



China's Network Diplomacy and the UAE; Two Trade Tycoons and New Power Waves

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ABSTRACT

Network diplomacy is a new form of diplomacy that, while taking advantage of traditional diplomacy, creates a network of actors with different backgrounds and degrees of power and skills. The People's Republic of China uses a network approach in its foreign policy under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is trying to invite countries and other actors under the umbrella of its diplomacy. One of the important nodes of China's network diplomacy is the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The question of this research is why has the importance of China's relations with the UAE increased in China's network diplomacy? The upcoming research hypothesis is The UAE's significant economic position and efficiency across various dimensions and the active presence of it in various sub-networks of China's network diplomacy have promoted the position of the UAE in the network diplomacy applied by China in the Persian Gulf region and in China's global-regional strategy. To examine the research question, the method of gathering information and data is based on the library method, utilizing materials from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of government reports, strategies, and guidelines from China and the UAE, while secondary sources encompass books and published research articles. The research findings highlight that the UAE has enhanced its position within the network by leveraging its economic strength, geo-economic positioning, and active engagement across all sub-networks of the BRI. By effectively leveraging the resources and connections cultivated within this network, the UAE has strengthened its position in the regional hierarchy and strategic dynamics of the Persian Gulf.

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Introduction

After China opened its doors to the world in the 1970s, its foreign policy was revised to align with the changes. The increasing demand of China's expanding economy for new energy sources, along with the geostrategic significance of West Asia (or the Middle East) and its thriving markets, prompted China to reevaluate its approach to the region. The energy sector played a crucial role in building relations between China and the Middle Eastern countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) holds a significant position in the Persian Gulf region, particularly within the framework of China's foreign policy. Due to its small size and proximity to influential neighbors, the UAE has been actively seeking ways to enhance its security and influence in the region. To this end, the country has focused on acquiring modern weaponry and fostering relationships with major global powers as a means of maintaining stability in the volatile Middle East (Roberts, 2020:303). The UAE's appeal also lies in its abundant energy resources, strategic location, strong economy, and potential as a regional hub for trade and finance, making it an attractive partner for nations seeking to engage with the region.

The year 2013 marks the beginning of Xi Jinping's presidency, as the fifth generation of leaders of the People's Republic of China. Xi Jinping's presidency is unique as it signifies the start of a new era in China's foreign policy, characterized by the introduction of several initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Security Initiative (Embassy of the people's republic of China in the United States of America, 2024). These initiatives aimed to bring many countries on China's foreign policy axis. Each initiative facilitated connections between countries and authorities and exploring common interests. Among these, the Belt and Road Initiative was the most extensive and thematic, consuming a significant portion of related institutions' resources in China. It is evident that managing such a large volume of communications and issues surpasses the capabilities of a country's traditional foreign policy apparatus (Council on foreign relations, 2023). The Chinese authorities adopted a network approach, evolving their methods of communication, topics, involved actors, and channels. They formed several networks, with the most prominent and significant being the one established under the Belt and Road initiative.

The conceptual framework guiding this study is the concept of network diplomacy, which signifies a transformative shift from traditional diplomacy to a more modern and technology-compatible approach. This newer form retains the advantages of its predecessor while reconstructing a more contemporary approach to diplomacy. China chooses to implement its network diplomacy under the Belt and Road initiative and the Persian Gulf strategic region will undoubtedly be a key focus of this approach. As an energy hub and a connecting point between East and West, with significant capital flow and ongoing conflicts, Persian Gulf region provides an ideal testing ground for China's network diplomacy aimed at ensuring its peaceful rise. Being a country in this region, The UAE has emerged as a pivotal node in China's network diplomacy, playing a significant role in expanding relations across various domains. This research posits that The UAE's significant economic position and efficiency across various dimensions and the active presence of this country in various sub-networks of China's network diplomacy have promoted the position of the UAE in the network diplomacy applied by China in the Persian Gulf region and in China's global-regional strategy.

1. Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted on network diplomacy as well as the relations between China and the UAE, which will be discussed below:

Vladimir M. Morozov (2022) deals with the theoretical foundations of network diplomacy and provides illustrative examples in his book " Network Diplomacy: Contributing to Peace in

the 21st Century." He posits that the phenomenon of network diplomacy can be considered a kind of derivative of all the features that currently characterize the contemporary world political order. Morozov underscores the absence of a universal understanding or standardized approach to studying network diplomacy, and many scholars believe that the emergence of network diplomacy is associated with the globalization of the international community and the processes of regional integration.

Also, in her book "The Chessboard and the Web: Strategies of Connection in a Networked World," Anne-Marie Slaughter (2017) explores the concept of networks, relationship strategies within them, and the dynamics of power, leadership, and grand strategy in this interconnected environment. She argues that "Complex interdependence describes the web world, but it does not give us web strategies" emphasizing that while this concept describes the interconnected nature of today's global landscape, it does not offer specific strategies for navigating networks. Slaughter also addresses the United States' challenges in confronting a complex web of global and regional threats categorized into resilience, capacity for action, and ability to scale. To tackle these challenges, she introduces three types of networks: resilience networks, task networks, and scale networks.

