



**Gulf Research Center**  
Knowledge for All

# China in the Eyes of the Saudi Media

**Mohammed Turki Al-Sudairi**

**GRC GULF PAPERS**

**February 2013**

---

© Gulf Research Center 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Gulf Research Center.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author alone and do not state or reflect the opinions or position of the Gulf Research Center.

# China in the Eyes of the Saudi Media

Mohammed Turki Al-Sudairi\*

## Introduction

*China remains this mystery we cannot understand, we cannot love her or even hate her, and all this despite every veto she slaps the face of the Arab World within the Security Council right now<sup>1</sup>*

- Umayma Al-Khamis, Saudi Columnist

تظل الصين اللغز التي لانستطيع أن نؤطرها، لانستطيع أن نحبهها وحتى نكرهها. على الرغم من كل فيتو تلطم به وجه العالم العربي في مجلس الأمن الآن.  
- أميمة الخميس

One of the oft-repeated axioms regarding Chinese soft power in the Middle East is that it unfolds in a largely welcoming space receptive to its overtures on both the state and grassroots level.<sup>2</sup> This has been an attractive presupposition to make and certainly corroborated to some extent by the ‘motion’ of ideas and complementarities that have shaped the development of Sino-Arab relations over the past two decades: the ‘Rise of China’ has generated a great deal of excitement among the Arab elite and intellectuals; the Eastern giant’s potential ‘balancing’ role to that of the United States, as well as its unique modernization model have nurtured positive perceptions about the country and its authoritarian political culture. The lack of a Chinese imperial

\* Mohammed Al-Sudairi is a graduate of Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Qatar with a degree in International Politics. He is currently in Beijing studying Chinese and preparing for his postgraduate studies focusing on Sino-Arab relations.

1. الرياض، الخميس، أميمة. «نحن لسنا بصينيين». Accessed: Oct.-Nov. 2012.
2. Please see: Chris Zambelis and Brandon Gentry, “China through Arab Eyes: American Influence in the Middle East,” *Parameters* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 60-72, at [www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/08spring/zambelis.pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/08spring/zambelis.pdf) and Jon Alterman, “China’s Soft Power in the Middle East,” in *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*, ed. Carola McGiffert (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), 63-76.

legacy, a shared collective memory of anti-colonial “Third Worldism” harkening back to the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1950s, and the country’s own Oriental heritage have all further contributed to these positive assessments. Underlying this enthusiasm is a seemingly widespread desire among the Arab elite to engender a transformation in their region’s current geopolitical circumstances which can only be realistically executed with the support of a non-traditional revanchist power unassociated with (and perhaps even opposed to) the *status quo* powers (namely, the United States and Israel.) Given China’s own rapid ascension and intensifying rivalry with the United States, its appropriation of such a role in the Middle East seems almost pre-determined. Not surprisingly, China has sought to cultivate and reciprocate, but not necessarily fulfill these expectations and attitudes by way of echoing regional concerns over US involvement while emphasizing its own unique historical and religious links with the Arab world. It has also sustained an active campaign of cultural diplomacy aimed at enhancing its profile and propagating its narrative of a ‘peaceful rise.’ Chinese soft power therefore dynamically arises from an interaction between a relative shift in global power and a sub-system’s desire to escape from unipolar domination; depending on how its sum-images are constructed and deployed, soft power can accelerate or decelerate the process by which the Middle East re-positions itself towards Beijing. As the authors of *China through Arab Eyes: American Influence in the Middle East* put it:

An often overlooked aspect of Beijing’s success in projecting influence and power in the Arab world transcends economics and stems from the generally positive perceptions of China that prevail in the region—both at the state and grassroots levels. These positive perceptions are crucial to facilitating closer Sino-Arab bilateral and multilateral contacts and cooperation and cannot be underestimated. Indeed, rightly or wrongly, Arabs in varying degrees see China as a potential strategic partner able to counter the influence of an increasingly unpopular United States. Initial Arab hopes for the emergence of a credible check on American influence in the Middle East and across the globe in the shape of the European Union or a rejuvenated post-Soviet Russia have failed to materialize. In this context, China is widely perceived as the only credible alternative to US hegemony.<sup>3</sup>

The argument, therefore, is that the success of Chinese soft power is predicated on favorable perceptions shaped by local political and strategic realities. While seemingly convincing, one must ask as to what extent these recounted assumptions about Chinese soft power and its successes in the Arab World are even true. A preliminary look at datasets drawn from Gallup, the Pewsurvey, the University of Maryland, the Brookings Institute, and Zogby International (all covering the

---

3. Chris Zambelis and Brandon Gentry, “China through Arab Eyes.”

period 2002-2011,) would suggest that Arab public opinion has been largely well disposed and even favorable toward China throughout much of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century corroborating in part or whole some of these assumptions.<sup>1</sup> A closer examination of the same data, however, yields a more nuanced and interesting picture overall, including observable but rarely noted aberrations that undermine – at least in the case of Saudi Arabia – these well-established assumptions.

