-model reforms, values and political democracy, which were seen by officials in both countries as a direct challenge to the legitimacy, stability and survival of both political systems³⁰².

In this respect, it would seem that Beijing was not only closely observing the American pressures on the Kingdom to introduce internal changes and soften its line in Iraq and Palestine but actually expressed sympathy with Riyadh's stance. For example, leading Chinese newspapers, such as *Renmin Ribao*, *Guangming Ribao*, and *China Daily*, were interested in covering the emerging complexities and 'growing pains' in US-Saudi relationships over 9/11 and its aftermaths and the Saudi displeasure about what they believe to be unlimited US support for Israel at the account of its regional partners especially during Crown Prince Abdullah is meeting with President George W. Bush at the latter's ranch in Crawford, Texas. More importantly, Chinese official media was not neutral in its converge of that matter but they showed sympathy to Riyadh against the US media campaign³⁰³ and chose to clearly back Riyadh in its dispute with Washington and favour the Saudi stance in refusing to grant the US access to bases in the Kingdom to wage the war against Iraq (Nemets 2002, <http://archive.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/9/6/132729.shtml>).

On the other hand, promoting economic and petroleum interests with the Kingdom were not outside the calculus of Chinese strategists. While admitting that Chinese petroleum companies are less competitive vis-à-vis Western oil giant

³⁰¹ Not only that but for some western observers, Saudi Arabia and China were put at the same basket in terms of possible political instability and its potential negative impacts on global economy. For such viewpoint, see Rupert Murdoch statements about Saudi Arabia and China at the Milken Institute Global Conference in Los Angeles (*Asia Pulse*, April 27, 2004).

³⁰² Garver and Alterman (2008: 35) argue that ruling elites both in Beijing and Riyadh are politically unified over their common concerns of US political pressures for the adoption of Western political norms including popular elections, active civil society and non-censored media and Internet. While Beijing and Riyadh are less inclined towards embracing rapid reforms for the sake of political and social stability, they both insist that whatever reforms are needed must be carried out in a fashion acceptable to the governments of the sovereign countries concerned.

³⁰³ For further understanding of the dimensions of this campaign, see (Al-Gosaibi 2006).

companies, Chinese strategists who were aiming for greater energy cooperation with the Kingdom concluded that they could benefit from current strains in Saudi-Western ties. In their final analysis, greater political engagement with Riyadh in the form of active 'energy diplomatism' coupled with the deteriorating relationship between Saudi Arabia and the West as a result of the aforementioned reasons could be expected to stimulate wider energy cooperation with Riyadh and hence will result in securing more joint projects in Saudi Arabia (*China Energy Newswire*, November 21, 2005). In fact, this Chinese policy seemed to be working very well. For example, when the Saudi government decided in 2003 to open up its natural gas sector for foreign investment for the first time since 25 years, Chinese Sinopec was granted a concession to explore natural gas in the Kingdom in the time that no US companies were given any contract.

Granting natural gas concessions to Chinese and Russian companies at that time and creating new energy partnerships with them for the first time ever was seen by observers as a Saudi move towards creating new alliances in this field (*Platt's Oilgram News*, January 28, 2004; *The Weekly Standard*, February 7, 2005). Not only that but *The New York Times* (march 8, 2004) described the collapse of the prolonged talks between the Saudi government and large American companies (ExxonMobil Corp. & Shell) *due to differences on terms* (italic added) as coming amid security fears and perceptions of amore distant relationship between Riyadh and Washington³⁰⁴. The newspaper noted that no US companies have been given any deal in that tender. In the same context, others have seen it as a Saudi response to recent US measures and a new preference in Riyadh for non-US investors in that project (Sager 2006a: 56).

Statistics show rising Saudi oil exports to Asia during May 2004 while exports to the US remained at the same level (*Energy compass*, April 15, 2004). Also prices were increased for exports to US while reduced for exports to Asia including China (*Lloyd's List*, July 13, 2004). While Saudi Arabia maintained its place as the largest exporter of crude oil to China in 2004 (*China Energy Report Weekly*, February 7, 2004), it left its place in the same year as the leading supplier of oil to the US (*TASS*, February 18, 2005). In fact, statistics show a considerable deterioration in Saudi share

³⁰⁴ In this regard, Donald Straszheim, the former chief of economist of Merrill Lynch and Co. said about being 'pretty reluctant to get stuck in doing something in Saudi Arabia' as the country is 'headed for total meltdown, total chaos' (*Edmonton Journal* (Alberta), August 7, 2004).

of the volume of US crude oil imports from 17% in 2001 to 14% in 2005 (Tu 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31392).

It is believed that this transformation fits in well with the new Saudi strategy to combine exports and investments in Asia with the creation of strategic political alliances to balance dependence on the West (*World Markets Analysis*, April 5, 2004). In harmony with this policy, Saudi petroleum companies, Aramco and Sabic were keen to enter into huge joint ventures with Chinese petroleum companies in China. According to Ambassador Alaudeen Al-Askary, Saudi Consul-General in Hong Kong, 'Saudi Arabia has been concerned about putting all its eggs into the same basket. So investment is going into China and the Far East and not just the US and Europe'³⁰⁵ (*Middle East Company News Wire*, March 19, 2005).

In fact, closer cooperation and symmetric features between the two countries drive one to argue that the Kingdom and China at this stage had moved from the previous phase of convergence of interests during the 1990s to a higher and maturer phase of congruence of interests at the opening of the third millennium. In this regard, it can be said that Saudis and Chinese look forward to coordinate their efforts in issues of common interests. These would include: first, in one of the best complementary relationships for each side, both critically look for a stable relationship to continue their economic growth and modernisation. While the Saudis want guaranteed outlet for their petroleum and petrochemical products, China requires stable and reliable oil and gas supplies (*SCMP*, September 23, 2005; Al-Ghamdi 2006: 3).

Second, from the security and geostrategic perspectives, both countries are in favour of a multi-polar world and want a less American dominance both in the Middle East region and the world. The 9/11 incident and its aftermaths on the US-Saudi relations have, on the one hand, led Washington and Riyadh to re-evaluate their 'special relationship' and, on the other, brought Saudi Arabia and China closer than seemed possible before. As a way of counterbalancing the pressures inherent to a single-power world and in accordance with a new direction in Saudi foreign policy towards less reliance on the US and the West in general, Riyadh developed an

³⁰⁵ It is worth noting that while China signed a framework agreement with the GCC countries to start serious negotiations with these countries to establish a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) (*World Market Analysis*, December 10, 2004), Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al-Faisal, blamed Bahrain for solely signing a FTA agreement with the US. For a detailed coverage of this matter, see (*World Market Analysis*, November 24, 2004; *SPA*, December 5, 2004; *AF*, December 5, 2004; *BBC*, *SWB*, December 6, 2004; *Federal News Service*, December 6, 2004).

excellent relationship with Beijing as a counterweight or a strategic hedge against US pressures and regional dominance³⁰⁶ (Luft & Korin 2004: 28; Blumenthal 2005: 13; Petrini 2006:74-75; Pant 2006: 45-46; Sager 2006b: 62; Kurlantzick 2007: 139; Ghafouri 2009: 89-90; Lee & Shalmon 2007: 17-18).

Thirdly, coordinating their positions towards issues of common interest in international forums especially those related to allegations of human rights violations and religious freedom persecutions³⁰⁷. Fourthly, Chinese leaders believe that Chinese economic reforms and growth are essential to enhance China's 'comprehensive national power', which in turn is necessary to gain the status of a major world power and a global standing (Taylor 1994: 261-263). By committing to supply China with a significant part of its energy needs, Saudi Arabia has become a cornerstone in China's economic modernisation strategy and a genuine partner in helping China to become a major world power³⁰⁸. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that without secure oil supplies, China's sustained economic growth would become unattainable. Since China overtook Japan to become the second largest economy in the world in the first half of 2010, the need for strategic supplies of energy becomes ever more evident.

Fifthly, diplomatically, Saudi leaders clearly hope that Beijing could counterweight the US supportive position of Israel and the unbalanced stance towards the Israeli-Arab dispute (Blumenthal 2005: 17). In fact, this issue has always been in the core of Saudi-Chinese top-level contacts as the Saudi leaders hope that Beijing would take an effective role that correspond to its international weight in solving the Palestine question and accelerating the pace of the peace process in the Middle East.

³⁰⁶ In a dossier prepared by Saudi *Shura* Council in the occasion of the visit of the Chinese-Arab Friendship Commission to the Kingdom during November 6-11, 2007 and under a section on the *main Arab-Chinese interests in the coming 10 years*, it says, among several things, that Arabs expects to make benefits of Chinese economic power and its political influence to minimise current hegemonic trends in US foreign policy especially towards the Middle East (*Al-Shura* report, p. 74). In this regard, Khalid Al-Maeena, Editor of Arab News daily, says that 'We need to maintain links to America, but we are not a gas station. America has to realise we want friends, not masters' (*AP*, April 22, 2006).

³⁰⁷ Author's interview with Mr. Mustafa Kawthar, (Head of Asian Department in the Saudi Foreign Ministry). Riyadh, March 2008.

³⁰⁸ In this regard, Abdullah Jum'ah, Saudi RAMCO Chief Executive, said that Saudi Arabia would work with China to keep its economy racing along. By pumping more oil to China, the Kingdom 'will fuel China's economic and social development, power the nation's manufacturing, agricultural, service and transport sectors, and help the Chinese People build an even more prosperous society', he adds (*SCMP*, September 23, 2005). Saudi Minister of Petroleum, Ali Al-Naimi, made it clear that the Kingdom 'will take all necessary measures to supply Asian countries with whatever oil they need for their economic growth. We will never let a shortage of supply take place – at any time in the future' (Al-Naimi 2000: 5). Also Dr. Ahmad Al-Ghamdi, the adviser at the Saudi Petroleum Minister's Office, indicates that 'With regard to security of petroleum supplies to China, it is a fundamental feature of the Saudi petroleum policy ... and we are fully committed to the Chinese needs' (Al-Ghamdi 2006: 4-5; Author's interview with Dr. Al-Ghamdi. Riyadh, April 2008).

Moreover, being identified as the closest regional friend of the US, which is the strongest supporter of Israel, invites lots of domestic and regional criticism against Riyadh (Peterson 2002: 39). However, this is not the case with China which in contrast has no bad or colonial record in the region and is actually recognised by many Arab quarters as a longstanding supporter of Arab rights in most of their issues including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Calabrese 1992-1993: 473; Petrini 2006: 76; Al-Otaibi 2006: 186). So, being identified as close to Beijing means for many that Riyadh is less pro-American (Kurlantzick 2007: 139-140).

Unlike in the US where the Israeli lobby enjoys huge influence over the Congress and could block some arm deals destined to the Kingdom, some Saudi observers consider China to be distant from such influence and therefore view it as a possible source for arms unattainable from traditional Western partners (Hashim 1999: 69). Finally, China offers the Middle East, including the Saudis, a good and valid example for a successful experience in achieving economic modernisation and development without the need to adopt Western-imposed democratic political systems or values (Shichor 2006: 66).

9.2. THE MAIN FEATURES OF AN UPTREND RELATIONSHIP (2001-2006)

Accompanied by huge official momentum that resulted from active summit diplomacy between the two capitals, the emerging Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership managed to score quick and major successes in various fields during the period 2001-2006. In order to achieve such a goal, both Riyadh and Beijing resorted to qualitative moves of all kinds which have contributed to advancing the main features of their strategic partnership and broadening their close cooperation and coordination in all sectors. Offering a better understanding of the nature of Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period indicated above entails shedding light upon major developments in political, Islamic and cultural, petroleum and economic ties between the two sides. This section will attempt to carry out this task.

9.2.1. Close Political Coordination

While energetic mutual top-level contacts between Riyadh and Beijing during the period 1998-2000 seemed to have borne fruit and was positively reflected in Saudi-Chinese political ties, the deterioration of US-Saudi relations following September 11th and its aftermaths seemed to have also added another impulse for such

unprecedented coordination and warmth. It can be said that signs of this improvement had started to emerge since late 2000. After establishing a regular political and economic consultation mechanism between China and the GCC states in September 1996 (*Xinhua*, September 27, 1996), Riyadh and Beijing agreed in 2000 to establish a cooperation mechanism between Chinese and Saudi foreign ministries, which was expected to enhance ties between the two key apparatus in all international issues of common interest such as Western allegations on violations of human rights and the coordination of their political attitudes in international organisations (*Arab News*, December 20, 2000). This period, also, was characterised by a sustained Saudi-Chinese political embrace and a mutual keenness to make positive statements about each other during the meetings that were held between senior leaders of both countries and their visiting envoys and diplomats (*Xinhua*, March 12, 2001).

In what appears to be a response to a Saudi repeated request to play a greater role in the region and following the eight-month-long violent clashes between Israel and Palestine sides which resulted in heavy losses and casualties along with raised regional tension, Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, told visiting Saudi Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nizar Madani, that Beijing will continue to contribute to the Middle East peace process (*Xinhua*, May 29, 2001).

It seems that September 11th incident has for a while overshadowed the Saudi-Chinese relationship. For its part, the Chinese Embassy in Riyadh was eager to deny in a published statement press rumours that China has imposed any restrictions on the sale of air tickets for Chinese aviation companies to travellers from certain Middle Eastern or Muslim countries considering this information as 'false' (*AFX News Limited*, October 15, 2001). Furthermore, a Chinese official sought to downplay the negative impacts of the governmental precautionary measures adopted by Beijing for issuing entry visas to Arabs, including Saudis, on the growth of bilateral trade exchange between the two countries by describing these steps as 'temporary' (*Saudi Gazette*, October 23, 2001).