In the field of China's regional policies and its relations with the UAE and Persian Gulf countries, authors such as Jonathan Fulton, Mehran Haghiriyan, Luciano Zaccara, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Niv Horesh, Bahareh Sazmand, and Fariborz Arghavani Pirsalami have conducted research. In the book "China's Relations with the (Persian) Gulf Monarchies," Jonathan Fulton (2018) delves into the intricate dynamics of China's interactions with the states of the Persian Gulf, with a specific focus on China's relationship with UAE in the seventh chapter. The underlying hypothesis posits that over the past two decades, China's ties with countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have progressed significantly from mere commercial transactions to multifaceted relationships encompassing bilateral interests. In their book "China's Economic and Political Presence in the Middle East and South Asia" Mehran Haghiriyan and Luciano Zaccara (2022) explore a variety of crucial topics concerning China's relations with countries in the Middle East and South Asia. The authors discuss economic and political relationships and projects that are part of China's Belt and Road initiative. The authors highlight China's approach to the Middle East and the countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, emphasizing that China not only prioritizes relations with the Council but also maintains a balanced foreign policy that considers intra-regional dynamics. By cultivating economic ties with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE (US partners) as well as Iran (a US regional rival), China has successfully established comprehensive strategic partnerships, showcasing a nuanced approach to regional geopolitics. This strategic balancing act positions China as an attractive partner for regional countries seeking stability and order. Unlike the US, China maintains stable relationships with states on both sides of the Persian Gulf, fostering a more appealing and harmonious approach for regional players. This balanced partnership aligns with China's broader national goals, particularly through economic diplomacy, underscoring the importance of maintaining equilibrium in its regional engagements. In Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Niv Horesh (2019)'s book "How China's Rise Is Changing the Middle East?" the authors explore the transformative impact of China's ascent on the economic, security, political, and socio-cultural landscapes of the Middle East. Ehteshami and Horesh argue that China's growing presence in the Middle East is poised to catalyze a potential showdown between China and the United States. They contend that when a foreign power intensifies its involvement in the Middle East and North Africa subsystem, it inevitably becomes entangled in geopolitical complexities within the region. Despite China's adept utilization of sophisticated statecraft and diplomacy, evidence from recent times suggests that it has not been able to deflect attacks on its policies from within the region. China may not

be seen as an imperial power in the region but its mercantilist approaches their fuels suspicion and uncertainty about its long-term intentions. This observation underscores the intricate dynamics at play as China navigates its role in the region, balancing economic interests with geopolitical sensitivities. Bahareh Sazmand and Fariborz Arghavani Pirsalami (2017) explore the implications of China's peaceful rise as a global power in their book "China's Global and Regional Foreign Policy in the 21st Century". The central focus of their work is an analysis of China's foreign relations with major powers and various regions, examining how the People's Republic of China has strategically managed these relationships to secure its current position. In the twelfth chapter, the authors specifically address "China's Presence in the Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf," discussing China's role in economic globalization within the region. They highlight China's vested interests in the Persian Gulf subsystem and its strategic priorities in the area. The book identifies regional integration as a key area of interest for China in the Persian Gulf, emphasizing benefits such as diminished U.S. influence, enhanced decision-making coordination, regional stability, and alignment with China's development model. Conversely, potential drawbacks of regional integration for China include decreased competition, heightened control over the energy sector, reduced tensions and arms purchases, diminished emphasis on free trade agreements, imposition of tariffs, limited external investment opportunities, and alignment with Chinese policies regarding Muslim regions.

By reviewing the books and articles on this subject, one can identify some gaps, which are mentioned below: Regarding the works written about network diplomacy, it is clear that there is no consensus about this form of diplomacy and the opinions are diverse. Additionally, the lack of clear definitions and boundaries surrounding network diplomacy complicates the development of models that pertain to institutions, organizations, and governments.

2. Conceptual Framework; networks power

Network diplomacy is a burgeoning form of diplomacy that has yet to establish a unified understanding or approach. Marie Slaughter, a prominent figure in network diplomacy, articulates this concept by stating, "Diplomacy is networked: managing international crises from SARS to climate change requires the mobilizing international networks of public and private actors" (Slaughter, 2009: 94).

2-1. Concept of Network

Human networks are as old as human relationships: kinship networks, tribal networks, friend and family networks. The study of networks in the natural and social sciences has roughly accompanied the rise of the computer, a technology that derives most of its power from being connected to other computers, and that allows mathematicians, physicists, and economists to simulate, analyze, and predict network interactions (Slaughter, 2017: 42). Network theory extends across a wide range of fields. It informs weighty tomes on mathematical graph theory and advanced game theory, neural maps of the human brain, and business books analyzing innovation and supply. "Network science" is thus emerging as its own scientific sub discipline, bringing together the insights of mathematicians, physicists, biologists, computer scientists, sociologists, and economists (Slaughter, 2017: 43-45). The word network seems to have reached its peak of popularity in the early decades of twentieth century. In fact, from social to computer networks, this word and its meaning seem to fit this new era of interconnectivity perfectly- an era that has witnessed several challenges that have led to major changes in international affairs, world politics, and undeniably in diplomacy (Morozov, 2022:14).

Network diplomacy is a new issue in international relations. It has creative aspects for states and non-state actors. Morozov (2022) in his book *Network Diplomacy*, provides a comprehensive definition of network diplomacy as an activity engaged in by diplomatic institutions that transcends traditional frameworks and borders to create networks of actors from

varied backgrounds and with varying degrees of power, skills, and audiences. This is achieved through the creation or adoption of new channels for communication and cooperation on a virtually infinite spectrum of issues with other international actors. This approach to diplomacy makes it possible to take advantage of the added exponential value that a network possesses due to the number of nodes/actors it consists of. Network diplomacy is commonly theorized as a set of non-hierarchical and interdependent relationships involving a wide range of stakeholders who share common interests and exchange information and resources. As many scholars put it, the network model presupposes the presence of various international bodies and non-state actors in the international arena. International events, negotiations, and soft power are among the main tools in the network approach. With new actors entering the inter-national system as new global challenges appear, the traditional model for diplomacy seems less relevant in today's world and is giving way to the development of network diplomacy. (Morozov, 2022:9). Manulak (2019), in his article, underscores that Networks of national officials represent the beating heart of the liberal international order. While productive, the true potential of these interactions has not been fully realized. Many governments remain unfamiliar with the tools of network diplomacy and are even less sure how to wield influence in the less centralized, more horizontal diplomatic environments being fashioned by advanced communication technologies. The informal quality of international institutions is precipitating a movement away from more procedurally structured modes of diplomacy. While formal intergovernmental organizations, such as those of the UN system, will continue to occupy a prominent place in the international landscape, informal bodies are poised to continue to increase progressively their "market share" among consequential international interactions (Manulak, 2019: 172-173).

