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# The Evolving Roles of China and Russia in the Middle East, Post-October 7, 2023

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**Abstract:** The strategic landscape of the Middle East has entered a new phase of transformation, driven not only by the historical interests of Western powers but also by the growing involvement of non-Western actors, particularly China and Russia. The events of October 7, 2023, when the Israel-Hamas conflict escalated dramatically, marked a significant turning point in regional geopolitics. This escalation highlighted the increasing complexity of international relations in the region and underscored the shifting role of China and Russia in Middle Eastern affairs. In the aftermath of the crisis, both powers have emerged as key actors reshaping regional dynamics through distinct strategies. China's economic diplomacy, focused on energy, trade, and infrastructure investment, and Russia's military and political interventionism, with its longstanding alliances with Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, have been pivotal in the evolving regional landscape. As the influence of the United States and other Western powers recedes, China and Russia's strategic priorities in the Middle East are becoming increasingly significant, both in terms of shaping the region's future and in the broader context of global power realignment. This paper explores the evolving roles of China and Russia in the Middle East post-October 7, 2023, examining their strategies, goals, and the implications for regional stability and global geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Evolving Roles, China and Russia, Middle East, Post-October 7, 2023

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## INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has long been a focal point of global geopolitical and economic competition, historically dominated by Western powers, particularly the United States. U.S. foreign policy in the region has been driven by a range of objectives, including the protection of vital energy resources, support for key allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia, and counterterrorism efforts. For much of the 20th and early 21st centuries, the U.S. maintained its dominance in the Middle East through military interventions, arms sales, and extensive diplomatic ties. However, a series of critical events, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 2008 financial crisis, and the Arab Spring uprisings, have exposed the limits of U.S. influence and raised questions about the efficacy of its approach in the region. As a result, the Middle East is witnessing a major shift in its geopolitical order, with new actors - most notably China and Russia - playing increasingly central roles.

The Israel-Hamas conflict that erupted on October 7, 2023, serves as a symbolic moment in the broader realignment of power within the Middle East. The escalation of violence, particularly the scale and complexity of the hostilities, revealed the ongoing volatility of regional dynamics and highlighted the inability of traditional Western actors, especially the U.S., to fully control the unfolding events. In this context, China and Russia have taken on new and increasingly influential roles, filling the power vacuum left by a perceived retreat of the U.S. from the region. While the U.S. has historically approached Middle Eastern affairs through military and security-based strategies, China and Russia are introducing alternative

approaches based on economic engagement, military cooperation, and political interventionism, each with its own set of interests and methods of influence.

China's presence in the Middle East has been growing steadily over the last decade, with its economic diplomacy playing a central role. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has expanded its investments in infrastructure projects, energy partnerships, and trade agreements throughout the region (Zhao, 2020). This expansion is underpinned by China's need for secure energy supplies, given its position as the world's largest importer of oil (She, 2023). Moreover, China has actively sought to mediate regional conflicts, presenting itself as a neutral power and offering an alternative to the more interventionist approaches of the West. One of the most significant developments in this regard was China's successful mediation in the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023, which demonstrated China's ability to act as a diplomatic broker capable of navigating the region's complex and often conflicting alliances (Fadeev *et al.*, 2024).

In parallel, Russia has reasserted itself in the Middle East with a more assertive military and political strategy, particularly since it intervened in Syria in 2015. Russia's goals in the region are multifaceted: maintaining its influence in Syria, strengthening alliances with Iran and Hezbollah, and countering Western influence (Gorenburg, 2016). Its direct military involvement in Syria and its support for the Assad regime have allowed Russia to position itself as a key power broker in the Middle East, particularly in areas of security and military cooperation. Unlike China, which

prefers economic diplomacy and neutrality, Russia's approach is grounded in military presence and political intervention. Furthermore, Russia's ability to balance relationships with rival states, such as Turkey and Israel, while maintaining strong ties with Iran, showcases its capacity to navigate the region's complex political landscape (Doroshenko & Shelkovnikov, 2024).