In late 2001, Sinopec of China announced that it might reduce its imports of Saudi crude oil in 2002 (*China Business*, December 7, 2001). Saudi Arabia, in turn, imposed a ban on various Chinese foods the ban also included import of US rice (*AFP*, January 29, 2002). However, the two countries seem to have managed to contain this quick and limited strain in bilateral relationship as statistics of petroleum

and economic exchange between the two countries, as will be discussed in detail in the following section, have shown a remarkable growth in 2002.

One of the signs of such rapid recovery came when Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhang Qiyue, expressed her country's appreciation and support of the Saudi Middle East peace initiative that was put forward at the Beirut Summit of the Arab League in March 2002³⁰⁹ (*BBC, SWB*, March 27, 2002). In another positive development, China expressed its willingness to enhance 'consultation and coordination' with Riyadh during the meeting that comprised visiting Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister, Yang Wenchang, and Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz. Touching upon issues such as the question of Iraq, Palestine-Israel conflict and Sino-Saudi bilateral relations, the meeting revealed that the two sides held identical viewpoints towards the way through which these issues should be handled. With regard to the pressing issue of Iraq, both sides expressed opposition to the use of force against Iraq³¹⁰ and stressed that the issue be settled via political and diplomatic means and within the framework of the UN³¹¹ (*Xinhua*, October 27, 2002).

It can be said that at the same time as US-Saudi relations deteriorated and strained as earlier indicated, Saudi-Chinese ties seemed to be improving. In an interview with *Xinhua* (April 9, 2003) just few days after the breakout of war on Iraq, Crown Prince Abdullah stated that 'China is one of the special friends of Saudi Arabia'. 'The Kingdom's de facto ruler', as *Xinhua* puts it, made it clear that 'Saudi-Chinese ties ... are very strong'. One week later, Abdulrahman Al-Matrodi, Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs, Religious Endowments, Call and Guidance told *Xinhua* (April 15, 2003) that China's opposition to the use of force to solve the Iraqi crises is appreciated by the Kingdom who hopes Beijing will play a more effective part in future international affairs.

Within the framework of continued political and diplomatic coordination between the two sides, Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, exchanged views over the telephone with his Saudi counterpart on the Iraqi issue. The content of the

³⁰⁹ Then Crown Prince, King Abdullah initiative which was adopted by Arab countries offered a comprehensive peace and normalisation between Arab countries and Tel Aviv in return of Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967 including Syrian Golan Heights and the remaining occupied territories in the south of Lebanon together with the acceptance of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state.

³¹⁰ For the Saudi viewpoint in this concern, see the speech of the Saudi permanent envoy in the UN before the Security Council (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 18, 2002).

³¹¹ The Chinese side seemed to be concerned about the potential risks of war against Iraq on the safety of shipping lines with the Gulf (*SinoCast*, February 21, 2003).

consultative phone conversation was mainly about Iraq's post-war arrangements and reconstruction. Prince Al-Faisal, in turn, expressed his concern over Iraq's security situation and called on UN Security Council to play a greater role in Iraq's security and stability. Minister Li noted that Beijing and Riyadh share wide-ranging consensus in this matter (*Xinhua*, May 12, 2003). This consensus reflects growing sentiments both in Riyadh and Beijing against US sole dominance in the region.

When the Kingdom was subject to a wave of suicide attacks against western targets in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, the Chinese government expressed its shock and concern over the bloody incidents and Chinese leadership expressed plain support of Saudi efforts to fight terrorism (*Xinhua*, May 13-14, 2003; *Xinhua*, November 9, 2003). In June 2004, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Liu Jianchao, reiterated his country's support for Saudi measures adopted to combat and eliminate terrorism and praised its success in rescuing hostages following the armed attacks on civilians and hostage taking in Saudi Arabia's Eastern city of Al-Khubar (*BBC*, *SWB*, May 31, 2004; *China Daily*, June 1, 2004).

As part of their efforts to enhance and diversify political ties between all the political establishments, the two sides showed noticeable interest in reinforcing their ties at the parliamentary level. In this sense, a number of Saudi and Chinese parliamentary delegations representing the Communist Party of China and the Saudi *Al-Shura* Council made several official visits to each other and sought to establish contacts during this period³¹² (*World News Connection*, July 26, 2003; *Al-Riyadh*, September 21, 2004; *Xinhua*, November 21, 2005; *Xinhua*, January 25, 2006; *Xinhua*, January 24, 2006).

It would seem that Beijing has taken heed of Saudi request to play a greater role in the regional peace process as China appointed a special envoy on the Middle East question. The Chinese move was welcomed and appreciated by Crown Prince Abdullah who called on China to play a greater role in the region during his meeting with China's Special Envoy on the Middle East issue, Wang Shijie. For his part, Wang emphasised that his country is determined to increase consultation and

³¹² In January 2007, the two countries established a Parliamentary friendship Committee to enhance their parliamentary ties. The committee also undertakes an active part in cementing relations between the Chinese Embassy in Riyadh and the *Al-Shura* Council (Author's interview with Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Otaibi, Member of *Al-Shura* Council and Head of the Saudi-Chinese Parliamentary Friendship Committee. Riyadh, April 2008). For more details about Saudi-Chinese parliamentary ties, see (*Ash-Shura*, May-June, 2001, p. 17; March-April, 2002, p. 12; May, 2003, p. 17; July, 2003, p. 44; August-September, 2003, p. 13; November, 2003, p. 8; September, 2004, p. 18; October, 2005, p. 10).

cooperation on international and regional affairs with the Kingdom and that both sides hold 'identical or similar' view points (*BBC, SWB*, October 26-27, 2003).

Targeted with frequent Western criticism on issues related to human rights and religious freedom, this new common challenge appears to have entered into the domain of their common political interest and, consequently, Riyadh and Beijing seem to have acknowledged the need to join forces and show mutual solidarity in this matter. During the four-day visit of China's Foreign minister, Li Zhaoxing, to the Kingdom, he was scheduled to hold a number of key meetings with Saudi top officials including King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah and both of whom emphasised that Saudi Arabia and China share many common interests and have similar views on key international and regional issues. After reaffirming their support of 'one China' principle, the Saudi leaders said that the Kingdom and China would support each other in human rights and other issues (*Xinhua*, September 8, 2004). This was the first occasion that Riyadh plainly voices such matter in the history of Saudi-Chinese political relations.

Moreover, and as a natural outcome of their growing harmony and coordination in the political sphere, Li Zhaoxing's visit witnessed also an interesting political development that came in the form of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for political consultations between Saudi and Chinese Foreign Ministries according to which the two ministries agreed to enter into a formal political dialogue and to hold regular political consultations (*SPA & AFP*, September 7, 2004).

Chinese President, Hu Jintao, was keen following the death of late King Fahd to mourn him as 'an old esteemed friend to the Chinese people' and welcomed the naming of Abdullah as the new monarch. Hu, in another congratulatory message, pledged to new King that China will 'further promote the friendly relations with Saudi Arabia under his rule'. Throughout its coverage of the event, *Xinhua* placed emphasis over and praised the apparently 'smooth succession' in the Kingdom. (*Xinhua*, August 2-3, 2005).

By 2006, bilateral relations between the Kingdom and China were at their best since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1990. Summit diplomacy restored its primacy and again returned to play another significant role in cementing Saudi-Chinese partnership. Five months after his ascendance to the throne of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah made a very significant state visit to China during January 22-24, 2006. The landmark visit to China was full of symbolic connotations for the future of

bilateral relationship between the two countries and was highly appreciated and welcomed in Beijing according to Chinese President Hu³¹³ for a number of considerations. Firstly, it was the first ever in history for a Saudi sovereign and secondly it was Abdullah's first official trip since he came to the throne and thirdly because China was chosen as the first stop³¹⁴ in his Asian tour that also took him to another three nations, India, Malaysia and Pakistan (*Xinhua*, January 17, 2006; *AFP*, January 23, 2006).

The agenda of the royal visit, according to China's Foreign Ministry, included the discussion of various topics including oil, energy security, trade, major regional and international issues such as Iraq, Iran and Palestine and the global fight against terrorism (*AP*, *Qatar News Agency & Indo-Asian News Service*, January 22, 2006).

Unlike the previous reciprocal visits of 1998 and 1999, there was no official communiqué at the end of this visit to reveal the main issues that dominated the talks that were held between the leaders of the two countries. This move actually was perceived by some observers as an attempt by both Riyadh and Beijing to avoid alarming Washington about their growing strategic partnership³¹⁵. Despite the absence of an official communiqué at the end of the visit, one could notice from press leakages and diplomats' statements that the two countries have reached an advanced phase in their cooperation and that they were willing to carry on their endeavours to enhance their ties in all fields. In this regard, *Xinhua* (January 23, 2006) reports that the Chinese President and Saudi Monarch 'unanimously agreed to further strengthen pragmatic cooperation between the two countries and promote the in-depth development of their strategic ties of friendship and cooperation'.

Likewise, the statements of the Ambassadors of both countries on the eve of the royal visit reveal some parts of the untold story. Chinese ambassador to Riyadh, Wu Chunhua, states that Saudi Arabia and China make close consultations and coordination on several international issues such as the situation in Iraq, and support each other on the issues of human rights and the war on terror (*Xinhua*, January 23,

³¹³ Describing King Abdullah as a 'respected and familiar old friend', Hu Jintao said that choosing China as the first destination of his first official trip outside the Middle East since becoming Monarch is noted and welcomed by Beijing (*AFP*, January 23, 2006).

³¹⁴ Saudi Ambassador to Beijing, Saleh Al-Hujaylan, told *China Daily* (January 23, 2006) that the King's decision to make China his first stop reflects 'the great emphasis our country has attached to the relationship with China.'

³¹⁵ For such viewpoints, see for example an interview with Shi Yinong, Professor of international relations at People's University (*AFP*, January 23, 2006) and also see (Alterman & Graver 2008: 36).

2006). Chinese Charge de'Affaires in Riyadh, Wnag Kejian, said that bilateral 'Political relations have been deepened' (*SPA*, January 22, 2006). Saudi Ambassador to China, Saleh Al-Hujaylan, in turn, said to *China Daily* (January 23, 2006) that Saudi Arabia 'will strengthen an all-round relationship with China, more than just in energy cooperation'.

At this stage of their relationship, the two countries seemed to have a much clearer vision more than ever about the major determinants of the future of their strategic partnership. As such, the visit witnessed an important four-point proposal that was put forward by President Hu to serve as a framework on furthering bilateral relations and substantial cooperation in various field. The proposal, which has been welcomed and favoured in the part of King Abdullah, was based on the following pillars according to *Xinhua* (January 23, 2006):

1. Enhancing mutual trust and bilateral political relations through maintaining high-level contacts, conducting close dialogues and consultations at various levels, supporting each other for their efforts to safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity, and continue strengthening mutual support and cooperation in international and regional affairs.
2. Reinforcing energy cooperation to mutual benefit and both sides will make joint efforts to conduct all-dimensional cooperation in the energy field and continuously improve bilateral energy dialogue mechanism and cooperation.
3. Expanding economic and trade cooperation while exploiting their advantages. In this regard, the Chinese side pledged to step up bilateral cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, telecommunications, finance and investment, and encourage two-sided economic and trade intercourses at various levels and between different institutions.
4. Developing friendship and cultural exchanges by furthering bilateral exchanges in culture, education, science, technology and press, and promote dialogues and exchanges between different civilizations.

In another sign of warming Saudi-Chinese political ties and constant consultation, Saudi Foreign Minister 'warmly' received a high-ranking delegation of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Head of the delegation, Wang Jiarui, who is also the Head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, told Prince

Al-Faisal that the four-point proposal made by President Hu 'marked out a direction for bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields'. The meeting according to *Xinhua* (March 12, 2006) pivoted around the situation in the Middle East and Iran's nuclear issue³¹⁶.

Within the same context, Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, invited Prince Bandar Bin Sultan to visit China following his appointment as the Secretary-General of the Saudi National Security Council. During his talks with Bandar, Li stated that China 'is ready to strengthen exchanges with Saudi Arabia at all levels and raise bilateral relationship to a higher level'. Achieving such goal, the Chinese official meaningfully clarified, will entail promoting political mutual trust, developing economic and trade cooperation and expanding cultural exchanges between the two countries. Without giving further details, it was reported that Prince Bandar also held a meeting with Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, to discuss international and regional issues of common concern (*Xinhua*, March 29, 2006; *UPI*, March 31, 2006).

Exactly after three months of Abdullah's state visit to China, President Hu was due in Riyadh for a state visit during April 22-24 (*Xinhua*, April 22, 2006). China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Liu Jianchao, announced that 'energy cooperation is an important domain of ... [our] cooperation but it is not the only domain'. Hence the visit should be viewed as multidimensional and aiming at enhancing energy, economic and trade, politics and culture, according to Liu (*AFP*, April 11, 2006).

During his visit to Riyadh, Hu noted that the 'consensus reached between the two sides at the beginning of this year on establishing strategic friendship and cooperation marks a new era in the development of bilateral ties'. Indeed, as he did during Abdullah's visit to Beijing, Hu re-proposed a five-point plan to enhance 'bilateral strategic friendship and cooperation' throughout his talks with the Saudi Monarch. Besides his previous four-point proposal, Hu at this time adds the need to refining bilateral cooperation mechanisms and give full play to the roles of various cooperation mechanisms that exist between the two countries (*Xinhua*, April 23, 2006).

Without a doubt, Hu's visit was rich in terms of political implications as it came as a culmination of active mutual diplomatic consultations during the previous

³¹⁶ It was said that the delegation came in response to an invitation of Saudi *Al-Shura* Council.

months³¹⁷. Besides discussing the regional situation, the conflict between Palestine and Israel and the Iraqi issue, the visit resulted in inking a number of important bilateral agreements that included defence, security³¹⁸, energy, health and trade cooperation (*AP*, April 22, 2006). During his talks with Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, Hu re-stresses that his country is 'committed to strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia' (*Xinhua*, April 24, 2006).