Separately Slaughter and Hale (2010), in an article, elaborate on active networks in diplomacy by focusing on Transgovernmental networks as informal institutions linking regulators, legislators, some ministers, judges, and other actors across national boundaries to carry out various aspects of global governance. Transgovernmental networks occupy a middle place between traditional international organizations and ad hoc communication. They have emerged organically in response to the increasing complexity and transnational nature of contemporary problems, to which they are uniquely suited, challenging the distinction between domestic and foreign policy. They appear most commonly in the realm of regulatory policy—for example, commercial and financial regulation, environmental protection—but also extend to judicial and even legislative areas of government. (Slaughter, Hale, 2010:48). Morozov also highlights the Western perspective on network diplomacy, viewing it within the context of globalization. In the opinion of Western researchers, in order for governments to effectively conduct diplomacy in the new era, they must create foreign policy infrastructure that makes it possible for a greater number of institutions to engage in achieving their goals and widen their influence with the audiences in foreign countries, thereby creating loyal influence groups. In other words, the Western vision of network diplomacy devotes special attention to creating a system of foreign policy instruments that, in practice, functions like a globally integrated transnational company. By doing this, a country can strengthen its position in the international arena by managing a broad network of diplomatic entities (Morozov, 2022:2). Zaharana (2006), in his article "Strategic Public Diplomacy Network Paradigm," suggests that public diplomacy is ideally suited for a network orientation (Zaharana, 2005:3). Beyond health, public, scientific, and sports diplomacy, other forms of diplomacy such as digital and disaster diplomacy can also benefit from a network approach.

3. The role of states in network diplomacy

States, as the primary actors in the international arena, have seen their monopolies diminish as new actors emerge, compelling them to share authority with these entities. Metzel (2001) notes

that although states still have tremendous advantages in the international arena, dynamic networks are complicating and chipping away at hierarchical state power. Networks of civil society organizations and second-tier states banded together to support an international ban on land mines in 1998. The network's vastness allowed these organizations to lobby governments around the world through a more effective, focused, and systematic publicity campaign than that of the United States, which opposed the treaty. Similar groups leveraged their expertise and contacts in support of establishing the International Criminal Court, even representing some smaller states in multilateral consultations. Since networks are able to bring together much broader communities to flexibly address problems in ways that hierarchies often cannot, networks will make the non-competitive components of traditional hierarchies seem increasingly inefficient, ineffective, and ultimately irrelevant. As this occurs, rather than abandoning democratic accountability altogether, governments must instead explore which of their functions can and must be transformed. If governments must behave more like networks but cannot fully participate in them at every level, they need to determine what aspects of government foreign policy activity can be better networked. In the other hand, governments have always been networks. Embassies across the globe interact with local leaders and populations and report conditions back to capitals and to other embassies. (Metzel, 2001:78-80). As the traditional certainties afforded by membership within formal international organizations wither and new players emerge on the scene, states must contemplate new means of preserving their relevance internationally. This issue is particularly important for small and medium-sized states, which do not enjoy immediate influence by virtue of their size and resources. The principal challenge in this landscape is to secure and maintain network centrality. This is achieved principally through maximizing the number of connections with other actors and by serving as the most efficient and directs point of connection between a large numbers of actors. "Nodal" players maintain substantive ties with hundreds of relevant global players. Those at the center of networks can shape international outcomes through, among other things, influencing the flow of information—the currency of diplomacy. (Manulak, 2019:174).

4. Network diplomacy in China's foreign policy

By examining the introduced components of network diplomacy regarding China's foreign policy and especially the initiative of One Belt and One Road, we observe a network approach in China's foreign policy.

The Belt and Road Initiative, unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September and October 2013, comprises the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt (the state council the People's Republic of China, 2017). The goal of this initiative is to create a broad network of states and other actors that goes beyond traditional intergovernmental relations. Within this network, China strategically positions itself to maximize its influence by maintaining centrality and strengthening multiple connections with other actors, acting as a major communication hub. States and other actors, including the UAE, who are referred to as nodes within the network, seek to increase their power and exploit the network by increasing their proximity to the center and expanding their relationships with other nodes.

5. The central issues of the BRI network

Based on "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road" (ministry of Foreign Affairs the People's Republic of China, 2015) this network is formed around six central issues, each of which attracts a group of actors and forms a sub-network.



Figure 1. Network of BRI

Source: Authors

In the analysis that follows, the document “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” serves as the primary reference for examining each sub-network within the Belt and Road Initiative, making it a pivotal document in understanding this initiative. After presenting China's network diplomacy model using the Belt and Road Initiative, the way is paved to examine the role of the UAE in this network.

5-1. Policy Coordination Sub-Network

The first critical issue is policy coordination, around which a sub-network is structured, with government officials as its nodes. This sub-network bears resemblances to traditional diplomacy, aiming to enhance policy coordination for the effective implementation of the BRI. Through this sub-network, countries along the Belt and Road seek to promote intergovernmental cooperation, build a multi-level intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism, expand shared interests, enhance mutual political trust, and reach new cooperation consensus. Moreover, this sub-network enables active participation in the Belt and Road Initiative to align their economic development strategies and policies, work out plans and measures for regional cooperation, negotiate to solve cooperation-related issues, and jointly provide policy support for the implementation of practical cooperation and large-scale projects.

5-2. Facilities connectivity Sub-Network

Facilities connectivity Sub-Network is a critical component of the Belt and Road network, focusing on integrating infrastructure across land and sea routes. This network brings together a diverse group of stakeholders, including countries, multinational corporations, and technical experts in maritime logistics and information technology, standard development specialists, business leaders, and infrastructure users, to collaborate on enhancing connectivity. Within this sub-network, On the basis of respecting each other's sovereignty and security concerns, countries along the Belt and Road improve the connectivity of their infrastructure construction plans and technical standard systems, jointly push forward the construction of international trunk passageways, and form an infrastructure network connecting all sub-regions in Asia, and between Asia, Europe and Africa. Emphasis is also placed on promoting green and low-carbon infrastructure construction and operation management, taking into full account the impact of climate change on the construction. Specific initiatives within the Facilities Connection Sub-Network include prioritizing the improvement of transportation infrastructure such as passageways, junctions and projects, and give priority to linking up unconnected road sections, removing transport bottlenecks, advancing road safety facilities and traffic management facilities and equipment, and improving road network connectivity. Efforts are made to build a unified coordination mechanism for whole-course transportation, increase connectivity of customs clearance; reloading and multimodal transport between countries, and gradually formulate compatible and standard transport rules, so as to realize international transport