Moreover, there are problems with the general interpretation of the data. No doubt, China enjoys comfortable pluralities in most if not all Arab countries. These positive pluralities largely appear to confirm the arguments of Zambelis and Gentry that they have been largely circumstantial and dependent on the actions of other “Great Powers” than the result of an active Chinese soft power campaign. But this assumes a limited analysis that only takes the United States and China into consideration: indeed, Chinese gains appear less impressive when taking into account other countries, such as Japan, Turkey Germany, France, and (at least prior to 2006), Iran that have managed to attract far larger pluralities in the Arab World than what China could muster.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, and notwithstanding the continued growth of Sino-Arab relations and the implications of the Arab Spring, Arab public opinion towards China has, since 2008, not been very positive.<sup>5</sup> There are also unexpected divergences in how the Arab public at large evaluates different aspects of Chinese hard power. The Pewsurvey’s datasets, for example, while unfortunately limited in their selection of Arab countries, are particularly revealing in that regard: In 2010, 54 percent of respondents in Egypt, 71 percent in Jordan, and 54 percent in Lebanon reported that they believed China’s economic growth had an overall positive impact on their national economies.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, when asked if growing Chinese military power constituted a net gain for their countries, the numbers were largely reversed: 55 percent of respondents in Egypt, 56 percent of those in Jordan, and 57 percent of those in Lebanon described it as negative. While these numbers do confirm that public opinion is largely lukewarm toward China, opinions are more complex than what first meets the eye and show that Arab expectations about the ‘rise of China’ do not necessarily conform to popular assumptions about strategic repositioning – they reveal rather that attitudes, despite overall positive perceptions - are largely guarded about the country in question.

As noted, the narrative of Chinese soft power is especially challenged by the anomaly

4. Please look at the Arab American Institute datasets. Links available in the (i) endnote.

5. Please look at the Pewsurvey, Arab American Institute, and Gallup datasets. Links available in the (i) endnote.

6. Please look at the Pewsurvey datasets. Links available in the (i) endnote.

of Saudi public opinion trends. While the Kingdom has actively sought – one could even say more so than any other Arab state – to improve relations with Beijing and stress the importance of its bilateral ties to the public, nearly all available polling data gauging Saudi public opinion reveal the existence of large negative pluralities (with only one exception dating from 2002.)<sup>7</sup> What is particularly interesting about this phenomenon is that it emerges as a glaring exception to wider Arab public opinion patterns found elsewhere. In an early 2005 survey conducted by the Arab American Institute, for example, we find that while 15 percent of Egyptians (versus 38 percent of Moroccans, 26 percent of Jordanians, and 25 percent of Lebanese) reported having unfavorable opinions about China, a whopping 41 percent of Saudis reported the same – slightly exceeding those who indicate having a positive impression about the country (40 percent) in the same poll. The same source also noted that Arab public opinion in 2011 had become less optimistic and far more polarized in its attitudes toward China – with 43 percent of Egyptians, 40 percent of Moroccans, 44 percent of Jordanians, and 29 percent of Lebanese reporting having an unfavorable impression of the country. By contrast, 66 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia reported having an unfavorable impression of the country (versus 26 percent). More unsettling is the fact that the last poll covered Saudi public opinion attitudes in the first half of 2011 – well before the eruption of the Syrian uprising, the condemnation of Russia’s and China’s roles in the UN, and the mobilization of Saudi society over this issue. We are confronted thus with two parallel but contradictory trends unfolding within the context of Sino-Saudi relations over the last decade: on the one hand, we have an intensifying political and economic engagement between Saudi Arabia and China, and on the other, a sustained negative perception about China among the wider Saudi public.