Moreover, Hu was invited to deliver a speech at the *Al-Shura* Council, only the second foreign leader to do so after French President Jacques Chirac³¹⁹. In his speech³²⁰, Hu expressed his country's commitment to peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East and to work with Riyadh and other Arab capitals to reinforce regional security and peace³²¹ (*The Times & China Daily*, April 24, 2006). In an implicit reference to the Western pressures to which countries such as China and Saudi Arabia are subject, Hu stresses the notion of non-interference in other country's domestic affairs along with respecting and maintaining each country's right to independently choose social systems and development methods that suit its needs and values (*Ash-Shura*, April, 2006, p. 32-34).

9.2.2. Renewed Security and Military Ties

Owing to the sensitive nature of this sector, there is not much disclosure about the current state of Saudi-Chinese military and security ties. Yet, what has been announced in this regard that Hu's recent visit to the Kingdom in April 2006 was culminated by the signature of a number of key bilateral agreements among which two were of special interest. The first was a security agreement on combating terrorism and the second was a deal to buy defence systems for Saudi Defence Ministry.

³¹⁷ On the eve of Hu's visit, Chinese Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Wu Chunhua, tells *Xinhua* (April 21, 2006) that Beijing and Riyadh have 'closely conducted consultations and actively coordinated their positions on many international and regional issues, such as the Arab-Palestine conflict and the War on Iraq'.

³¹⁸ Details of these pacts were not made public. Yet, according to (*Asharq Al-Awsat* (April 23, 2006), security agreement was between interior ministries in both countries whereas defence deal was between Saudi Defence Ministry and China North Industries Corporation to provide defence systems.

³¹⁹ Chirac addressed the Council in March 2006.

³²⁰ The Chinese Head of State received a warm welcome and got a standing ovation from the 150-member council when he walked into the chamber.

³²¹ For his part, Dr. Saleh bin Humaid, Chairman of *Al-Shura* Council stated that Chinese polices 'represent the safety valve for the stability of the international community and the achievement of international peace' calling it to maximise its efforts to put an end to the suffering of Palestinian and Iraqi people (*AP*, April 23, 2006).

It seems that Saudi purchases of Chinese air defence systems are gradually growing with the purpose of protecting itself against regional rising ballistic missiles capabilities especially those of Iran. In this respect, a military expert notes that China is likely to continue to be a good source of air defence systems for Saudi Arabia as long as the US has no plans to sell such military equipments to Riyadh (Obaid 2002: 32-33).

On the other hand, press rumours and intelligence leakages continue to appear from time to time to claim covert Saudi-Chinese understandings on the nuclear field and allege a virtual connection between Riyadh and the Pakistani nuclear bomb. For instance, two political analysts suggest that Saudi Arabia is able whenever it chooses to buy a ready nuclear bomb off the shelf Pakistan. Such scenario would be, according to Luft and Korin, the culmination of an alleged Sino-Saudi-Pakistani nuclear project that began in mid 1970s. Without citing a reference, they claim that Saudi Arabia has played an important part in financing Pakistan's nuclear programme, which was allegedly built with a Chinese technical assistance. They refer to Prince Sultan's visit to Pakistan in 1999 in which he was escorted by then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, to tour the country's uranium-enrichment and missile production facilities at Kahuta. Prince Sultan was the only foreign personage given such access into a facility that was forbidden even to then President Benazir Bhutto (Luft & Korin 2004: 28). Similar allegations about Saudi-Pakistani cooperation in this regard had earlier appeared in the *Washington Times* (October 22, 2003) attributed to a senior Pakistani 'insider'. Also, an unnamed US official told *Reuters* (15 February, 2004) that Washington has concerns about an alleged Sino-Saudi cooperation on acquiring Chinese rockets and that the Kingdom has funded Pakistan's nuclear programme in the hope that this would enable it to obtain nuclear weapons.

These allegations were squarely denied by the Saudi Defence and Aviation Ministry, which issued a statement saying that this information was 'fabricated and baseless' and that the Kingdom continues to seek a Middle East that is free of weapons of mass destruction (SPA, February 16, 2004; BBC/SWB, February 16, 2006). Likewise, a US congressional report points out that Washington has received assurances from Riyadh that it has no ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction (Prados 2006: CRS10).

Having said that, one must add that growing Saudi-Chinese political, energy and economic ties might lead to greater military ties whenever both sides feel that

there is a need for such a thing or that they feel that their common strategic interest is at stake. Given that Saudi Arabia exists in a turbulent area and surrounded by various regional dangers, it might find itself forced to protect its national security against any external threat, whether coming from Israel or Iran, and in such case China as a military power might be able to give a hand again as did in the mid 1980s.

Saudi observers consider China as distant from Israeli lobby's influence and therefore view it as a possible source for arms and technologies unattainable from traditional Western partners (Hashim 1999: 69). While some analysts argue that China has made strong commitments to the US not to transfer any unconventional arms to the Middle East (Liangxiang 2005: 4; Jaffe & Lee 2007: 18; Shirk 2007: 223), some Saudi observers believe that the Chinese would have no objection to providing the Kingdom with whatever arms it might need as long as it can pay for what it wants to buy (Obaid 2001: 34).

9.2.3. Activating Islamic and Cultural Ties

The two countries seemed to be conscious of the fact that their bilateral cultural ties might be considered the weakest link in their interactions and that they did not achieve much in developing their public ties and bridging the cultural gap between their people. Hence, it can be said that during the period between (2001-2006), they endeavoured to stimulate their cultural ties as an integral part of their comprehensive strategic partnership.

As they did in the past during Riyadh-Beijing's political rupture, Chinese Muslim communities continued to take part in activating cultural and public ties between China and the Kingdom. For example, this period witnessed for the first time in the annals of Saudi-Chinese relations the reception of 200 Chinese pilgrims as the guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy mosques, King Fahd (*Xinhua*, March 7, 2001). Developments of Saudi-Chinese ties in political, economic and petroleum spheres have been positively reflected in the size of Chinese *hajj* delegations. Official statistics of the Saudi Ministry of Hajj³²² show that the number of Chinese pilgrims have remarkably grown during the period between 2001-2005 as a reflection of growing bilateral ties. The number of Chinese pilgrims was 9472 in 2002, 102854 in 2003, 11579 in 2004 and 9887 in 2005.

³²² Statistics issued by Information & Computer Centre at the Saudi Ministry of *Hajj* (author's private archive).

It is worth noting, however, that *Xinhua* (December 7, 2005) reported that the Islamic Association of China (IAC) said that 7000 Chinese Muslim pilgrims would perform the *hajj* in 2005 claiming this to be the biggest group since 1979 when China resumed sending *hajj* missions and that flights to Jeddah for this purpose have increased from 15 to 20 that year. The difference in Saudi and Chinese statistics might be attributed to hundreds of Chinese pilgrims who prefer not to be part of IAC's official mission and therefore travel to Saudi Arabia through different destinations such as Pakistan.

In a related development in early 2004, the Chairman of China's State Authority for Religious Affairs, Xiao Ye Wen, and his accompanying delegation were received by Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call and Guidance, Sheikh Saleh Al- Al-Sheikh in Riyadh. During the meeting the Chinese visitor briefed the Saudi minister on the status of Muslims in China, the positive developments in Sino-Saudi ties and expressing the satisfaction of Chinese Muslims for *Hajj* services and facilities (*SPA*, January 13, 2004). It is expected that the Saudi side has suggested an expansion of the size of Chinese *hajj* annual missions during this meeting to correspond to China's official number of 22,000,000 Muslim populations. Saudi officials indicate that they have received assurances from their Chinese counterparts that Beijing will gradually increase the number of Chinese pilgrims to reach 20000 pilgrims/year as per the quota based on the number of Muslim population of China³²³. Saudi *Hajj* Ministry statistics show that the number of Chinese pilgrims reached 9887 in 2006 and 15119 in 2007³²⁴.

Bilateral efforts to enhance cultural ties were not confined to Islamic activities but in fact it stretched to cover new cultural activities such as youth exchange programmes and participating in cultural exhibitions held in each other's country. It was reported that in recognition of the value of developing cultural ties and bridging the cultural gap between the two countries and peoples and the importance of this aspect in 'promoting better relations and understanding', a cultural agreement between Riyadh and Beijing will be inked soon according to visiting Chinese Vice-Minister of Culture, Zhou Heping (*Saudi Gazette*, May 22, 2002).

³²³ Author's private interview with HE Ambassador Dr. Jamil Merdad (Head of Islamic Department at the Saudi Foreign Ministry) & HE Dr. Abdullah Al-Luhaidan (Assistant Under Secretary of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment and Guidance for Islamic Affairs). Riyadh, April 2008.

³²⁴ Statistics issued by Information & Computer Centre at the Saudi Ministry of *Hajj* (author's private archive).

Also a Chinese cultural delegation led by Vice Minister of Culture, Zhou Heping, paid a visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2002 to attend the Chinese photo exhibition entitled 'The World Heritage in China' which was held in King Fahd Cultural Centre. Also in June of 2004, a Chinese information delegation led by Deputy Director of the State Council Information Office, Wang Guoqing, visited the Kingdom (Consulate-General of the PRC in Jeddah, 26/11/2004, <http://jeddah.chineseconsulate.org/eng/zsgx/t172060.htm>).

In late 2002, the Agreement of Cultural and Educational Cooperation between China and the Kingdom was signed during the visit of the Saudi Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Khalid Al-Anqari, visit to China (Xinhua, December 24, 2002). This agreement was an important development in bilateral ties in this sphere and seems to have helped paving the way for a greater cooperation between the two countries. For instance, the Kingdom participated with a huge pavilion at China's 10th International Book Show in Beijing. Among more than 40 exhibitors, the Saudis were eager to distribute free copies of the Holy Quran in various foreign languages including Chinese, French and English as well as souvenir photos of the two holy mosques of Mecca and Al-Madina (*SPA*, September 17, 2003).

Within the framework of its endeavours to boost cultural ties and enhance mutual understanding with China, the Saudi General Consulate in Hong Kong, which was opened in 1998, participated in establishing its first Arabic language classes at the University of Hong Kong. The Consulate also announced that it has plans to upgrade academic cooperation between Saudi and Chinese academic institutions (*SCMP*, September 23, 2004). Moreover, the Information Centre of Riyadh Chamber of Commerce & Industry indicates that while a Chinese youth delegation had paid a visit to the Kingdom in April 2004, a Saudi youth delegation replied the visit in July 2004³²⁵.

In November 2005, Assistant Minister of Culture and Information, Prince Turki Bin Sultan, inaugurated a Chinese cultural week that included various cultural activities that aimed at enhancing existing relations between the two countries. The event came within the framework of the cultural cooperation agreement signed between Riyadh and Beijing in December 2002, according to China's Deputy Minister of Culture, Chawo Yusoi (*US Fed News*, November 20, 2005). Commenting

³²⁵ Author's private visit to the information centre in April 2008.

on these developments, Chinese Charge D’Affaires in Riyadh, Wnag Kejian, regards that cooperation in the fields of education, culture, public health, sports have ‘increased remarkably’ (*SPA*, January 22, 2006).

By 2006, cultural ties between the two countries have assumed growing importance and become a significant component of their strategic partnership. This is apparent because it was one of the four pillars that were raised by President Hu in his four-point proposal to enhance Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership. In the same context, Saudi Ambassador to China, Saleh Al-Hujaylan, announces after his appointment that ‘There are bound to be greater cultural exchange between us, and my agenda takes that into consideration’ (*China Daily*, January 23, 2006).

In Spring 2008, in an attempt to activate this dimension in the Riyadh-Beijing partnership, Saudi official TV broadcast for the first time ever a long Chinese drama that talks the history of China. The Saudi government also sponsors hundreds of Saudi students who are attending Chinese universities to acquire degrees in various courses.

9.2.4. Major Qualitative Steps in the Sphere of Petroleum Cooperation

Although China generally reduced its oil imports by 14.09% to 60.26 million/tons in 2001, imports from Saudi Arabia have sharply increased by 53.19% to reach 8.778 million tons (*China Business*, March 1, 2002). During her visit to the Kingdom in April 2002, Chinese State Councillor and Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade, Wu Yi, met Ali Al-Naimi, Saudi oil minister, and said that she came to activate bilateral cooperation between the two countries especially Saudi oil exports to China (*Xinhua*, April 1, 2002; *Saudi Gazette*, April 4, 2002).

Al-Naimi, for his part, had stated during a visit to China to attend the World Petroleum Congress in Shanghai that the Kingdom expects Asia to be the major growth area for petroleum consumption during the upcoming decades. He also emphasised that his country will ‘closely monitor growth of demand in all of Asia, and in China particularly, to anticipate needs and meet them without delay’ (Al-Naimi 2001: 3, 5).

The Saudi appetite to enter the Chinese petrochemical market has increased and in late 2002 it was reported that the Kingdom has doubled its share in the Chinese Glycol market and became one of the main countries in satisfying the Chinese market needs of this product (*Comtex News Network*, December 26, 2002). This development

comes against the backdrop of the announcement that China has overtaken the US as the world largest Glycol consumer (*SinoCast*, December 23, 2002). In fact, statistics showed that China's domestic production of Polythene falls short of meeting the growing demand in the Chinese market and that China's imports of this product has grown by 22% compared with 2002 (*SinoCast*, February 27, 2003).