facilitation. Additionally, advancements in port infrastructure construction, land-water transportation channels, sea routes, information technology cooperation in maritime logistics, and communication. Networks are key focus areas to promote seamless connectivity and information exchange. Cooperation in connectivity of energy infrastructure is also a key component of this sub-network, with a focus on ensuring the security of oil and gas pipelines, building cross-border power supply networks, and upgrading regional power grids. Overall, the Facilities connectivity Sub-Network aims to foster collaboration among various stakeholders to create an integrated infrastructure network that enhances connectivity, promotes sustainable development, and facilitates international trade and cooperation.

5-3. Unimpeded trade Sub-Network

To facilitate seamless trade among member countries of the Belt and Road Initiative, a network of government officials, traders, investors, multinational corporations, customs and inspection experts, and other stakeholders are interconnected. By coordinating their efforts, they aim to enhance the efficiency of this network. Participants in this initiative improve investment and trade facilitation and remove investment and trade barriers for the creation of a sound business environment within the region and in all related countries. Moreover, Countries along the Belt and Road enhance customs cooperation such as information exchange, mutual recognition of regulations, and mutual assistance in law enforcement; improve bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the fields of inspection and quarantine, certification and accreditation, standard measurement, and statistical information; and work to ensure that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement takes effect and is implemented.

5-4. Customs clearance capability sub-network

Establishing a network between customs and streamlining bureaucratic processes is crucial for enhancing trade among Belt and Road member countries. This network aims to increase cooperation in supply chain safety and convenience, improve the coordination of cross-border supervision procedures, promote online checking of inspection and quarantine certificates, and facilitate mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operators. Efforts within this network also focus on lower non-tariff barriers, improvement the transparency of technical trade measures, and enhancement trade liberalization and facilitation. In addition, innovative business models such as cross-border e-commerce are being promoted within this network to create a supportive service system that complements traditional businesses. Furthermore, speeding up investment facilitation, eliminating investment barriers, and pushing forward negotiations on bilateral investment protection agreements and double taxation avoidance agreements to protect the lawful rights and interests of investors are key priorities among the network nodes. Expanding cooperation in various sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, and environmental protection industries is emphasized within the network. This includes deepening collaboration in conventional and renewable energy sources, as well as promoting the development of integrated industrial chains of energy and resource cooperation. Additionally, cooperation in emerging industries like new generation technology, biotechnology, new energy technology, and new materials is being advanced with a focus on mutual complementarity and mutual benefits. Overall, the network aims to foster cooperation, entrepreneurship, and investment mechanisms to drive economic growth and development among countries along the Belt and Road. Also improving the division of labor and distribution of industrial chains by encouraging the entire industrial chain and related industries to develop in concert; establishing R&D, production and marketing systems; and improving industrial support capacity and the overall competitiveness of regional industries are following in this sub-network

5-5. Financial integration Sub-Network

According to the documents and measures regarding the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, Financial integration is an important underpinning for implementing the Belt and Road Initiative. A network has been established to deepen financial cooperation and focus on building a currency stability system, investment and financing system, and credit information system in Asia. Within this network, efforts are underway to expand the scope and scale of bilateral currency swap and settlement with other countries along Belt and Road, open and develop the bond market in Asia, and collaborate on establishing institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and BRICS New Development Bank. Negotiations are ongoing among related parties on establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) financing institution and set up and put into operation the Silk Road Fund as early as possible. Practical cooperation between the China-ASEAN Interbank Association and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Interbank Association is being strengthened, facilitating multilateral financial cooperation through syndicated loans and bank credit. Governments of the countries along the Belt and Road and their companies and financial institutions, will be supported in obtaining good credit ratings to issue Renminbi bonds in China. Chinese financial institutions and companies will be encouraged to issue bonds in both Renminbi and foreign currencies outside of China, and use the funds thus collected in countries along the Belt and Road. Moreover, cooperation in financial regulations will be enhanced, encouraging the signing of MOUs on cooperation in bilateral financial regulation, and establishing an efficient regulation coordination mechanism in the region. The network also aims to improve the system of risk response and crisis management, build a regional financial risk early-warning system, and create an exchange and cooperation mechanism of addressing cross-border risks and crisis. The Silk Road Fund and sovereign wealth funds of countries along the Belt and Road will play a significant role, with efforts focused on fully leveraging their potential. Commercial equity investment funds and private funds will be encouraged to participate in key innovation projects to further drive development along the Belt and Road.

5-6. People-to-people bond Sub-Network

People-to-people bond provides the public support for implementing the Belt and Road initiative. Consequently, people and non-governmental entities serve as pivotal nodes within this network. Within this framework, forward the spirit of friendly cooperation of the Silk Road by promoting extensive cultural and academic exchanges, personnel exchanges and cooperation, media cooperation, youth and women exchanges and volunteer services, so as to win public support for deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation is necessary. Moreover, nations involved in the Belt and Road initiative are encouraging greater student exchanges, promoting joint school administration, and offering 10,000 government scholarships from China to participating countries. Cultural events such as cultural years, art festivals, film festivals, television weeks, and book fairs are organized in partner countries. Furthermore, personnel exchanges and cooperation among Belt and Road countries are on the rise. Tourism cooperation is a key aspect of this network, with efforts focused on enhancing collaboration, organizing tourism promotion events, creating competitive international routes inspired by the Silk Road, simplifying tourist visa applications, and collaborating on maritime tourism initiatives. Sports cooperation is also emphasized, including sports exchanges and support for hosting major international sporting events. Health and emergency response are integral components of this network as well. Collaborative efforts include sharing epidemic information with neighboring countries, enhancing the exchange of prevention and treatment technologies, training medical professionals, and bolstering joint capabilities to address public health emergencies. Furthermore, the network aims to integrate existing resources to expand and advance practical cooperation between countries along the Belt and Road on youth