The evolving roles of China and Russia are reshaping the Middle East's strategic environment. No longer confined to the margins, both powers are playing more active and visible roles in regional conflicts, diplomacy, and economic development. Their increasing influence challenges the traditional U.S.-led order and signals the emergence of a multipolar balance of power in the region (Sim, 2023). This shift is about a redistribution of influence and represents a fundamental change in how global powers engage with the Middle East. China's focus on economic partnerships and non-intervention contrasts with Russia's emphasis on military engagement and political alliances, creating new dynamics that regional states are increasingly navigating.

The growing influence of China and Russia in the Middle East has far-reaching implications, not only for the region's stability but also for the broader international system. As the U.S. recalibrates its strategy in the Middle East, these non-Western powers are expanding their presence in ways that reflect their respective visions of global governance.

This paper explores the evolving roles of China and Russia in the Middle East, particularly in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, escalation, examining how their strategies differ, the nature of their engagements with key regional players, and the broader geopolitical implications of their increasing involvement. By analyzing these developments, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the new geopolitical order emerging in the Middle East, driven in part by the shifting balance of power between Western and non-Western actors.

### **The Israel-Hamas Conflict: A Case Study of Strategic Realignment**

The Israel-Hamas conflict is increasingly influenced by the broader geopolitical shifts in the region. While the United States and its allies have traditionally played a central role in attempting to mediate peace efforts, the rising influence of China and Russia has introduced new dynamics. Russia's support for Palestinian factions and its outreach to Israel allow it to serve as a diplomatic interlocutor in ways that the U.S. cannot, given its close alignment with Israeli policies (Marten, 2024). Meanwhile, China's economic influence in the region and its investment in stabilizing key states offer alternative avenues for conflict resolution that could weaken the traditional Western monopoly on peace processes (Petry, 2024).

Both China and Russia's growing influence serve as a reminder that regional conflicts are no longer solely shaped by Western powers (Niu, 2024). Instead, the involvement of these two non-Western actors, with their respective focuses on economic development and military power, provides Middle Eastern states with more options for strategic partnerships (Sagild & Hsiung, 2024). This diversification of alliances complicates traditional narratives of conflict and peace-building, leading to a more fragmented, multi-polar regional order.

The Israel-Hamas conflict is a critical component of understanding the broader regional political and security dynamics in the Middle East. The involvement of non-Western powers like China and Russia in the Middle East, as explored in this research, provides essential context for analyzing the shifting alliances, foreign policies, and security arrangements that influence and shape such conflicts (Byman & Jones, 2024). Specifically, the Israel-Hamas conflict is relevant to this research because it reflects how the growing influence of China and Russia impacts the ability of regional actors to navigate their relationships with global powers and how these powers can influence the outcomes of such disputes.

China's strategy in the Middle East, including its diplomatic efforts to mediate regional conflicts, plays a significant role in the Israel-Hamas conflict. China's approach, as seen in its broader Middle East policy, emphasizes economic diplomacy, stability, and conflict resolution through non-interference. China's growing involvement in the region positions it as a neutral player, capable of influencing regional dynamics without the baggage of historical political alignments or military interventions typical of Western powers, especially the U.S. (Kuhn, 2024). In the case of Israel and Hamas, China has not directly engaged in the military dimensions of the conflict but has taken steps to advocate for peaceful resolutions and foster economic interdependence, which could be leveraged to address the root causes of the conflict, including socioeconomic inequality and regional instability (Zhou, 2025).

China's investments and infrastructure projects across the Middle East, including its growing ties with countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran, give it leverage in mediating regional disputes, including the Israel-Hamas conflict. Furthermore, as China increasingly becomes involved in the Middle East through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its focus on economic development can be seen as an indirect effort to mitigate tensions and foster long-term stability. The stability of the region, which is influenced by conflicts like Israel-Hamas, is essential to China's broader goals of securing critical trade routes and maintaining the flow of energy resources (Chaziza, 2024a).