Since early 2003 and even before inviting foreign tenders to bid on three large gas projects (*AFX News Limited*, July 21, 2003), the Kingdom seemed willing to enhance and diversify its cooperation with China in energy areas by granting Sinopec a considerable slice of the contracts of natural gas exploration³²⁶. Accordingly, when the Saudi government decided to open up its natural gas sector that had been not accessible to foreigners for more than 25 years, it, meaningfully, granted Sinopec³²⁷ a concession to explore and produce natural gas in around 40,000 square Kilometres block known as 'Zone B' in the northern sector of the desert of the *Rub Al-Khali* or 'Empty Quarter' (*AP*, January 27, 2004).

While Sinopec will take 80% of a new company that will be established, Saudi Aramco will hold the remaining 20%. Given that Saudi oil exploration remains barred to foreigners, the deal marks a breakthrough of Chinese oil companies as it allowed the Sinopec, among few other companies, to gain a foothold in the Kingdom upstream's energy industry (*Platt's Oilgram News*, January 28, 2004). USD 300 million was allocated for the 1st phase of the project according to a Sinopec official³²⁸ (*Xinhua*, March 7, 2004). Following the signing ceremony, Deputy General Manager of Sinopec Group, Wang Jiming, said that implementation of this project will 'further strengthen the communication and cooperation' between Sinopec and Saudi Aramco (*China Business News*, March 8, 2004; *China Energy Report Weekly*, March 12, 2004). Chief Executive of the state-owned Aramco, in turn, commented on this deal

³²⁶ Dr. Fahd Al-Sultan, Secretary-General of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CSCCI) stated that the Kingdom is interested in promoting its cooperation with China in the fields of natural gas and power transformation and transmission (*Xinhua*, January 17, 2003).

³²⁷ Sinopec was among few other companies were awarded such concessions including Russian Lukoil Holding (80%) and Aramco (20%) (Zone A, 30,000 sq-km), Italian Eny (40%), Spanish Repsol (40%) and Aramco (20%) (Zone C, 52,000 sq-km) (*Xinhua*, March 7, 2004; *China Business News*, March 8, 2004; *MEED Quarterly Report*, August 31, 2004, p. 21). It is worth noting that in the summer of 2003, a consortium of Royal Dutch/Shell Group (40%), Total S.A (30%) and Aramco (30%) had been awarded a USD 2 billion natural gas deal to explore an area of 200,000 sq-km in the 'Empty Quarter' (*Arab News*, July 21, 2003).

³²⁸ Sinopec Chairman, Chen Tonghai, said that while the cost of turning potential reserves into proved ones in the project is estimated at USD 300, converting proved ones into extractable gas would cost about USD 1.9 billion (*SCMP*, April 1, 2004).

by stressing that cooperation with China is 'vital and thrilling' (*The New York Times*, March 8, 2004).

Later on, Sinopec Chairman, Chen Tonghai, disclosed that his company will consider importing natural gas from Saudi Arabia and building an LNG terminal and refinery in costal Shandong Province if it achieves good results there (*SCMP*, April 1, 2004). China's imports of liquefied natural gas from the Kingdom at that time was said to be 60,000 barrels/day (*Sino-Cast*, June 25, 2004). In late December 2005, Sinopec became the first foreign company to drill a well in Saudi Arabia since it reopened its door to foreign petroleum companies (*International Oil Daily*, December 30, 2005).

Although China has become in 2004 one of the largest importers of Saudi crude oil in Asia and that the Kingdom simultaneously was the largest exporter of oil to China (*China Energy Report Weekly*, February 7, 2005), signing the natural gas agreement seems to be another positive turning point in the pace of strategic partnership between the two countries as shortly after that deal Ali Al-Naimi left to Beijing with an ambitious objectives in his mind. Raising Saudi oil exports to China and establishing more joint refining projects there side by side with attracting Chinese to enter into mining ventures in the kingdom were at the heart of Al-Naimi's good will visit's agenda to China 1-3 April (*Xinhua*, April 1, 2004).

Bearing in mind the growing energy demand in China³²⁹, Al-Naimi revealed that the Kingdom is endeavouring to increase its current sales of nearly 300,000 barrel/day to China. Not only that but Riyadh is seeking partnerships with Chinese enterprises to mine for phosphate in northern Saudi Arabia and build railway tracks with the aim of transporting the raw material to Jubail and Dammam on the Gulf coast where they would be used for making fertilisers that would be shipped to Chinese and Asian markets (*AFP*, April 2, 2004).

The Saudi suggestion to increase oil exports seemed to have found acceptance at the Chinese official circles as Vice Premier, Zeng Peiyan, and Minister of Commerce, Bo Xilai, in turn, stated during their meetings with the Saudi visiting minister, that Beijing is willing to expand collaboration in energy resources with the

³²⁹ While China's crude oil imports used to be at 1,720,000 barrel/day in 2003, they significantly increased by 55% to hit 2,660,000 barrel/day in 2004. Meeting between 17% of its energy needs, Saudi Arabia is the top supplier of oil to China (*Energy Compass*, April 15, 2004). *China Energy Report Weekly* (February 7, 2005) says that China imported 120 million tonnes of crude oil in 2004. According to experts in oil industry, China's energy imports were expected to double and reach 200 million tons/year by 2020 (*SinoCast*, June 18, 2004).

Kingdom (*Xinhua*, April 1, 2004). With regard to the Saudi plan to the attracting Chinese companies to Saudi mining sector, various Chinese enterprises have shown interest in Bauxite crude and Ammonium projects in the Kingdom according to Al-Naimi (*AFP*, April 2, 2004).

In view of that, reports began to speak about an expected increase in Saudi oil exports (light and medium grades) to China in 2005 by 25% (additional 2 million tons) to reach 400,000 barrels/day from its current level of 320,000 barrels/day in order to meet the growing domestic demand which has become since 2003, the second largest consumer of oil in the world after the US³³⁰ (*Lloyd's List*, November 4, 2004). With an export volume standing at 17.24 million tonnes, Saudi Arabia was regarded the largest crude oil supplier to China throughout 2004 scoring a gain of 14.3% year-on-year according to an estimation of *China Energy Report Weekly* (February 7, 2004).

Besides increasing China's oil imports from Saudi Arabia, it is worth noting that the visit of Ali al-Naimi to Beijing along with the preceding Sino-Saudi natural gas deal have yielded some other important outcomes. For instance, they both seem to have paved the way for stirring the stagnant water of Saudi Aramco's USD 3 billion joint project in China's downstream sector that has been on the table with little tangible progress for roughly 4 years. Following the sealing of Sinopec's gas deal and Al-Naimi's visit to China, it was reported that Aramco was finalising the deal to build the 240,000 barrel/day refinery project and petrochemical complex (with 800,000 tonnes/year Ethylene steam cracker, Polyethylene and Polypropylene units and a 700,000 tonnes/year Paraxylene unit) in Fujian Province which will accordingly grant it retail rights in the huge Chinese market and will increase Saudi oil exports by nearly 50% to reach nearly 500,000 barrels/day (*World Markets Analysis*, April 5, 2004, *Energy Compass*, April 15, 2004; *Sino-Cast*, June 25, 2004). By late 2004, Aramco and Exxon Mobil were said to have officially started some basic engineering work in Fujian refinery³³¹ (*Asia Pulse*, December 2, 2004). Another key outcome of

³³⁰ According to Chinese observers, China imported 40% of its crude needs in 2004 and was expected to increase its imports by 20% in 2005 to reach 3,000,000 barrels/day (*Lloyd's List*, November 4, 2004). According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), China's current consumption level of 6,300,000 barrels/day in 2004 is expected to jump to more than 10,000,000 barrels/day along with a five-fold increase in oil imports by 2030 which makes it a promising outlet for Saudi crude exports (*Asia Pulse*, December 2, 2004; *SCMP*, September 23, 2005).

³³¹ According to *Xinhua* (July 12, 2005), the project represents the largest Sino-foreign refinery and petrochemical integrated venture in China.

this agreement was that partners would establish a joint venture to operate 600 service stations and market petroleum products produced by the Fujian Integrated Project throughout the province (*SCMP*, September 23, 2005).

It would seem that these positive developments on the Sino-Saudi frontier encouraged the Chinese side to continue its active diplomatic endeavours towards enhancing energy cooperation with GCC countries and enlarging Beijing's stake in the Gulf's oil. In this regard, visiting Chinese Foreign minister, Li Zhaoxing, stated following his meeting with the GCC Secretary-General, Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah, in Riyadh that he had discussed the issue of high oil prices with Saudi leaders and that his country will work with Gulf nations to 'deepen our cooperation in the field of energy'. For his part, Al-Attiyah said that the GCC countries are willing to supply China with its oil and gas needs 'within the strategic partnership' between the two sides (*AFP*, September 8, 2004; *Xinhua*, September 9, 2004).

Since mid-2003 the Saudis showed a growing interest in furthering their presence in China's petrochemical market³³². In this context, Ali Al-Naimi had earlier told *Xinhua* (April 10, 2003) that besides joint ventures Saudi Arabia has entered in refining sector in Fujian and Shandong, the Kingdom is willing to increase its investment in China's petrochemical sector³³³. In parallel with this orientation, it was unveiled that Saudi petrochemical giant Sabic and Chinese Dalian Shide Group will set up a joint petrochemical manufacturing complex along with an eight million tons oil refinery in the northern port city of Dalian. While each partner will hold 50% of the USD 5 billion proposed project, it was said that it would be the world's largest Ethylene plant by 2010 with the capacity to annually produce 1.3 million tons of Ethylene (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, June 20, 2004).

Prompted by an ever-growing demand for energy and using their strategy of investing in oil refineries to secure outlets for crude oil exports³³⁴, senior officials in the Saudi petroleum industry, appeared willing to enter into competition with other oil

³³² Saudis attach great importance to China's petrochemical market and by 2005, 70% of Saudi Polyethylene was exported to the Chinese market (*SinoCast*, September 12, 2005).

³³³ In a step designed to promote joint ventures between the two countries in the petrochemical sector, a USD 10 billion-size oil industry fund was established in Hong Kong and subscribed by foreign investment banks (*SinoCast*, June 23, 2005 & September 10, 2004).

³³⁴ Saudi Aramco has shares in refineries in the US, Japan, Greece, Philippines, South Korea that process nearly 2,3 million barrels of oil every day into fuels. However, Saudi Aramco revealed that it has a 'higher priority in the Far East because that's where the growth is', according to Abdulaziz Al-Khayyal, Aramco's Vice President for Refining and Oil Marketing (*Asia Pulse*, December 2, 2004). As stated by IEA, China accounted for one-third of global growth in oil demand in 2004 (*SCMP*, September 23, 2005). By 2001, Asia accounted for 60% of Saudi oil exports (Al-Naimi 2001: 3).

producers to win the lion's share of the Chinese energy market (*Asia Pulse*, December 2, 2004; *TASS*, February 18, 2005). In this sense, it was announced during the first quarter of 2005 that Saudi Aramco entered into confidential talks with Sinopec for the purpose of acquiring a stake in a new 200,000 barrel/day Greenfield refinery project worth USD 1.2 billion in Qingdao of eastern China's Shandong Province, which was said to start operation in 2007 (*Lloyds List*, November 4, 2004; *AFX News Limited*, February 2, 2005; *SinoCast*, February 7, 2005).

During his visit to China to attend the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Fujian project, Chief Executive of Aramco, Abdullah Jum'ah, stated that the world petroleum giant expects more cooperation with China in energy and told press that negotiations are underway to explore the feasibility of developing a 1.2 USD billion new refinery in Qingdao (*Xinhua*, *SinoCast* & *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 2005). Besides the ongoing negotiations on Qingdao refinery, Aramco is eyeing more of such investments in China according to a Saudi Aramco official (*SPA*, February 26, 2005). The decision of the Chinese central government to allow Aramco to own another refinery was seen by some Chinese analysts as coming in response to strategic considerations related to domestic energy difficulties (*China Energy Newswire*, November 21, 2005).

As a natural consequence of this rising cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector, Saudi Arabia oil supplies to China in 2005 witnessed another considerable increase. While some reports in early 2005 said that oil exports from the Kingdom to China reached 500,000 barrels/day (*TASS*, February 18, 2005), other reports estimated them to be 450,000 barrels/day by July 2005 and anticipated them to increase by the end of the year (*Platts Oilgram News*, November 22, 2005). Yet, according to official Chinese sources, Saudi Arabia remained the largest provider of oil to China with more than 34% increase in its exports, which reached 20.01 million tons/year by November 2005 accounting for 14% of China's oil imports (*China Energy Weekly*, December 2, 2005, *Xinhua*, January 17, 2006; *Business Daily Update*, January 24, 2006).

Likewise, it was reported that a new cooperation in refining technologies is underway when the Chinese Shaw Stone & Webster was selected by Saudi Aramco and Japanese Sumitomo Chemical Co. to provide deep catalytic cracking

technology³³⁵ for their joint project at the Rabigh petrochemical complex in western Saudi Arabia (*New Orleans City Business*, March 28, 2005). In a related development aiming at deepening cooperation between Sabic and Sinopec, it was also revealed that a large-scale Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) contract for two integral polyolefin plants at YANSAB complex, in Yanbu Saudi Arabia, has been won by Sinopec and Norway's Aker Kvaerner in late July 2005. The two plants, which represented Sinopec's first petrochemical joint venture in cooperation with a foreign partner in Saudi Arabia, will be designed to annually produce 400,000 tons of Polypropylene and a similar amount of Polyethylene as integral parts of the main Ethylene and Propylene manufacturing complex (*China Energy Newswire*, August 8, 2005). The three parties signed the agreement for this project in September (*Al-Riyadh*, September 15, 2005; *China Business On-Line*, September 28, 2005).