employment, entrepreneurship training, vocational skill development, social security management, public administration and management and in other areas of common interest. Political parties and parliaments of countries along the Belt and Road initiative are encouraged to strengthen ties and foster friendly exchanges. The network emphasizes the role of political parties and legislative bodies as bridges for enhancing communication and cooperation between countries. City-to-city exchanges and cooperation play a significant role within this network, with a focus on becoming sister cities. Additionally, think tanks in countries along the belt and road are encouraged to jointly conduct research and hold forums. Lastly, the network seeks to enhance exchange and cooperation among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within countries along the Belt and Road initiative. Activities such as education, healthcare, poverty reduction, biodiversity and ecological protection are organized for the benefit of local communities. International exchanges and cooperation in culture and media are also promoted. (see: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/jj/2015zt/xjpcxbayzlt2015nnh/202406/t20240606_11381659.html).

6. China's network diplomacy and the role of the UAE

As outlined in the preceding sections, the relationship between China and the UAE has flourished across various domains, positioning the UAE as a significant node in China's network diplomacy. The subsequent discussion delves into China's diplomatic approach concerning this node, drawing insights from key documents such as the “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” (Ministry of foreign affairs the People’s Republic of China,2015), “China's Arab Policy paper” (the state council the People’s Republic of China,2016), “Xi Jinping's Speech at Arab League Headquarters January 2016” (China Daily,2016) and “UAE, China issue joint statement, agree to establish comprehensive strategic partnership” (Emirate News Agency,2018).

6-1. UAE and Policy Coordination Sub-Network of China's Network Diplomacy

In the policy coordination sub-network, China's network diplomacy is implemented on five key issues concerning the UAE:

1. Increasing policy coordination to implement the Belt and Road initiative:
 - Conferences and gatherings titled "Belt and Road" are held to enhance communication and understanding, strengthening the strategic partnership between China and the UAE (Belt and Road Summit,2024).
2. Promotion of inter-governmental cooperation and establishment of an inter-governmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism:
 - Exchange of high-level meetings (Ministry of Foreign Affairs the People’s Republic of China, 2023);
 - Enhancing strategic communication;
 - Coordinating positions in international organizations, conventions, and treaties;
 - Utilizing the political consultation mechanism between the foreign ministers of both countries (Qian and Fulton,2017: 16);
 - Expanding consultations on political and security matters;
 - Emphasizing the representation and voice of developing countries;
 - Facilitating cooperation forums between China and Arab countries (Al Ameri,2021: 8137);
 - Establishing a strategic dialogue mechanism with the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Iran,2022);
 - Facilitating exchanges between legislatures, political parties, and local governments.

3. Communication and coordination on important international and regional issues, supporting each other's main interests:

- Providing mutual political support for practical cooperation and large projects;
- Enhancing mutual political trust and reaching new cooperation consensus.

4. Coordinating economic development strategies and policies, compiling plans and measures for regional cooperation:

- Supporting Arab countries' (including the UAE) national economic development goals;
- Assisting in discovering development paths suitable for national conditions;
- Willingness to coordinate development strategies with Arab countries;
- Supporting the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development;
- Establishing a research center for China and Arab countries in the field of reforms and development (Office of International Cooperation and Exchange).

6-2. The UAE and the connecting facilities sub-network of China's network diplomacy

In the sub-network of connecting facilities, China's network diplomacy is implemented in three issues concerning the UAE, as detailed below:

1. Connecting infrastructure construction plans and enhancing technical standard systems to jointly promote the development of international crossings and establish an integrated infrastructure network:

- Encouraging active involvement of Chinese companies and financial institutions in the construction of railways and highways.

2. Advancing port infrastructure development and land-water transport channels, expanding sea routes and trips, and fostering cooperation in maritime logistics technology:

- Notable investments in UAE ports, such as the CSP terminal at Khalifa port near Abu Dhabi by China's COSCO shipping ports amounting to \$400 million (ship technology, 2017).

3. Establishing cross-border optical cables and communication networks, improving international connectivity, and creating a digital silk road (Southern Finance Omni (jinja), 2023):

- Engaging in projects like submarine and intercontinental optical cable initiatives and space information corridors;
- Enhancing collaboration in space technology, satellites, Beidou navigation satellite system utilization, and space-related education and training (GPS World, 2021);
- Leveraging China's 5G technology by the UAE for technological advancement (The National Interest, 2022).

These initiatives aim to strengthen connectivity, facilitate trade, and foster technological cooperation between China and the UAE.

6-3. UAE and the Unimpeded trade Sub-Network of China's network diplomacy

Trade is the main instrument of china-UAE relations. Considerably, trade flows between the two countries have increased in last decade. In the sub-network of unimpeded trade, China's network diplomacy is implemented on six issues concerning the UAE, as outlined below:

1. Enhancing investment and trade facilitation:

- China and the UAE prioritize strengthening cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative to foster sustainable business and investment partnerships (Mubadala);

- Both countries are committed to boosting trade exchanges and integration by leveraging the UAE's strategic position as a key investment and trade gateway to Middle East markets;
 - Establishment of a joint economic and trade committee between the UAE and China (ministry of commerce People's Republic of China,2024);
 - Creating mechanisms for visiting exchanges among traders and other platforms to enhance economic and commercial cooperation;
 - Expanding cooperation in e-commerce, including policy coordination, knowledge sharing, enhanced communication, specialized training, and support for cross-border e-commerce to boost bilateral trade;
 - Support for establishing a China-UAE Industrial Capacity Cooperation Demonstration Zone as a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative (China-Arab states expo,2023);
 - Promoting industrial integration through effective investment partnerships;
 - Increasing mutual investments and diversifying cooperation areas, investment, and financing channels, including joint investments in Africa and the Pacific Islands(Eurasia magazine,2023);
 - Focus on facilitating trade and investment through the 1+2+3 cooperation model;
 - Participation of the Emirates in trade and investment meetings between China and Arab countries exhibitions;
 - Adherence to market-oriented commercial operations where companies play a central role and governments facilitate;
 - Collaboration in oil and natural gas investment, particularly in oil exploration, extraction, transportation, and refining (the cradle, 2023);
 - Engagement with the Arab countries and China Chamber of Commerce (highlighting the UAE's role in this chamber);
 - Support for the entry of products from Arab countries, including the UAE, into the Chinese market.
2. Enhancing customs clearance facilities at border ports, establishing a single window system, and reducing customs clearance costs:
- Implementation of export-oriented special economic zones.
3. Commitment to implementing the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement.
4. Strengthening customs cooperation and bilateral and multilateral collaboration in inspection and quarantine, certification and accreditation, standard measurement, and statistical information:
- Harmonization of standards, exchange of personnel, and joint training between the two countries;
 - Collaboration in combating the export and import of counterfeit and substandard goods.
5. Engaging with authorities of countries and regions along the route to discuss the establishment of free trade zones.