Russia's role in the Israel-Hamas conflict is multifaceted. As a key player in Middle Eastern

geopolitics, Russia has positioned itself as both a supporter of Iran and a strategic partner to Israel. This balancing act places Russia in a unique position to influence the trajectory of the conflict by leveraging its relationships with key actors (Allison, 2018). Russia's engagement with Iran and Syria is driven by a combination of geopolitical and security interests, including the prevention of Western domination in the region and the preservation of Russian influence in the Levant. At the same time, Russia seeks to maintain constructive relations with Israel, with which it shares common interests, especially in counterterrorism and military cooperation (Sisk, 2022).

Russia's role as a disruptor of Western-led peace initiatives has implications for the Israel-Hamas conflict. While the U.S. and its allies have traditionally played a dominant role in peace efforts, Russia's growing influence presents an alternative approach to conflict resolution. Moscow's support for Palestinian factions, including Hamas, and its position on Israeli settlements have made it a significant player in the ongoing diplomatic efforts in the region (Rumer and Weiss, 2025). This adds another layer of complexity to the conflict, as Russia's actions, while advocating for a two-state solution, are often at odds with Western policies, particularly in terms of security and territorial disputes.

### **Shifting Power Dynamics and Multi-Alignment**

The strategic landscape of the Middle East has entered a new phase of transformation, driven not only by the historical interests of Western powers but also by the growing involvement of non-Western actors, particularly China and Russia. The events of October 7, 2023, when the Israel-Hamas conflict escalated dramatically, marked a significant turning point in regional geopolitics. These events highlighted the increasing complexity of international relations in the region and underscored the shifting role of China and Russia in Middle Eastern affairs. In the aftermath of the escalation, both powers have emerged as key actors reshaping regional dynamics through distinct strategies. China's economic diplomacy, focused on energy, trade, and infrastructure investment, and Russia's military and political interventionism, with its longstanding alliances with Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, have been critical in the evolving regional landscape.

The Israel-Hamas conflict serves as a case study for the broader shift toward multi-alignment in Middle Eastern foreign policies. As China and Russia increase their influence, regional states are increasingly diversifying their alliances, engaging with both Western and non-Western powers to balance their interests. This is evident in how regional states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE have managed their relationships with Israel, Iran, and other powers, reflecting a more fluid approach to foreign policy that aims to maximize strategic advantages (Hanau Santini, 2025).

In the case of the Israel-Hamas conflict, the increasing presence of China and Russia provides Middle Eastern actors with alternative diplomatic and economic options, which may influence the way the conflict is addressed (Shlykov, 2024). States in the region can leverage these new power dynamics to further their national interests, either by aligning with Russia and its security-focused policies or by engaging with China's economic diplomacy. The competition between these powers for influence in the Middle East also affects the strategies of regional actors involved in the Israel-Hamas conflict, potentially leading to new approaches to conflict resolution.

China's role in the Middle East has evolved significantly in the years following the escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict (Kuhn, 2024). As the conflict intensified, China's position as a neutral actor in the region became more pronounced. While the United States remained firmly aligned with Israel, China's focus on conflict mediation, economic integration, and energy security has provided it with opportunities to strengthen ties with various Middle Eastern states, including those opposed to Israel's actions (Raz, 2024). One of China's key strategies in the aftermath of October 2023 has been its attempt to mediate conflicts while maintaining an image of non-interventionism (Karsh, 2023).

China's increasing influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been instrumental in positioning it as a partner for both Arab states and Iran. The economic relationships China has cultivated through investments in infrastructure, energy projects, and trade have made it an attractive alternative to the traditional Western powers. China's diplomatic engagement with Iran and Saudi Arabia, particularly its role in facilitating their rapprochement, underscores China's commitment to fostering regional stability through economic interdependence (Shinji, 2023). In contrast to the United States' polarized approach to regional politics, China emphasizes pragmatic economic cooperation and conflict stabilization. For instance, China's mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been framed as a significant move toward reducing regional tensions, thus safeguarding critical energy routes and enhancing China's economic interests in the Gulf (Zhou, 2025).

In the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict, China's strategy remains focused on broader regional stability rather than direct involvement. By encouraging economic dialogues and partnerships, China seeks to stabilize regional rivalries that threaten its investments (Shawamreh, 2025). Additionally, China's approach to Israel has been measured; while it has expressed concern over the humanitarian impact of the conflict, it has refrained from taking sides, instead emphasizing the need for a peaceful resolution and economic cooperation (Zhou, 2025). This stance has allowed China to maintain strong relationships with both Israel and its Arab

neighbors, positioning itself as an essential player in post-conflict reconstruction and regional development.