It seems that the two countries were pleased about and satisfied with their recent Joint Venture experiences as positive outcomes of Saudi-Chinese petroleum, petrochemical and gas J.V. were praised during talks between Saudi oil minister, Ali Al-Naimi, and visiting Chinese Vice-Minister of the National Development and Reform Commission, Zhang Guobao, in Riyadh. The two officials, according to *Xinhua* (November 21, 2005), pledged to make efforts to expand their bilateral energy cooperation and more importantly they discussed some new mining and refining projects involving Chinese firms in the Kingdom.

Bilateral energy cooperation saw a remarkable progress in 2006. In a fresh move to expand energy cooperation between the two countries, King Abdullah's visit to China resulted in the signature of five agreements one of which was a protocol on closer cooperation in petroleum, natural gas and minerals³³⁶ (*China Daily*, January 24, 2006). This deal has provoked contradictory press speculations. While some saw this agreement as a result of a Chinese desire to secure overseas oil and gas reserves for their power-hungry economy and guarantee greater oil supplies of oil from the Kingdom (*AP & AFP*, January 23, 2006), others believe that it was motivated by Saudi concerns that the Chinese will rely more on Russian oil (*Marketplace Morning Report*, January 23, 2006).

³³⁵ This technology helps in breaking down crude oil to produce Propylene and Ethylene.

³³⁶ Neither side gave any details about the agreement but Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al-Faisal, says the energy deal signed provide a framework for specific energy investments. Yet agreements on the projects would have to be inked between oil companies in the two countries (*AFP*, January 23, 2006; *China Daily* January 24, 2006). The Prince adds that there exist extensive contacts between companies from both sides (*Business Daily Update*, January 24, 2006).

What analysts do agree about; however, is that this energy deal was expected to pave the way for much greater cooperation in the energy sector between the two countries (*AFP*, January 23, 2006; *Oil & Gas Journal*, February 6, 2006, p. 35; *World Market Analysis*, February 6, 2006). In this regard, an unidentified source at the Chinese energy industry told China's semi-official agency that Beijing wants to increase its current imports of Saudi crude oil under fixed-term deals next year to limit the impact of price volatility (*Qatar News Agency*, January 22, 2006). Whereas a Chinese analysis predicts that Chinese oil imports of Saudi oil would increase by 50,000 barrel/day to reach a new peak of 500,000 barrel/day in 2006 (*SinoCast*, January 24, 2006), other news agencies including *Xinhua Information Center*, *Asia Pulse* and *World Market Analysis* (February 6, 2006) point out that Riyadh pledged to raise oil and natural gas exports to China by 39% along with taking a much larger part in China's endeavours to develop strategic national oil stockpile as per energy protocol signed during Abdullah's visit.

The *Beijing Morning Post* (January 24, 2006), in turn, reports that part of the signed energy deal was about a Chinese and Saudi plan to build a USD 868 million large crude oil storage facility (25-30 million tons)³³⁷ in the Southern Province of Hainan as part of a comprehensive joint project that also comprises a refinery and a gas storage facility. A Chinese business source indicates that the Chinese side held deep talks with Saudi officials in September 2005 on a Chinese proposal to establish a large oil joint venture project. *SinoCast* adds that Crown Prince Abdullah had shown interest in this project when first put forward in 2002 as a mechanism to promote Saudi oil sales in Southeastern and Northeastern Asia along with reducing risks brought by the volatility of international oil market (*SinoCast*, January 19 & 24, 2006). It is worth noting here that the Saudi oil minister had expressed in April 2003 a favourable opinion towards the notion of establishing Chinese national strategic oil storage. Al-Naimi said that China is a big nation with growing demand for oil supply and thus it is of critical significance for China to set up its national strategic oil storage system in order to 'guarantee national energy security under emergency circumstances' (*Xinhua*, April 10, 2003).

However, this initial Saudi interest in the 6-million-ton oil refinery project and 20-million-ton oil depot in Southern Province of Hainan slowed down due to

³³⁷ The equivalent of nearly 98 days' consumption.

concerns regarding Chinese government's hesitation about introducing reform of the industry. Taking into consideration that domestic oil product prices are currently manipulated by the central government and are much lower than those on the global market, 'it will be risky for the Saudi side to launch oil projects in China under the current oil pricing system' according to Li Guohong, a senior energy expert with Yinhe Securities (*China Energy Weekly*, January 20, 2006).

Yet, given that senior officials of the central government pledged to speed up the reform of oil pricing system at the beginning of 2006³³⁸, it was expected that King Abdullah's visit to China between January 22-24, 2006 will give a boost to oil deposit joint venture in Hainan (*SinoCast*, January 19, 2006; *China Energy Weekly*, January 20, 2006). In this regard, some industry-watchers believe that Saudis will push for details about China's reform of the energy sector and pricing system and demand projections (*UPI*, January 23, 2006).

In a related development, Pakistani State Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources, Nasser Mengal, states that Pakistan will help China in the construction of the strategic pipeline from Gwadar to China's *Xinjiang* bordering Pakistan and hence enabling Beijing to import more oil from Saudi Arabia. Pointing out that Pakistan is the shortest possible option for China to import oil from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, the Minister adds that President Pervez Musharraf offered China an 'energy corridor' in accordance with King Abdullah's desire to increase Saudi crude exports to China which was discussed by the two leaders during the Monarch's visit to Pakistan in February 2006. It is worth noting in this regard that China has expressed readiness to set up an oil refinery in Gwadar (*Business Recorder & Japan Economic Newswire*, March 16, 2006).

The newly appointed special envoy to the Middle East and former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia during the early 1990s, Sun Bigan, said before Hu's visit to the Kingdom that Hu is keen to solidify growing ties with the Kingdom and that enhancing bilateral energy cooperation and securing oil supplies for China is expected to be high on the agenda (*SCMP*, March 30, 2006). Chinese Foreign Ministry confirmed this matter and stated that energy issues will be important components of Hu's visit to Riyadh (*AFP*, April 11, 2006). For its part, Shanghai-based *Dongfang Zaobao* (Oriental Morning Post) reported that President Hu might discuss the

³³⁸ In a meaningful step in this direction, the Chinese government lifted the oil prices by nearly 5% increase on March 2006 (*Xinhua*, March 27, 2006).

construction of Saudi-Pakistani-Chinese oil pipeline during his visit to the Kingdom. Chinese planners believe that by utilising Pakistan as an 'energy corridor', China could reduce its over-reliance on the Strait of Malacca as a passageway for oil imported from the Middle East and Africa and thus enhance its energy security strategies (*BBC, Worldwide Monitoring*, April 19, 2006).

According to an unidentified Chinese official, the issue of setting up a strategic oil reserve in China was brought into discussion by the Chinese side during Hu's talks with Saudi officials (*The Daily Telegraph*, April 24, 2006; *Xinhua Economic News Service*, April 26, 2006). A senior Saudi official, in turn, says that both sides have agreed to arrange for a Saudi-Chinese committee to meet in a month to study further the feasibility of the Chinese proposal. Expecting that it will not be less than one million barrel/day, the official goes on says that it is premature to say how much extra oil the Kingdom will supply China for the reserve and whether Riyadh is willing to sell the oil to the Chinese at a discount (*AP*, April 24, 2006). In June, it was reported that the two countries have entered into extensive talks on this matter (*China Energy Newswire*, June 22, 2006; *China Energy Weekly*, June 23, 2006).

On the other hand, among the various pacts signed during Hu's visit was a MoU on energy cooperation between the Saudi Aramco and Sinopec with a commitment to enhance joint exploration of oil and natural gas (*China Business News On-Line*, April 24, 2006; *China Energy Weekly*, April 28, 2006). Sinopec, as a result, might get an oil exploration project in Saudi Arabia in a development that was regarded as a breakthrough in the Chinese oil company tough pursuit of going overseas according to *Xinhua Economic News Service* (April 26, 2006). For its part, Saudi Aramco³³⁹ announces that two refineries with Sinopec in Fujian³⁴⁰ and Qingdao are on track and it pledged to supply China with 1,000,000 barrel of oil per day in 2010 (*Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2006).

It was also said that during President Hu's visit to Saudi Sabic Headquarters, he discussed a USD 5.3 billion petrochemical project in Northeastern China in which the Saudi company is interested. From Sabic's viewpoint, China's market is a 'key strategic global petrochemical market' and his company's annual exports to China

³³⁹ As part of its efforts to expand its operations and presence in China, the oil giant opened an office in Shanghai in late 2006 (*AFP*, November 14, 2006).

³⁴⁰ Fujian joint refinery was said to start production in early 2009.

were worth USD 2 billion (*AP*, April 22, 2006; *China Daily*, April 23, 2006). By mid May, Dalian petrochemical complex between Sabic and China's Shide Group was said to be awaiting the final approval from the Chinese central government (*China Energy Newswire*, May 16, 2006).

9.2.5. Dynamic Economic Ties and Continuous Growth

Riyadh and Beijing continued to intensify their efforts to encourage cooperation in commercial and economic sectors and further understanding and friendship among entrepreneurs in both countries by holding several symposiums and workshops both in Riyadh and Beijing (*Xinhua*, November 20, 2000). In this regard, *Saudi Times* (November 21, 2000) reported that Riyadh and Beijing are currently seeking ways to enhance and expand their economic relations. The Chinese Ambassador to China, likewise, told *Saudi Gazette* (December 24, 2000) that he predicts a 60% increase in trade exchange between the two countries.

As a result, several Saudi and Chinese companies entered into projects and contracts that were reflected on the volume of two-way trade³⁴¹. Indeed, IMF statistics show that whereas Saudi-Chinese trade volume for years 1998 and 1999 were USD 1.7 and 1.85 billion respectively, it has noticeably doubled in 2000 hitting more than USD 4 billion with a trade balance in favour of the Kingdom (see table 5 for more details). By early 2001, China has become the seventh trade partner of the Kingdom³⁴² (*Xinhua*, March 12, 2001; *Al-Hayat*, September 23, 2002).

In another move to boost commercial exchange between the two countries, it was disclosed that the first Chinese trade city (mall) in the Middle East was under construction in Jeddah, the largest Saudi port city on the Red Sea. The 20,000 square/meter mall that cost USD 2 million was designed to sell various Chinese-made commodities including textiles, medicines, chemicals and non-ferrous metal products (*Xinhua*, March 25, 2002).

During the visit of Vice-Premier of Economy and Foreign Trade, Wu Yi, to Riyadh, the two countries held talks on boosting bilateral cooperation, expanding the trade volume and encouraging businessmen of both sides to increase investments. Their talks included also the issue of avoidance of double taxation and standard

³⁴¹ For more information in this regard, see for example (*Xinhua*, August 20, 2000; *Arab News*, December 24, 2000; *Chemical Business Newsbase*, November 26, 2001).

³⁴² China has become the top supplier of readymade garments to the Kingdom with a share of 44% of the total Saudi market (*Asia Pulse*, September 10, 2002).

specifications along with a Chinese proposal to lower trade barriers and liberalise trade policies in order to strengthen trade turnover between the two countries (*Xinhua*, April 1, 2002; *Saudi Gazette*, April 4, 2002).

In a tangible indication that these meetings were productive, it was reported that China by mid 2002 has become the 5th largest international exporter to the Kingdom³⁴³ (*Al-Watan*, May 9, 2002; *Al-Hayat*, September 23, 2002). IMF Statistics, in addition, show that at the end of 2002, the value of bilateral trade between the two countries has grown by 25% hitting more than USD 5 billion and again with a trade balance favourable of Saudi Arabia (see table 5). In correspondence with such growth and in another effort to promote bilateral trade exchanges, Saudi Arabia Airlines Corporation announced that it has started to ship cargo between the Kingdom and China through Hong Kong by allocating a number of Boeing 747 planes for this purpose (*Al-Hayat*, October 30, 2002).

In order to enhance non-official trade ties between entrepreneurs in both countries, the Sino-Saudi Friendship Association and the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CSCCI) signed in Beijing in early 2003 a memorandum on the establishment of a non-governmental joint commercial committee. Comprised of business people from both countries, the committee under this agreement will undertake the mission of organising business forums, encourage companies to hold exhibitions in both countries and make suggestions to the governments to simplify trade exchange³⁴⁴ (*Xinhua*, January 17, 2003).

Admitting that both the Saudi and Chinese economies are 'supplementary', Dr. Fahd Al-Sultan, CSCCI Secretary-General predicts a promising future for bilateral trade exchanges. He also reveals that Chinese investors have obtained six licenses from the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA), namely petrochemical, pharmaceutical, tire manufacturing and construction material projects in Riyadh, Jeddah and Yanbu (*Xinhua*, April 24, 2003).

A press report in late 2003 predicts that the Saudi recent reduction of tariff barriers, which have confined the importation of certain goods and services, as a precondition to accession to the World Trade Organization will allow a greater access to the Kingdom's market and that China will be one of the most beneficiaries of such

³⁴³ China remained the 7th largest trade partner with the Kingdom in terms of Saudi exports (*Xinhua*, April 24, 2003).

³⁴⁴ For more details in this regard, see (*Middle East Business Digest*, December 8, 2003; *Al-Riyadh*, December 14, 2003).

transformation. On the one hand, Chinese enterprises will greatly benefit from Saudi rising demand for consumer goods³⁴⁵ and, on the other, they will take advantage of new reduction of limits on foreign investment by setting up production plants there (*Market-Africa/Mid-East*, December 1, 2003).

IMF statistics indicate that the volume of bilateral trade between the Kingdom and China in 2003 has scored a growth rate of 70% compared with last year reaching USD 7,341,840,000 billion (see table 5). Trade balance was clearly in favour of the Kingdom thanks to Saudi exports of crude oil to China that increased to reach 15.18 million tons/year accounting for 16.7% of the total importation (*China Business News*, January 29, 2004).