Table 1. China-UAE Bilateral Trade, 2013-2023

China-UAE Bilateral Trade, 2013-2023		
Year	Export	Import
2013	12,823,525,641	33,411,294,711
2014	15,763,356,629	39,034,507,149
2015	11,514,031,960	37,020,164,366
2016	9,994,362,641	30,066,955,630

2017	12,311,158,312	28,723,965,341
2018	16,237,766,589	29,651,248,093
2019	15,336,738,558	33,412,894,763
2020	17,054,552,303	32,310,092,207
2021	28,567,888,952	43,818,205,175
2022	45,407,517,093	53,861,686,819
2023	55,683,130,074	39,309,210,624

Source: UN/ <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>

6. Removing investment barriers and trade obstacles:

- Establishing a more stable and transparent economic and business environment;
- Signing a framework agreement on cooperation in production capacity and investment fields between the two governments;
- Providing training for small and medium enterprises to enhance their participation in economic activities beneficial to both China and the UAE;
- Facilitating and optimizing mutual investments by bilateral companies;
- Signing agreements with Arab countries (including the UAE) to prevent double taxation and tax evasion;
- Creating a conducive investment environment, ensuring comfort for investors from both sides, and safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests;
- Opposing trade protectionism and eliminating non-tariff trade barriers;
- Resolving commercial disputes through amicable consultations;
- Establishing bilateral and multilateral early warning mechanisms for commercial disputes.

6-4. UAE and Customs clearance capability sub-network of China's Network Diplomacy

In the realm of customs clearance cooperation, China's network diplomacy with the UAE encompasses five key areas, as outlined below:

1. Enhancing coordination of cross-border procedures, promoting online review of inspection and quarantine certificates, and facilitating mutual recognition of authorized economic operators.

- China and the UAE express mutual interest in deepening cooperation on customs and tax-related matters;
- Both countries pledge support for intellectual property rights and commit to fostering communication and collaboration among relevant authorities in this domain.

2. Deepening collaboration in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, marine pharmaceuticals, ocean engineering technology, environmental protection industries, and marine tourism:

- China and the UAE aim to enhance cooperation in agriculture, forestry, and sustainable waste management through dialogue, information exchange, and capacity building;
- Emphasis is placed on consulting and sharing expertise in food security, investment, agricultural trade, market creation for agricultural products, desertification combat, seawater desalination, and climate change (The state council information office The People's Republic of China, 2022).

3. Increasing cooperation in hydroelectric power, nuclear energy, wind energy, solar energy, and other clean and renewable energy sources, fostering an integrated industrial chain of energy and resource cooperation, and expanding collaboration in deep processing technology, equipment, and engineering services in energy and resources sectors (Reuters, 2023):

- Both nations recognize the potential for collaboration in clean and renewable energy fields and seek to develop partnerships for renewable energy production (Solarquarter , 2024).
 - Promotion of peaceful nuclear energy use to mitigate climate change impacts and support joint research initiatives by Chinese and UAE research institutions.
 - Commitment to continuing support for the International Renewable Energy Agency headquartered in Abu Dhabi to facilitate cooperation in clean development mechanisms and leverage benefits through the establishment of energy enterprises and related ventures (The state council information office The People's Republic of China , 2023).
4. Collaboration in emerging industries based on the principles of mutual complementarity and mutual benefits, focusing on new generation technology, biotechnology, and new energy technology to establish mechanisms for cooperation, entrepreneurship, and investment:
- Strengthening cooperation in renewable energies like solar energy, wind energy, and hydropower (China daily, 2023).
 - Establishing a clean energy training center for China and Arab countries, including the UAE (China inside out, 2018).
5. Promoting ecological progress in investment and trade by increasing cooperation in environmental preservation, biodiversity protection, and addressing climate change:
- Encouraging the exchange of expertise between China and the UAE in the green industry sector.
 - Facilitating communication and coordination with Arab countries, including the UAE, under the frameworks of the UN Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Convention on Desertification Prevention and Control.
 - Enhancing cooperation through policy dialogue, information exchange, environmental laws, pollution control and purification of water, air, and soil, raising environmental awareness, conducting environmental impact assessments, advancing environmental monitoring, promoting environmental protection industries and technologies, providing employee training in environmental practices, and organizing seminars.