Russia's role in the Middle East, particularly in the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict, has been marked by its active military presence and its strategic alliances with Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. Since the escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict, Russia has increased its involvement in the region, balancing its support for Israel with its longstanding relationships with regional powers that oppose Israel, such as Iran and Syria. Russia's military intervention in Syria, where it has maintained an airbase and provided support to the Assad regime, has made it a crucial actor in shaping the future of regional security and diplomacy (Hamzaoglu and Merdan, 2024).

Russia's involvement in the region, particularly following the Israel-Hamas escalation, reflects its broader geopolitical strategy of challenging U.S. influence and promoting a multi-polar world order. Russia's engagement with Iran and its support for the Syrian government have made it a key player in the dynamics surrounding the Israel-Hamas conflict, as Moscow's political and military influence often intersects with the interests of Iran, Hezbollah, and other actors critical of Israel's policies (Shlykov, 2024). While Russia has refrained from taking direct military action in the Israel-Hamas conflict, its support for a multi-polar international order has positioned it as a critical diplomatic and military actor in the region.

Russia's influence also extends to its position on the United Nations Security Council, where it has repeatedly used its veto power to block resolutions that could lead to Western intervention in the region. This ability to shape international discussions surrounding the conflict, while also engaging in direct military and diplomatic outreach to Israel, Iran, and other regional players, has cemented Russia's role as a key power broker. Furthermore, Russia's strategic partnership with China in the Middle East has created a new dynamic in which both powers offer alternatives to U.S.-led diplomacy, particularly in terms of military cooperation, arms sales, and economic agreements (Ghiselli, 2023).

### **The Impact on Middle Eastern States**

The events of October 7, 2023, which saw a dramatic escalation in the Israel-Hamas conflict, have catalyzed broader realignments in Middle Eastern geopolitics. This crisis has brought into sharp relief the increasingly complex network of alliances across the region, where multi-alignment, rather than exclusive alignment with a single global power, has become a defining feature of foreign policy strategies among key regional actors. Long-standing U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while still reliant on Washington for military hardware and security cooperation, are diversifying their diplomatic portfolios. In the wake of the conflict, these Gulf monarchies have intensified their outreach to China and Russia, signaling

a clear shift toward a more diversified and autonomous approach to international relations (Arakelyan & Kassab, 2024).

This shift has been further reinforced by growing disillusionment with Western policies, particularly U.S. responses to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and perceived inconsistencies in its commitment to regional stability. The U.S. under Biden and Trump's unwavering support for Israel during the conflict has fueled public outcry in the Arab world and complicated bilateral relations with several Gulf states. In contrast, China's emphasis on conflict de-escalation and economic cooperation, along with Russia's diplomatic engagement with both Hamas and Israel, has elevated their status as alternative power brokers in the region (Fulton, 2020). This has encouraged states like Egypt, Qatar, and Oman to adopt more balanced foreign policies, maximizing their room for maneuver by leveraging relationships with all three major powers - the U.S., China, and Russia.

At the heart of this transformation is the appeal of non-Western powers as partners who do not impose political conditionalities, such as democratic reforms or human rights standards, that often accompany Western engagement. China's economic diplomacy, primarily conducted through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and major energy and infrastructure agreements, presents a model of engagement focused on mutual gain and state sovereignty (Shinji, 2023). Meanwhile, Russia has extended its influence through arms sales, security cooperation, and strategic alliances with key non-state actors such as Hezbollah and with state actors like Iran and the Syrian regime. This dual strategy of economic inducement from China and military-political leverage from Russia has granted Middle Eastern states greater autonomy in pursuing their national interests, independent of Western oversight or prescriptions (Kurylo, 2024).