In 2004, Saudi entrepreneurs injected considerable sums of capital investments towards the Chinese market³⁴⁶. In a key event in Saudi-Chinese economic and commercial relations, the Kingdom and China inked in Riyadh a final bilateral trade agreement on commodity price and service lists as part of the former's efforts to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Following the signing ceremony, Deputy Minister for Technical Affairs of Saudi Trade and Industry Ministry, Fawaz Al-Alamy, expressed gratitude to the Chinese support for its bid to join the WTO³⁴⁷ (*Xinhua*, April 3, 2004; *MEED*, April 9, 2004).

In another significant development that will create a more stable base for long-term cooperation and will be positively reflected on enhancing bilateral economic ties and encouraging trade of commodities and services between Riyadh and Beijing, China and the GCC countries inked a framework agreement on cooperation in economy, trade, investment and technology. The agreement will act as a prelude under which the two sides will form a joint committee on economic and trade cooperation as well as launch a consultation mechanism and talks on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two sides³⁴⁸ (*Xinhua*, July 6, 2004; *China Daily*, July

³⁴⁵ In this regard for example the volume of annual ready-to-wear clothing imports to Saudi Arabia were estimated at USD 800 million most of them come from Italy, China, Taiwan and Thailand (*Al-Watan*, June 8, 2004). China, also, was regarded the primary provider of toys to the Saudi local market, which was valued at USD 160 million/year (*Al-Watan*, July 6, 2004).

³⁴⁶ For more details in this regard, see (*SCMP*, January 8, 2004; *Asharq Al-Awsat*, May 19, 2004).

³⁴⁷ After 12-years of negotiations, the Kingdom was given the permission to join the WTO on October 28, 2005 (*AP*, 28, 2005).

³⁴⁸ With USD 17 billion trade exchanges, GCC countries have become China's 8th largest trade partner worldwide; 9th largest import source and 8th largest export destination (*Xinhua*, July 6, 2004). Yet, China is the GCC's 3rd trade partner after the US and Japan (*World Markets Analysis*, December 10, 2004). When the FTA is reached, the GCC will be the 2nd international body after ASEAN to have such an agreement with China.

7, 2004). According to *China Daily* (March 3, 2005), the first session of negotiations towards the FTA was set to begin in the following month.

Statistics indicate that the numbers of Saudi entrepreneurs who visit China and Hong Kong to attend fair trades and conduct business deals have grown remarkably to reach roughly 5000-6000 businesspeople according to the Saudi Consul-General at Hong Kong, Alauden Al-Askary. In order to enhance trade links between the two countries, Saudi Airlines was negotiating with the authorities of Hong Kong for an air service deal to allow direct passenger flights between the Kingdom and Hong Kong³⁴⁹. The agreement in this regard was awaiting completion, Al-Askary said (*SCMP*, September 23, 2004).

The Saudi-Chinese bilateral exchange in 2004 has distinctly grown by more than 40% hitting USD 10,299,660 billion (see table 5), and the two countries seemed willing to maximise opportunities for future economic and investment cooperation. In this regard, the Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CSCCI) suggested the establishment of a USD 100 million joint investment company to mainly focus on future investments in energy and infrastructure sectors. This proposal was raised during trade talks organised by Chinese People Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries in Beijing. The talks comprised 100 businesspeople from both China and the Kingdom Abdulrahman Al-Jeraisy, Head of Saudi-China Friendship Association and CSCCI's chairman, said that CSCCI supports investment and setting up plants in China and simultaneously invites Chinese investors to enter the Saudi promising market as the government is planning to spend USD 600 billion in the next 15 years in the fields of irrigation, public health, road and railway construction, communication, education (*Xinhua*, December 14, 2004).

Economic and technological cooperation between Riyadh and Beijing was not limited to conventional exchanges but actually stretched to include new areas such as telecommunication. In this sense, it was announced that Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd. Of China will supply Saudi Telecom Company (STC), the largest telecom company in the Kingdom in which the government holds a majority share, with equipments and terminals to build CDMA 2000 network in Saudi Arabia which will help STC to reinforce its telecom services (*SinoCast*, November 3, 2004).

³⁴⁹ While there are three cargo flights every week between Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong, there were no direct passenger flights.

Additionally, Chinese construction companies intensified their activities in the Saudi market in 2005. It was reported that a USD 167.5 million worth contract to design and build a 5000-tons cement production line near Riyadh has been obtained by Shanghai-based Sinoma International Engineering Co. Ltd. (*AFX News Limited*, July 18, 2005). The contract was the third of its kind for Sinoma in the Saudi market. The Chinese company, therefore, sent 900 of its management, technical and construction staff to the Kingdom (*IPR Strategic Business Information Database*, July 27, 2005). The same company also announced in late 2005 that it won another deal to build two cement production lines worth USD 580 million for the Saudi Cement Co. (*AFX News Limited*, December 15, 2005).

As a result of intensive movement of Saudi imports from and exports to China and as a result of rising international oil prices, Saudi Arabia overtook Japan and became the 3rd largest trade partner with Ningbo port after only the EU and the US by August 2005 (*IPR Strategic Business Information Database*, August 17, 2005). China, on the other hand, became the 2nd largest importer of Saudi non-oil exports after the UAE with total value near to USD 250 million by the second quarter of 2005 (*Al-Watan*, September 7, 2005). The year 2005 also saw another step to enhance bilateral cooperation in the fields of science, technology and trade especially in the agricultural sector as the two countries signed in Beijing an agricultural cooperation agreement (*Xinhua*, September 13, 2005). A report issued by the Saudi daily, *Arab News*, and quoted by Saudi official agency indicates that the Kingdom has offered Chinese entrepreneurs and companies investment opportunities worth USD 624 billion in vital sectors such as petrochemicals, gas, desalination, telecommunications, electric power generation and railways (*SPA*, January 21, 2006). Against this background, trade exchange between the two countries sharply increased by nearly 50% in 2005 scoring USD 16,111,240,000 billion and with a trade balance heavily in favour of Saudi Arabia (see table 5).

King Abdullah's visit to China resulted in the signature of four bilateral economic agreements that included 'economic, trade, investment and technical cooperation' and 'avoid dual taxation'. The other two agreements were about facilitating 'cooperation in vocational training' and finally permission for a loan from Saudi Arabian Development Bank to improve infrastructure in the historic Muslim Chinese city of Aksu in China's Western oil-rich Xinjiang Province (*AFP*, January 23, 2006; *China Daily*, January 24, 2006). Furthermore, enhancing mutual political trust,

expanding two-way investments and seeking means to speed up the process of signing a bilateral free-trade agreement between China and the GCC countries were at the heart of talks held both during King Abdullah's visit to Beijing and the subsequent visit of President Hu to Riyadh (*Xinhua & AP*, January 24, 2006; *China Daily*, April 24, 2006).

In a meeting comprised of President Hu and Saudi entrepreneurs, both sides committed themselves to increasing the volume of bilateral trade to USD 40 billion in five years (*BBC, Worldwide Monitoring*, April 24, 2006). Within this orientation, the Governor and Chairman of the board of Directors of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority, Amr Al-Dabbagh, announces that Riyadh and Beijing are studying a plan to set up a fund with the purpose of encouraging investment between them³⁵⁰ (*SCMP*, November 8, 2006).

The supplementary nature of Saudi-Chinese economies has paved the way for a greater growth in bilateral commercial ties between the two countries. According to China's Minister of Commerce, Bo Xilai, Saudi Arabia has become the largest oil provider to China, largest trade partner and second largest export market in the regions of West Asia and Africa (*Xinhua*, January 25, 2006). Likewise, Chinese official news sources indicate that while the Kingdom has become China's 10th largest importer, China has become the 4th largest importer from and the 5th largest exporter to Saudi Arabia (*Xinhua*, January 22, 2006; *China Knowledge Newswire*, January 27, 2006). At the end of 2006, the Chinese Ambassador to Riyadh, Wu Chunhua, points out that trade between the two countries has increased by 50 times over the last 16 years (*Middle East Business Digest*, November 8, 2006). According to IMF statistics, the two-way trade volume registered an annual growth of nearly 25% in comparison with last year hitting a new peak of US 20 billion (see table 5).

³⁵⁰ When the mainland's second-largest bank was listed in Hong Kong in early 2006, a group of Saudi investors led by Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, the world's 8th-richest person, have subscribed to 2.7% of Bank of China shares worth USD 2 billion (*The Daily Telegraph*, May 24, 2006).

Table 5: Bilateral Trade exchange between the KSA & PRC between 2001-2006*

Year	PRC Exports to KSA	KSA Exports to PRC
2001	\$ 1,356,430,000	\$ 2,723,140,000
2002	\$ 1,672,740,000	\$ 3,436,490,000
2003	\$ 2,147,160,000	\$ 5,194,680,000
2004	\$ 2,775,590,000	\$ 7,524,070,000
2005	\$ 3,824,840,000	\$ 12,286,400,000
2006	\$ 5,054,430,000	\$ 15,086,500,000

*Source: *Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF*.

9.3. CONCLUSION

Saudi Arabia and China managed to deepen and broaden their relations in all possible fields during the period between 2001-2006 due to several reasons related to economic interdependence, common political interests and geostrategic concerns. The two countries became more than ever convinced that what links them is not merely an oil-for-money relationship but a multi-dimensional strategic partnership. Hence, Riyadh and Beijing sought to forge a comprehensive partnership through enhancing their political, petroleum, economic, military and cultural relations.

Politically, the deterioration of US-Saudi ties following the tragic events of 9/11, the US accusation to the Saudi government of sponsoring terrorism, and the US pressures for introducing some political reforms in the Kingdom contributed to make Riyadh willing to strengthen its political relationship with Beijing as a hedge in the face of US pressures. The Chinese government, in turn, was desirous of such rapprochement, as they had worked hard to gain the trust of oil and gas exporting countries to secure needed energy supplies. Like the Saudis, China was, on the one hand, in favour of less US dominance in the region and the world and targeted by the same US criticism in issues such human rights, religious freedom and political reform, on the other.

The Saudis and Chinese, consequently, established in 2000 a regular cooperation mechanism between foreign ministries in issues of common interest such as human rights, regional security and the coordination of their political attitudes in international organisations. The two countries were keen also to enhance and diversify political ties between all the political establishments including Communist Party of China (CPC), and the Saudi *Al-Shura* Council through several official visits. Also Beijing favourably responded to repeated Saudi requests to play a greater role in the Middle East peace process and regional status by appointing a special envoy on this question. The two sides, moreover, inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for political consultations between Saudi and Chinese Foreign Ministries to upgrade the consultation mechanism between the ministries of foreign affairs to a formal political dialogue with regular political consultations in 2004.

In a clear sign of how strong bilateral ties have become, the year 2006 witnessed two important and consequent visits of King Abdullah to China and then three months later President Hu was due in Riyadh. The state visits resulted in a consensus on the pillars of Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership including enhancing mutual trust and bilateral political relations, reinforcing energy cooperation, expanding economic and trade cooperation and finally developing friendship and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the two sides reached two important security and military agreements in 2006. The first concerned combating terrorism and the second was a deal to buy Chinese defence systems for Saudi Defence Ministry.

Arising Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership might lead to greater military ties in the future whenever both sides feel that there is a need for such thing or that they feel that their common strategic interest is at stake due to regional risks. In this regard, one cannot rule out the possibility that Saudis might resort again to China to mend any change in the regional balance of power if Iran for example was able to acquire nuclear weapon.

In the energy field, the Saudi-Chinese partnership represented a win-win connection. The Chinese desire to secure energy supplies was met by a Saudi counter-desire to maximise shares in the Chinese huge and promising market especially after negative signals coming from Washington about its intention to reduce reliance on Middle East oil. Hence, state-run petroleum companies of both sides were strongly supported to enter into active negotiations on joint ventures on the Saudi upstream and Chinese downstream sectors. These negotiations resulted in a Saudi official

commitment to meet all China's needs of energy products. Also, it resulted in granting the Chinese companies for the first time the right to gain a foothold in the Saudi upstream and gas exploration sector through a concession to explore and produce natural gas in around 40,000 square Kilometres block in the desert of the *Rub Al-Khali*.

The Saudis, in return, were allowed to enter the Chinese downstream sector and gain shares in a number of Chinese refineries and petrochemical projects and that on the one hand guarantees a huge outlet for Saudi (high-sulphur) crude oil and, on the other, gives Saudis marketing rights for their petrochemical products in the huge Chinese market. Saudi exports of oil to China, consequently, reached 450,000 barrel/day by 2006 making the Kingdom the largest oil exporter to China. These crude exports are likely to increase to reach 1,000,000 barrel/day in the coming years especially after these giant projects start to work, if the proposed 'energy corridor' becomes a reality on the ground and when the two sides reach an agreement about the proposed Chinese oil reserve.

These key developments were as well positively reflected on bilateral economic exchanges. While Saudi-Chinese commercial exchanges was hovering around USD 4 billion in 2001, it reached a new high of USD 20 billion by 2006, scoring a 5 fold increase. In this regard, the Saudi petroleum exports secured a huge surplus in trade balance in favour of the Kingdom. Riyadh continued to be the largest trade partner of China in West Asia and North Africa.

Improvements on political, energy and economic frontiers had implications for cultural ties between the two countries. The size and number of Chinese *hajj* missions increased with a promise from Beijing to reach 20,000 pilgrims in the future. Moreover, the two sides paid a considerable attention towards enhancing their cultural contacts and not limit them to Muslim contacts but in fact to introduce the culture of each side to peoples of the other through holding cultural exhibitions and festivals.

This notable progress in Saudi-Chinese multi-dimensional partnership does not mean that bilateral relations might not face some challenges. One of these possible challenges could be the situation of Chinese Muslim communities toward which Saudi religious and political circles feel a 'moral commitment' to support. While it was obvious that Saudi political leadership has been in favour of China's national unity and against any Muslim separation forces, it would seem difficult and

shameful for Riyadh to turn a blind eye towards any harsh treatment these communities could receive from central government.