6-5. The UAE and Financial integration Sub-Network of China's network diplomacy

In the realm of financial integration, China's network diplomacy in relation to the UAE encompasses four key areas, as outlined below:

1. Enhancing financial integration efforts to establish a stable currency system, launch investment and financing mechanisms, and implement a credit information system in Asia:
 - Facilitating the establishment of branches by qualified financial institutions from both countries and promoting multi-sector collaborations (Middle east business intelligence, 2013);
 - Encouraging monetary cooperation between the central banks of China and the UAE;
 - Boosting insurance financial support (Fintech Times, 2021);
 - Strengthening coordination and collaboration within international financial organizations and mechanisms to enhance the global financial system.
2. Expanding bilateral currency exchange and settlement, fostering the development of the bond market in Asia, and jointly establishing institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the new BRICS Development Bank:
 - Welcoming the UAE to join as a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Emirates news agency, 2018);

- Expanding cross-border currency settlement and swap arrangements between China and Arab countries, including the UAE (East Asia Forum, 2024);
 - Establishing Renminbi settlement centers and launching joint investment funds between China and Arab countries (Xinhua, 2017).
3. Enhancing financial cooperation by encouraging the signing of a memorandum of cooperation on bilateral financial regulations and establishing an efficient regulatory coordination mechanism in the region:
- Supporting the opening of banking institution branches in both countries in compliance with respective laws and regulations;
 - Fostering collaboration between the international financial centers of the UAE and the Shanghai Stock Exchange (Abu Dhabi Global Market, 2018).
4. Promoting cross-border exchange and cooperation among credit research regulators and rating agencies:
- Facilitating exchanges and cooperation between regulatory bodies in China and the UAE (A treasure's guide).

6-6. The UAE and People-to-people Bond Sub-Network of China's Network Diplomacy

In the realm of People-to-people bonds, China's network diplomacy in relation to the UAE encompasses nine key areas, which are detailed below:

1. Promoting the spirit of friendly cooperation along the Silk Road through extensive cultural and academic exchanges, personnel exchange, media cooperation, and voluntary services:
- Enhancing cultural communication at official and public levels (Gulf Today, 2019);
 - Facilitating dialogue on soft power politics and cultural policies, promoting cooperation in cultural industries, heritage preservation, contemporary art, and intellectual exchanges;
 - Encouraging joint scientific research between universities in areas such as history, culture, scientific applications, and regional studies (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2015);
 - Supporting Chinese language education and training programs for Chinese language teachers in Arab countries, including the UAE;
 - Fostering dialogue between civilizations and religious exchanges through bilateral and multilateral platforms;
 - Promoting harmony, religious tolerance, and cooperation to combat extremism;
 - Convening university presidents from China and Arab countries, including the UAE (Xiamen University, 2016);
 - Establishing a Confucius Institute in the UAE (Office of Confucius Institutes, 2014);
2. Increasing student exchanges between China and the UAE, promoting cooperation in school management, and awarding ten thousand Chinese government scholarships to countries along the Belt and Road Initiative:
- Expanding student exchange programs and enhancing government exchange scholarships.
3. Organizing cultural years, art festivals, film festivals, television weeks, and book exhibitions, collaborating on the production and translation of quality films, radio and television programs, efforts to safeguard global cultural heritage, and enhancing personnel exchanges and cooperation:
- Supporting the establishment of cultural centers in both countries and fostering joint cultural initiatives between China and the UAE, participating in each other's diverse cultural events;

- Facilitating sustained and sustainable cooperation between major cultural institutions and significant art festivals in China and the UAE;
 - Regularly convening meetings between cultural officials, fostering friendly collaboration among cultural institutions, and sharing experiences from both sides;
 - Reciprocal establishment of cultural centers and engagement in cultural festivals hosted by the counterpart;
 - Strengthening the training of cultural professionals and promoting collaboration within cultural industries;
 - Implementing the visit exchange program involving 1000 Chinese and Arab artists;
 - Enhancing dialogue and cooperation between Chinese and Arab news media, including those in the UAE, by promoting news article exchanges and personnel training;
 - Supporting joint interviews, productions, and activities by media organizations;
 - Deepening cooperation in broadcasting, film and television exchanges, as well as translating and broadcasting authorized television programs;
 - Facilitating a media cooperation forum between China and Arab countries, including the UAE;
 - Promoting technology and broadcasting industry collaboration between China and Arab countries, including the UAE;
 - Hosting film weeks and exchanging film crews at international film festivals (Meraas company, 2020);
 - Translating select Chinese works into Arabic and vice versa;
 - Collaborating with the Broadcasting Union of Arab Countries, China International Radio, and the Arabic Channel of China Central Television;
 - Engaging in cooperative efforts between press and publishing institutions from both sides, implementing mutual translation projects outlined in the memorandum, and publishing books from China and Arab countries (world's first professional hub for Arab publishers, 2021);
 - Participating in each other's book fairs between China and the UAE (Xinhua, 2023);
 - Facilitating exchanges of experts and researchers from China and the UAE (United Arab Emirates ministry of education, 2015, 2021);
 - Establishing a mechanism for sustained exchange of ideas between China and Arab countries, including the UAE.
4. Collaborating with neighboring countries to enhance epidemic information sharing, exchange prevention and treatment technologies, and provide training for medical professionals to collectively address public health emergencies. This includes offering medical assistance to relevant countries and engaging in practical cooperation in maternal and child health, rehabilitation for the disabled, and combating major infectious diseases.
- Strengthening exchanges and partnerships in traditional medicine (Dubai healthcare city, 2018);
 - Enhancing efforts in preventing and controlling communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as collaborating on information exchange and surveillance of epidemic diseases;
 - Promoting reciprocal visits by experts and fostering cooperation between medical institutions (Dhaheri, 2023: 85);
 - Facilitating increased exchanges related to clinical technologies;
 - Deploying medical teams and continuously improving services.

5. Deepening cooperation in science and technology by establishing laboratories or joint research centers, international technology transfer centers, and maritime cooperation centers. This includes promoting the exchange of scientific and technological personnel, addressing key scientific technology challenges, and enhancing scientific innovation capabilities.

- Encouraging the establishment of educational projects in China and the UAE (Dubai eye, 2023);
- Fostering enthusiasm for developing cooperation in scientific and technological innovation within the China-Arab countries cooperation program in science and technology;
- Encouraging young Emirati scientists to engage in short-term research in China;
- Expanding cooperation in technology transfer centers between China and the UAE to facilitate the effective utilization and dissemination of modern technologies (Xinhua, 2017);
- Facilitating information exchange and research collaboration, as well as promoting technical communication and people-to-people exchanges between educational institutions in both countries;
- Supporting joint scientific research and development projects to address challenges such as water scarcity, improve water use efficiency, ensure water quality, and share expertise in dam construction;
- Establishing a cooperation mechanism under the intergovernmental science and technology initiative between China and Arab countries, including the UAE;
- Building a network for technology transfer between China and Arab countries through the China-Arab countries technology transfer center (Longhua district, 2023);
- Establishing national laboratories, joint research centers, and specialized scientific parks;
- Encouraging Chinese companies with advanced technology to innovate, establish businesses, and set up research and development centers in Arab countries, including the UAE;
- Involving Arab technicians, including Emiratis, in technology training courses for developing countries organized by the Ministry of Science and Technology of China;
- Promoting the application and expansion of technological achievements and advanced applied technologies from China and Arab countries in each other's territories.