The conflict has also provided both China and Russia with new opportunities to expand their diplomatic footprints. China calls for a ceasefire and its support for a two-state solution echoed in international forums such as the United Nations allows it to present itself as a neutral and stabilizing force (Wang, 2024). Russia, meanwhile, has sought to position itself as a mediator, hosting delegations from Hamas and expressing solidarity with the Palestinian cause, even as it maintains working relations with Israel. This multi-vectored diplomacy allows both powers to engage multiple actors across conflict lines, thereby reinforcing their relevance and legitimacy in regional politics (Lawale & Ahmad, 2024).

What emerges from this new geopolitical reality is a Middle East no longer dominated by a single hegemon but rather shaped by multipolarity and flexible diplomacy. The diversification of alliances is not merely



a temporary adjustment, but a strategic recalibration in response to both global power shifts and the volatility of regional crises. As Middle Eastern states continue to navigate this evolving order, the influence of China and Russia is likely to grow, not by replacing U.S. dominance entirely, but by redefining the terms of engagement in the region. These developments underscore a broader trend: the global diffusion of power and the erosion of the post-Cold War, U.S.-centric international system (Ghiselli, 2023).

The Israel-Hamas conflict, while deeply rooted in longstanding regional and ideological tensions, has become emblematic of the wider geopolitical shifts in the region. As the Middle East continues to navigate these changes, the role of China and Russia will likely grow, offering new pathways for conflict resolution and economic cooperation. Their presence provides the region with alternative diplomatic options, challenging the Western-centric approach that has dominated the Middle East for much of the 20th and early 21st centuries. However, the aftermath of October 2023 marks a turning point in Middle Eastern geopolitics. It has catalyzed a more complex web of partnerships, as regional actors recalibrate their foreign policies in light of emerging global realities. China and Russia, with their distinct yet complementary approaches, capitalize on the shifting balance of power and actively reshape the contours of regional order in ways that challenge Western paradigms of engagement and control.

## CONCLUSION

The Middle East is undergoing a profound geopolitical transformation, with the growing involvement of China and Russia playing a central role in reshaping regional dynamics. The events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict marked a critical juncture in the region's complex political landscape. These events not only intensified existing tensions but also highlighted the emerging influence of China and Russia in regional diplomacy, security, and economic affairs. This paper explores how China and Russia's expanding presence in the Middle East is altering regional power dynamics. By focusing on the Gulf region, a critical area for both powers, this analysis examines how the economic and political strategies of China and Russia diverge from those of the United States and Western powers.

China, with its emphasis on economic diplomacy, infrastructure investment, and conflict stabilization, has positioned itself as a neutral, non-interventionist power in the Middle East. Its focus on fostering economic interdependence, coupled with its mediation efforts, has allowed China to strengthen ties across the region, especially with key players like Iran and the Gulf monarchies. In the aftermath of the October events, China has continued to offer alternative avenues for diplomatic engagement, further reducing the region's

reliance on Western powers and presenting itself as a critical partner in the search for regional stability.

Russia, on the other hand, has employed a more assertive approach, blending military intervention with political maneuvering to secure its influence in the Middle East. Its active involvement in Syria, its alliances with Iran and Hezbollah, and its strategic diplomatic balancing between Israel, Iran, and regional Arab states have positioned Russia as a pivotal actor in the ongoing Middle Eastern crises. Russia's ability to challenge Western-led diplomatic initiatives and its role in shaping the security architecture of the region have underscored its importance as a key power broker.

The growing influence of China and Russia has led to a shift in the Middle East's traditional alignment structures, with regional states increasingly adopting multi-alignment strategies. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt are now pursuing policies that balance their relationships with both Western and non-Western powers, ensuring that they can maximize their national interests in a rapidly changing global order. This dynamic is reflective of a broader global trend towards multipolarity, where the dominance of any single power, particularly the U.S., is being counterbalanced by the rising influence of China and Russia.

The Middle East is entering a new era of geopolitical realignment, where China and Russia are playing increasingly central roles. The evolution of the Israel-Hamas conflict, alongside broader regional dynamics, underscores the complexity and fluidity of the region's international relations. As regional actors continue to adapt to these new realities, the growing influence of China and Russia will shape the future of Middle Eastern politics, economics, and security, offering both challenges and opportunities for the region in the years to come.

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