Sino-Iranian ties could be another challenge to growing Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership especially in respect of Iran's secret nuclear programme and its potential implications on Saudi national security. China needs to show greater support to UN's measures and international resolutions in this regard and to exert pressure over Tehran to stop its nuclear enrichment activities and prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon.

Saudis also hold high expectations on a Chinese active role in the peace process. Chinese failure to move from the position of inspiring to initiating might shake the image of China as a potential superpower. Hence, in order to preserve its regional prestige, Beijing needs to give up its passive policy and lip service in the Middle East for a more active regional role to balance the US role in the area.

Finally the anti-dumping measures adopted by Chinese authorities against some Saudi petrochemical products and companies might represent a predicament in the face of maximising bilateral economic exchanges (*SinoCast*, September 12, 2005). Yet, such problems are likely to be overcome through arbitration and bilateral negotiations between parties concerned if both governments are to continue their cooperation.

Whereas some observers believe that the Saudi-Chinese partnership could jeopardise US geostrategic interest in the region and hence lead at the end to a possible clash of interest between Beijing and Washington especially if long-term energy situation led Beijing to protect sea routes of its energy supplies through establishing a military presence in the region (Pan 1997, <http://www.meforum.org/article/373>; Xu 2000: 124; *Wall Street Journal*, January 25, 2006; *Associate Press*, *The Times*, *The Global and Mail*, *Turkish Daily News*, April 24, 2006; Mezran & Mastrelia 2005: 81 & Ghafouri 2009: 90), still others including all Saudi officials met by the author³⁵¹ assert that both Riyadh and Beijing are keen not to upset Washington or send any negative signals in this direction and that Saudi-Chinese partnership is not at the account of US-Saudi strategic ties (*Marketplace*, January 26, 2006; *Agence France Press*, April 11, 2006 & Calabrese, 2005,

³⁵¹ For instance Author's private interview with Dr. Saleh Al-Namlah, Deputy Minister of Culture & Information for Foreign Information (Riyadh March 20, 2008) & with Dr. Ibrahim Al-Muhanna, Advisor at the Saudi Petroleum Minister's Office (April 2, 2008).

www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=408&issue_id=347&article_id=2370272).

Yet, one must admit that the first argument seems to be more convincing and supported by a number of considerations. First, there is China's ever growing domestic energy demand and the likeliness that it will continue to rise side by side with China's economic growth. Second, the fact that the Middle East is assuming a greater importance in China's foreign policy and strategic thinking as it accounts for more than 50% of China's oil imports (*Asia Pulse*, February 28, 2005). Third, taking into account that China's diplomatic and strategic calculi are gradually yet increasingly dominated by oil security concerns (Jaffe & Lewis 2002: 115). Fourth, given that the Chinese like the Americans regard the procurement of foreign oil a matter of national security (Klare 2004: 168).

The plausible conclusion, then, would be that China's expansion into the Middle East will become 'a must' (Xu 2000: 135) since the Middle East oil will become 'not only indispensable but also a strategically critical source for China' (Xu 2000: 124). Furthermore, as Chinese strategists believe that 'Any domination of the Middle East either by internal or outside powers, is not expected or acceptable' (Xu 2000: 135), one hence cannot rule out the possibility of a potential future competition over energy sources in the region between the US and China (Mezran & Mastrelia 2005: 81 & Ghafouri 2009: 90).

One must admit, moreover, that increasing US pressures and criticisms of the Saudi political system hand in hand with less Saudi petroleum sales to the US could result in greater energy and political ties between the Kingdom and China and such a situation could ultimately draw Riyadh away from Washington towards Beijing. History tells us that Saudis following the Second World War attempted to balance their ties with Britain, which was the main hegemonic and colonial superpower at that time by forging strong ties that turned into a 'special relationship' with the US, which was then an emerging superpower that enjoys no colonial past in the region (Robin 1979: 265). By adopting a foreign policy that attempts to smoothly reduce dependence on Washington and employing strong ties with Beijing as a counterweight against US pressures and regional dominance, it seems that the Saudis are repeating the same ploy with China who this time is an emerging superpower that has no colonial history in the region and is widely recognised as a historical supporter

of Arabs in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The question that raises itself at this crucial moment is whether history is going to repeat itself.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS

Whilst conducting their academic studies, IR students usually employ one or more of the field's mainstream theories to conceptually capture and explain the phenomenon under review. It has been said that it is not easy to adopt a single IR approach when attempting to give a comprehensive or a holistic explanation of the observed phenomenon especially when it is applied to area studies.

This problem stems from the fact that adopting a single theory could result in overlooking one or more aspects of the phenomenon we examined. This chronic difficulty is what IR scholars refer to as the level of analysis (agent-structure) problem. The researcher, accordingly, resorted to building an integrated theoretical frame work that takes into account the impact of factors embedded both at the levels of the agent and structure with the purpose of giving a comprehensive account of the main determinants and dynamics of the Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period between (1949-2006).

Given that this study was based on the assumption that Riyadh-Beijing relationship during this 57-year timeframe was shaped by the impact of three main factors of systemic-security, identity-ideological and economic-interdependent nature, the conceptual framework adopted has comprised three mainstream IR theories that tackle the impact of such factors on international actors namely Neorealism, Neoliberalism and Social Constructivism. Having said that, this study draws greatly on the insights and assumptions of Social Constructivism in explaining the evolution of Saudi-Chinese relationship especially during the period of (1949-1990).

This study raises a number of questions. The first question concerns the main obstacles that delayed the establishment of diplomatic relations between Beijing and Riyadh during the period between (1949-1990). Through tracking the evolution of Riyadh-Beijing relationship during that period, it can be said that the Saudi-Chinese relationship suffered a long political rupture that was the outcome of a combination of systematic-security and identity-ideological factors.

Since the early 1950s, it was obvious that Saudi Arabia and the PRC belong by default to two contradictory categories either systematically or ideologically. From a Neorealist viewpoint, it can be said that during the early phases of the Cold War and

owing to ideological and security considerations, Mao decided to align China closely with Soviet Union against 'Western imperialism' and believed that the two camps are destined to enduring and inevitable conflict due to their ideological differences. Saudi Arabia, which was surrounded during the Cold War by Socialist and security threats from some Arab neighbouring countries including Egypt and Iraq, saw Communism as a direct and serious challenge to its national security and survival. As such, Riyadh thought that aligning itself with the West would be a preferable asset for its national security especially after King Saud's visit to the US in 1957.

Yet, it is important to say that it was only in the late 1960s that the Saudis began to see China itself as a serious and tangible threat to their national security. This Saudi concern came after Beijing took itself away from the Soviet camp and sought to play its version of revolutionary Marxism and compete with Moscow for influence and leadership through supporting armed struggle and leftist-radical movements in the Arabian Peninsula, namely in Yemen and Dhofar. In reaction to the Chinese presence in and threat to the southern flank of the Kingdom, Saudis enhanced their political and financial assistance of Taiwan and escalated their diplomatic support of Taiwan in the UN in an endeavour to prevent the PRC from assuming China's seat in the Security Council of the UN.

On the other hand and from a Social Constructivist viewpoint, the identity-ideological factor has negatively and considerably overshadowed Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period between (1949-1978). In accordance with the Constructivist assumption about the impact of shared systems of knowledge, values and identities on the behaviours of the international actor and their definition of interests and threats, Saudi Arabia and China have shown antagonism to each other at that period because they belonged, by nature, to conflicting and adversary identities.

It was expected that Islamic, monarchic and conservative Kingdom will have a clash of identities with the atheist, progressive and revolutionary China. Not only that but it was obvious that each side's image about the other would be influenced negatively by its ontological starting points. While the Saudis saw the PRC as an atheist, radical and illegitimate group that toppled the legitimate government of the Kuomintang, the Chinese saw them as a feudalist, reactionary and a client of the West. Because of its spiritual status in the Islamic world and what it regards as part of its responsibility toward defending faith and Muslim minorities all over the world, the news delivered by Chinese Muslim immigrants who fled to the Kingdom about

Beijing's attempts to erase their Islamic identity along with the harsh way through which Communist authorities dealt with them during the late 1950s and throughout the notorious Cultural Revolution has enhanced the Saudi negative image of the Communist regime as a 'foe of Islam'.

Against this background, it can be said that both systemic-security and identity-ideological factors have jointly and negatively contributed to shape Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period between (1949-1978). Moreover, it was not expected that any plausible breakthrough in their tense relationship would be possible unless these issues be solved.

The key fundamental transformations both in China's foreign and domestic policies following the arrival of Deng Xiaoping to power in late 1978 have served as a good basis for the détente that followed in Saudi-Chinese relationship during the period between (1978-1985). Saudis were relatively satisfied with the pragmatic changes that took place in China's foreign policy in which China gave up its radical policies, defused ideology from its foreign policy, adopted 'open door' policy and sought to break its international isolation, aligned itself closely with the West against Moscow's aspirations in the Middle East and Beijing also recognised the Saudi regional role and began to praise Saudi foreign policies especially those directed to curb the Soviet regional infiltrations.

This stage, also, witnessed an indirect Saudi-Chinese military cooperation within which the Saudis used to finance arms deals going to the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan against the Soviet presence during the 1980s. Saudis, also, have given Beijing's arms sales to Baghdad a secure access to their country for indirect overland military deliveries during the Iran-Iraq War. It can be said that the systemic factors including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) have contributed to reconciling Saudi and Chinese attitudes.

With regard to its Muslim minorities, Beijing adopted relatively tolerant policies towards its religious minorities including Muslims and hence Islamic rituals were resumed again and mosques were reopened. Beijing also resumed sending *hajj* missions to holy places in the Kingdom and these missions not only served as messengers between the two countries to bridge the absence of official relations between them but they invited the Muslim World League (Saudi unofficial religious arm) to visit China and inspect the condition under which Chinese Muslims live.

These several visits to China have contributed to partly change the Saudi image of China as a 'foe of Islam'.

Yet, despite these positive changes in the Chinese foreign policy behaviour; and notwithstanding that China and Saudi Arabia began to indirectly cooperate against the Soviet regional aspirations and even though that Beijing became no security threat to Saudi Arabia, Riyadh decided not to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC and to maintain a diplomatic rupture with it. While this Saudi stance runs against the Neorealist assumptions of the priority of security and survival issues in determining the state's foreign behaviour, it gives eminence to the Constructivist account of actor's behaviour based on the influence of ideational and normative factors.

To put this argument in more practical and concrete terms, it can be said that the Saudi refusal to normalise relations with Beijing and its decision to keep an official political rupture can be seen as consistent with its repeatedly and publicly expressed principal antagonism to both Communism as a faithless ideology and Communist states as radical and irrational countries. Bearing in mind the sensitivity of the position of the Kingdom in the hearts and minds of Muslims, Saudis seem to have thought that by normalising their political ties with Beijing at that time they might end up shaking their religious and political credibility in the Islamic world especially given that they were deploying all means to fight Soviet presence in Afghanistan in the name of defending Faith. In order to overcome this problem, Saudis seemed to have needed more time until the war in Afghanistan ends.

Therefore, Riyadh favoured a gradual but constant rapprochement with China especially during the period between (1985-1990) in which Saudi Arabia and China managed to enhance their relationship at various economic and religious levels and to overcome their ideological differences. China's announcements of its 'independent foreign policy for peace', 'economic diplomacy' as well as economic and modernisation policies during the mid-1980s were reflected positively on Saudi-Chinese economic relations between (1985-1990).

Religious bilateral relations also witnessed a breakthrough after holding a Saudi-sponsored Islamic conference in China to which many Islamic dignitaries were invited. China also continued to patiently court Saudi Arabia through enhancing bilateral economic relations. China, furthermore, was on time and responded favourably when Saudis, due to regional security concerns and after being let down

by the US, requested to purchase strategic missiles in 1986. All these developments have led the Saudis to accept finally to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing and to cut their political relations with Taiwan in July 1990.

The second question this study addresses regards how the two countries managed, in a short time, to enhance their emerging political relationship and upgrade it to reach the status of strategic partnership in the late 1990s; and the role that summit diplomacy has played in this regard. To begin with, one must say that Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership has benefited greatly from the post-Cold War international environment in which 'low politics' issues including economic growth and social welfare have become more dominant than military and security issues or 'high politics'. Second, the Chinese ambitious modernisation programme and economic reforms that were introduced since 1979 helped the Chinese economy to score constant high levels of growth since then. As a result of its economic boom, China became a net oil importer in 1993 and such transformation made it critical for Beijing to guarantee safe resources for its energy needs in order to carry on its economic growth. Yet, energy demand in China was simultaneously accompanied by its desire to find markets capable of consuming a considerable slice of its various consumer goods and products.

For their part, Saudis and since the mid 1990s began to attach greater importance to the emerging Asian markets in general and to China in particular. In fact, the Chinese economic performance during that period along with China's 'economic diplomacy' attracted the attention of Saudi policy makers and, therefore, they began to perceive China as a potential and promising outlet for their petrochemical and petroleum products.

Against this background, economic factors began to play a crucial role in shaping the Saudi-Chinese relationship starting from this phase as the two sides realised that they could be 'complementary' to each other especially in the energy field. While the Saudis sought to open new markets for their petroleum (oil and gas) and petrochemical products in the huge and growing Chinese market, the Chinese were keen to enlarge the presence of their various products, goods and skilled manpower in one of the largest consumption markets in the Middle East and hence they could relatively reduce the expenditure bill of their energy imports. Chinese, as well, believed that the Kingdom is abundant in terms of capital and, hence, could be a good source of foreign investments to Mainland China.