6. Integrating available resources to expand and advance practical cooperation between active countries in BRI in the field of youth employment, entrepreneurship education, development of technical and professional skills, social security management, and public management:

- Strengthening cooperation in the training and development of human resources by increasing its scale and exploring new avenues for collaboration;
- Conducting joint training programs for personnel from China and Arab countries, including the UAE;
- Establishing platforms to support companies in their global expansion efforts.

7. Carrying out exchange and cooperation between cities, encouraging major cities in these countries to establish sister city relationships focused on promoting practical cooperation, particularly in cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Welcoming think tanks from active countries in BRI to collaborate on research and conferences:

- Promoting cooperation and communication in urban environments and sustainable development.

8. Increasing exchange and cooperation between non-governmental organizations in the active countries in the BRI, organizing public interest activities in education, healthcare,

poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation, and environmental protection to benefit the people. Improving production and living conditions in impoverished areas along the initiative, enhancing exchanges and international cooperation in culture and media, and leveraging the positive role of the Internet and new media tools to cultivate a harmonious and friendly cultural environment:

- Enhancing non-governmental exchanges and improving the mechanism for friendship conferences between China and Arab countries, including the UAE. Providing increased support to friendship associations between China and Arab countries;
- Promoting communication and exchanges between youth from China and Arab countries, including the UAE, as well as fostering connections between youth departments and young leaders (Guangzhou foreign affairs office, 2023);
- Strengthening exchanges and cooperation between China and Arab countries, including the UAE, in the realm of gender equality. Encouraging high-level dialogues, seminars, cultural exchanges, and capacity-building activities among departments and organizations responsible for women's affairs.

9. Enhancing cooperation in the field of tourism and broadening its reach by organizing tourism promotion weeks and advertising months, co-creating competitive international tourism routes and products, and streamlining the tourist visa application process in countries along the BRI:

- Establishing a regular dialogue on tourism and sharing information on respective plans and best practices for sustainable tourism development;
- China and the UAE expressing mutual interest in facilitating the movement of citizens through a comprehensive agreement to waive visas, strengthening interpersonal relationships, supporting tourism and cultural exchanges, and ensuring the security of citizens and businesses on both sides;
- Encouraging tourism departments and enterprises to showcase their tourism resources and products to each other (Meraas company, 2024).

Conclusion

China and the UAE are trade pioneers of the globalized life in two levels. Surprisingly, relations between the People's Republic of China and the UAE have been steadily growing since 1990 in bilateral framework. The UAE, positioned as the third re-export pole and one of the world's largest financial centers, holds a significant role in China's Middle East policies. China views the UAE as a valuable partner capable of supporting its development plans and aiding in the diversification of its economy and foreign policy partnerships. As well as The UAE occupies a unique position within China's network diplomacy framework. This form of diplomacy, which has gained prominence in China's foreign policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping, shifts focus away from traditional government-centric approaches and acknowledges the importance of various actors in the political landscape. As part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese network diplomacy consists of six sub-networks: policy coordination, Facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, customs clearance, and People-to-people bond. Each sub-network encompasses a diverse range of actors and thematic areas, contributing to China's network power by expanding connections with other nodes.

As a key node within the Belt and Road Initiative network, the UAE is actively seeking to enhance its influence and leverage its advantages. The UAE aligns its domestic development goals, including Vision 2021 and Vision 2031, with all six sub-networks under the initiative. By participating in policy coordination activities, the UAE engages in conferences and events that promote network diplomacy, fostering communication, understanding, and strengthening the strategic partnership between China and the UAE. The establishment of relationships

between The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China and the Federal Supreme Council of the UAE facilitates exchanges and cooperation in areas such as development and local governance.

Membership in the facilities connectivity sub-network enables the UAE to attract Chinese investment for port development projects, such as the Khalifa port terminal near Abu Dhabi. Leveraging Chinese technology, such as the Beidou satellite system, further enhances infrastructure capabilities. The Unimpeded trade sub-network benefits the UAE through mechanisms like joint economic and trade committees, business exchange platforms, and participation in Chinese business forums. Participation in the customs clearance sub-network promotes collaboration on intellectual property protection and advancements in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and ocean engineering technology. Financial integration efforts include the establishment of bank branches by qualified financial institutions in both countries and intensified cooperation between their central banks. Membership in the People-to-people bond sub-network facilitates deep cooperation in tourism, student exchanges, cultural heritage preservation, and academic exchanges. Through active engagement in these sub-networks, the UAE strengthens its position within the Belt and Road Initiative network and enhances bilateral relations with China.

Therefore, by taking advantage of network diplomacy, communication between China and the UAE has gone beyond the level of the governments of both sides and officials, and various non-governmental actors have had the opportunity to express themselves. The UAE has enhanced its position within the network by leveraging its economic strength, geo-economic positioning, and active engagement across all sub-networks of the BRI. Network diplomacy has deepened the interconnected interests and communication between the two countries, bolstering the UAE's standing in the region and globally while enhancing its bargaining power against regional competitors. Through effectively utilizing the resources and connections fostered through this network, the UAE has strengthened its significance in the regional hierarchy and strategic dynamics of the Persian Gulf. Therefore China's network diplomacy in the Persian Gulf has reshaped power dynamics, with the country increasing its regional influence through the establishment of multi-dimensional and multi-level relations with regional countries and through solidifying ties with the UAE, China reinforces its presence in the region and maximizes the benefits of the region's energy resources and strategic geographic location.

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