Consequently, the two sides signed a Cooperative Document to exchange the most-favoured nation-Status and in order to redress the imbalance in their two-way trade, they decided to activate their petroleum cooperation. As a result, Riyadh for the first time achieved a surplus in its trade balance with Beijing due to daily exports of roughly 60,000 barrel of crude oil to China. This was positively reflected on the volume of two-way trade exchange that reached approximately USD 1.7 billion by 1998 allowing the Kingdom to be China's largest trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Saudi-Chinese economic interdependence during the 1990s as a key component of their strategic partnership has benefited from remarkable progress in various fields of their bilateral relations. In the political field, officials emphasised that ideological and security obstacles no more exist on the way of developing bilateral ties. Riyadh and Beijing managed to further their mutual understanding and trust especially after the Gulf Crisis in 1991 during which Saudis showed satisfaction with the Chinese political attitude. Saudis, also, became publically supportive of the policy of 'one China' and that Taiwan is part and parcel of China. Furthermore, the two sides were interested in promoting their parliamentary relations. As a result of this progress and as talks between the senior officials of both countries revealed that they have identical views towards the regional security, the year 1996 witnessed the establishment of the annual consultation mechanism between the GCC (where the Kingdom enjoys great leverage) and the PRC in 1996.

In the military field, this period witnessed the first ever visit for a Chinese Defence Minister. Also, Riyadh and Beijing continued to develop their cooperation either through undertaking regular maintenance of the ten-year old East Wind missiles or possibly through putting forward a Saudi proposal to replace them. In the religious domain, direct ties increased between religious establishments in both countries and Beijing gave exceptional permission to Saudi organisations to offer some financial donations to support the religious schools and institutes in the PRC. As a result of these developments on bilateral relations, the size of Chinese official *hajj* delegations during the 1990s witnessed a notable growth in number as well.

Bilateral summit diplomacy between (1998-2000) has considerably contributed to giving Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership a strong momentum and governmental endorsement as it reflected a mutual political will in both countries to give this relationship whatever it needs to succeed. With the purpose of enhancing

and articulating the main features of their upcoming bilateral strategic partnership, three key official visits were made by the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz (the *de facto* ruler of the Kingdom since the mid-1990s) to China, Chinese President Jiang Zemin to the Kingdom, and Prince Sultan Deputy Premier and Defence Minister to China in 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively.

These visits held several strategic implications for the partnership between the two countries especially in the field of energy cooperation and in a time that meeting China's ever-growing domestic energy demand has become one of the main determinants of its foreign policy. Since these visits resulted in the signature of a series of important bilateral economic and petroleum agreements between state-owned Saudi Aramco and Sinopec, the two countries announced the real outset of their growing economic interdependence. Saudi Aramco was allowed, hence, to enter into joint ventures alongside Chinese companies in downstream and refining sectors with the purpose of enlarging the Saudi petroleum exports to the Chinese market. As a result of growing Saudi-petroleum and Chinese-commodities exports, economic exchange between the Kingdom and China reached a new high of USD 3 billion by the end of 2000.

The hypothetical assumptions of Neoliberalism about the possibility to achieve a cooperative behaviour among international actors under the conditions of the state of 'complex interdependence' are useful to understand the developments in Saudi-Chinese relationship during the late 1990s. Growing Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership at that time is best viewed within the context of their bilateral economic interdependence and proceeding from the point that the Saudi and Chinese economies are 'complementary' to each other. Hence, it becomes sensible that Riyadh and Beijing made a huge effort towards achieving the state of 'complex interdependence' through various means all of which aimed to expanding the areas of their cooperation and encouraging private sectors in both countries to establish 'multilateral' institutions to serve this end.

From a Saudi perspective, enhancing energy partnership with China was important to secure shares in its promising and ever-growing energy domestic market as well as to compensate for expected loss in the US market after the latter's announcement of its plans to increase its dependence on the Caucasus oil. Beijing, for its part, and as a natural outcome of its 'oil diplomacy' and hunt for secure energy

was bound to enhance its petroleum ties with Saudi Arabia as the world's number one in terms of oil output and proven reserves and number four in terms of gas deposits.

This strategic partnership, however, could be somewhat understood within a different theoretical context, the Neorealist systemic analysis. From a Neorealist perspective, Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership has some strategic motivations and could be seen as an outcome of some important developments at the level of the international or regional system including the Gulf Crisis in 1991, which resulted in the Saudi realisation of the importance of establishing a strong relationship with an important country such as China.

Furthermore and due to issues related to the structure of the unilateral world, Riyadh by the mid 1990s had a serious desire to redress the imbalance in its relations with all superpowers and reduce its dependence on the US especially after the emergence of some noteworthy divergent perspectives between Riyadh and Washington about the latter's post-Cold War Middle Eastern foreign policy and the collapse of their joint enemy, Communism. In Riyadh, enhancing Riyadh-Beijing connection was seen as a means to restore the Kingdom's image in the region as an important country that has excellent relations with all key international superpowers that could influence the course of events on the regional scene especially the peace process in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the new Saudi orientation towards cultivating strong relationship with Beijing in all fields provided the Chinese with a rare opportunity to achieve a long-standing wish of enhancing their political relationship with one of the traditional alliances of the West. As a multinational country, Beijing might have, also, thought that Saudis could have a possible role to play in encouraging the national integration and harmony among its Muslim communities through positively using their spiritual influence over China's Muslim minorities and encouraging them to be 'good citizens' of unified China.

Such Neorealist approach gains more explanatory relevance in the post- 9/11 phase in which US-Saudi relations suffered strain in contrast to the improving Saudi-Chinese relations. In answering the third question of this study, which asks about the impact of post-9/11 US Saudi relations on the Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership, it has been argued that the decline of Washington-Riyadh 'special relationship' was the gain of Beijing-Riyadh strategic partnership. Politically, the Kingdom and China grew closer and became supportive of each other as they felt that they are in the same boat

and targeted by the same US criticism in issues such as human rights, religious freedom and political reforms.

It can be said that the Sino-Saudi strategic partnership reflects both sides concerns of the US dominant role and that they became more than ever favourable of less US dominance both regionally and globally. While the Saudis want to use China as a shield and a counterweight against American regional dominance and pressures for western-styled political reforms, the Chinese want to strategically secure their energy supplies against any possible US blockage or sudden rupture and, hence, thought that forging strong ties with the Kingdom has become of special strategic importance for China's energy security.

As a result, the two sides agreed to set up a regular cooperation mechanism between foreign ministries in both countries to coordinate their attitudes in international organisations in issues such as human rights and regional security in 2000. In a clear indication of the high level of political harmony they have reached, this mechanism was upgraded in 2004 to a Memorandum of Understanding for political consultations between Saudi and Chinese Foreign Ministries according to which the two ministries agreed to enter into a formal political dialogue and to hold regular political consultations.

The proposal to construct a Saudi-Pakistani-Chinese strategic pipeline or an 'energy corridor' from Gwadar (in Pakistan) to China's *Xinjiang* can be perceived in line with the Neorealist explanation of this strategic partnership. Such pipeline will result in enabling Beijing to import more oil from Saudi Arabia was put forward to reduce China's over-reliance on the Strait of Malacca as a passageway for oil imported from the Middle East and Africa and thus enhance its energy security strategies.

Within the same context, the heads of both states, King Abdullah and President Hu, exchanged meaningful state visits during the first quarter of 2006 within which a package of agreements in various fields including security agreement on combating terrorism and a deal to buy defence systems for Saudi Defence Ministry. These visits served to stress that what combines the two countries is not an oil-for-money relationship, but actually a comprehensive multi-dimensional strategic partnership that is based on four main principals. First, establishing strong bilateral political relationship and continuous consultation. Second, boosting energy and

petroleum cooperation. Third, increasing bilateral economic and commercial cooperation. Fourth, promoting friendship and cultural ties between the two countries.

In the religious and cultural sphere, the two sides showed greater attention to bridging the relatively cultural alienation between their peoples. As a result, they decided to extend cultural bonds between them beyond merely religious ties that combine Muslim minorities in China to the holy places in the Kingdom and to introduce a broader range of cultural activities that could culturally increase the familiarity of both nations to each other including holding cultural exhibitions and weeks. Muslim minorities in China have, also, benefited from such orientation and the number and size of *hajj* missions have seen a notable expansion.

In the energy field, the Saudi-Chinese partnership represented a win-win connection. The Chinese desire to secure energy supplies was met by a Saudi counter-desire to maximise shares in the Chinese huge and promising market especially after repeated negative signals coming from Washington about its intention to reduce reliance on Middle East oil. Saudi officials, thus, regard their energy partnership with China as the most important energy relationship for them and, as such, they were keen to give assurances to their Chinese counterparts that the Kingdom is willing to meet all China's energy needs. Thus, Saudi oil, gas and petrochemical exports to China have remarkably increased and by 2006 the Kingdom became the largest oil supplier to China with nearly 500,000 barrel/day exports accounting for 14% of China's oil imports.

As a part of their bilateral energy cooperation, Chinese companies secured a foothold in the Saudi upstream sector after the Kingdom gave Sinopec concession to explore and produce natural gas in 40,000 square Kilometres in the desert of the *Rub Al-Khali*, the 'Empty Quarter'. Saudi Aramco, in return, was allowed to own shares in several joint ventures in refinery projects and downstream petrochemical complexes in Fujian, Shandong and Qingdao Provinces. Saudi Sabic and Chinese Dalian Shide Group also said to set up a joint petrochemical-manufacturing complex along with an 8,000,000 tons oil refinery in the northern port city of Dalian. Within the same framework, it was reported in 2006 that Saudi Sabic was negotiating a USD 5.3 billion petrochemical project in Northeastern China. Besides increasing Saudi oil and gas exports to the Chinese market, these joint projects will result in giving Saudi companies a relative advantage in comparison with other international companies and marketing rights in the Chinese huge market.

It seems that Saudis are bidding on establishing more joint refining projects in China in order to secure further shares in Chinese market. It was reported that Saudi oil exports to China are likely to double and reach 1,000,000 barrel/day in the foreseeable future especially when these joint ventures start to work in full capacity. The Chinese, for their part, are willing to continue their strategy to project their energy companies to become overseas and enter the profitable Saudi downstream sector.

There are, also, some reports about negotiations with the Saudi side to get a concession for oil exploration along with a Chinese intention to enter into Saudi mining sector and mine for phosphate in northern Saudi Arabia. The Chinese were said to take part in building a railway tracks with the aim of transporting the raw material to Jubail and Dammam on the Gulf coast where they would be used for making fertilisers that would be shipped to Chinese and Asian markets.

In a move designed to boost energy cooperation between the two countries, the visit of King Abdullah's to China witnessed the signature of a protocol on closer cooperation in petroleum, natural gas and minerals. In exchange, Hu's visit in the same year resulted in the signature of a MoU on energy cooperation between Saudi Aramco and Sinopec with a commitment to enhance joint exploration of oil and natural gas.

Due to differences over the way the petroleum products is priced in the Chinese domestic market, negotiations are still underway between the two sides to establish a strategic national oil stockpile (20 million-ton) in the Southern Province of Hainan as part of a comprehensive joint project that also comprises a 6-million-ton oil refinery and a gas storage facility.

In the economic domain, Riyadh and Beijing continued to intensify their efforts to encourage cooperation in commercial, economic and investment sectors. they, moreover, sought to further understanding and friendship among privative sector entrepreneurs in both countries by holding several symposiums and workshops both in Riyadh and Beijing. In order to enhance non-official trade ties between entrepreneurs in both countries, the Sino-Saudi Friendship Association and the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CSCCI) signed in Beijing in early 2003 a memorandum on the establishment of a non-governmental joint commercial committee.

While China supported the Saudi application to access the WTO in 2004, Saudis, in exchange, responded favourably to a Chinese proposal aiming to reduce tariff barriers between the two countries. Also with considerable Saudi support, China and the GCC countries signed a framework agreement on cooperation in economy, trade, investment and technology in 2005 as an initial step to reach a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two sides.

King Abdullah's visit to China resulted in the signature of four bilateral economic agreements and it was announced in 2006 that the two sides are committed to increase the volume of bilateral trade to USD 40 billion in five years. Whereas by 2006 the Kingdom has become China's 10th largest importer, China has become the 4th largest importer from the Kingdom, the 2nd largest importer of Saudi non-oil exports and the 5th largest exporter to it (*Xinhua*, January 22, 2006; *China Knowledge Newswire*, January 27, 2006). As a result of these developments, two-way trade between the two countries increased by tenfold from USD 1.7 in 1998 to USD 20 billion in 2006.

Still to reiterate that Saudi-China multi-dimensional strategic partnership is currently experiencing its best days and it seems that it is likely to grow further and further in the coming years. This will probably increase China's political presence and leverage in the region. One cannot rule out the possibility that Saudis might resort again to their Chinese friends for advanced military support if there is a security need to do so as happened in the mid 1980s. If this scenario happened, the Saudi potential request will be supported this time by a strong multi-dimensional partnership and a common Saudi-Chinese interest. The progress of Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership could cast some negative implications to Western traditional predominant position in the region. Yet, it is premature to attempt to exactly determine what sort of impact this could have.

Through employing the assumptions of three different conceptual frameworks of IR to understand and explain the dimensions of the 57-year evolution of Saudi-Chinese relationship, one could stress that the systemic-security and identity-ideological factors that contributed to alienate Saudi Arabia and China during most of the second half of the 20th Century have been substituted with a new set of systemic-security and economic-interdependence factors that encourages them to build a strong, promising and multi-dimensional strategic partnership in the 21st Century.

Having said that, it should be noted that the Sino-Iranian military relations and their potential impacts on Saudi-Chinese strategic partnership lie outside the parameters of this study and that further in-depth work could be done in this area. The implications of that topic especially during the post-2006 period might be of particular interest to those who are concerned about regional security both in the Middle East in general and in the Gulf region in particular.

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