It is perhaps tempting at this point to claim that “Arab public opinion” – and especially when laden with so many discrepancies – is not a totally suitable approach to understand the dynamics underlying Chinese soft power in the region. It is also possible to add that public opinion does not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the Arab elite formulating state policies to begin with. But this dismissal is problematic, first of all because there is an overwhelming propensity among scholars to rely on such polls when evaluating Arab receptivity to Chinese soft power, and secondly because while the public is perhaps not a significant actor in the decision-making processes of autocratic or stratified systems like those found in the Middle East and the Gulf, it is still an audience of, and a participant in, a wider discourse about such issues. It not only receives tailored texts by those with access and ownership of the

---

7. Please look at the Arab American Institute datasets. Links available in the (i) endnote.

media but generates its own set of notions and ideas that influence the overall tone of the conversation in the relative free flow of information. Public attitudes therefore cannot be totally ignored in the context of examining Chinese soft power in the Arab World: its trends are indicative of a larger discourse that includes and influences the perceptions of the political elite who in turn respond to the discourse itself. Public opinion thus cannot be totally de-linked from policymaking considerations – it usually reflects the boundaries of what is, and what is not, strategically feasible, especially when concerning sensitive issues such as the Arab-Israeli peace process or Gulf security.

If we accept that there is some connection between public opinion and receptivity, by what means are we to interpret the numbers cited earlier and particularly those coming from Saudi Arabia? More significantly, why does China augur such negative impressions despite active promotion of bilateral ties on the part of Saudi Arabia? The paper hopes to explore these vexing questions by examining how the Saudi media has chosen to “imagine” China from 2006 to the middle of 2012 (coinciding roughly from King Abdullah’s seminal visit to Beijing and overlapping with the general timespan of the public opinion surveys examined by this paper).<sup>8</sup> Of course, I do not mean to imply that the ‘media’ is a consummate reflection or crystallization of public opinion, but examining it will hopefully serve to identify the larger narrative about China that is unfolding in Saudi Arabia. More specifically, the paper aims to deepen our understanding of some of the challenges facing the development of Sino-Saudi relations by looking at potential sources of situational and ideational contention/comity through the available political and economic commentary. To wilfully ignore what the Saudi media is trying to communicate “between the lines” – especially when taking into account its present state of connectivity and globality – about China is to risk misreading current public attitudes and fail to address/avert what are potentially very real hurdles to the continued growth and consolidation of Sino-Saudi relations.

The paper will begin by outlining the type of media texts it will focus on, the reasons behind this selection, and how the media texts in question choose to construct imagery about China. Following that, it will look at the overall tone of the conversation about China in the Saudi media focusing on the two categories of politics and economics.<sup>9</sup> These categories will be further arranged to include a

---

8. The media cache is the only available medium which could allow us to examine the causes behind certain public perceptions, especially since the polling data itself is, while consistent, scattered and limited regarding Saudi Arabia and China.

9. A cultural sub-category was initially considered, but many of its themes were already subsumed under political or economic rubrics.

limited number of ‘sub-categories’ (at least for the political section) that will focus on key issues regarding China as identified in the Saudi media. These two sections will primarily showcase many articles from the Saudi media juxtaposed in the form of an ongoing conversation. Observations will then be drawn from these texts about the emerging narrative in the Saudi media and how this narrative – or repertoire of images – connects with the phenomenon of negative Saudi public opinion. The paper will then conclude by briefly considering the possible sources of tension underlying Saudi public opinion in regard to China.

### Saudi Media: Definition, Categories, and Preliminary Observations

The term ‘media’ usually refers to the main means of mass communication, including traditional and non-traditional channels. For the purposes of this paper, however, the term will be used to refer to printed newspapers from which an even more constrained body of ‘subjective’ texts – mainly columns, editorials, and articles – will be drawn. While this may appear to limit and narrow our reading of the larger discourse about China unfolding elsewhere within Saudi Arabia, it should be recognized that these types of texts are already produced in an environment largely shaped by a dynamic conversation involving many mediums such as youtube, twitter, online forums, television, as well as wire service news items from the international press. One could therefore say that the ‘slice’ we are examining is a representative sample that embodies the themes and imagery produced elsewhere, and this despite the altogether higher degree of regulation and government messaging the written press is subject to. The six newspapers this paper is concerned with are all national Saudi newspapers with sub-regional variations: *Al-Jazirah*, *Al-Watan*, *Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Madina*, *Al-Eqtisadiyyah*, and *Okaz*.<sup>10</sup>

This selection of newspapers will be divided into two categories: populist and elitist,

10. This means I will not be examining such newspapers as *Dar Al-Hayat* or *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* which are oriented, despite their Saudi patronage and wide circulation in Saudi Arabia, towards a more trans-Arab and international audience. *Arab News*, *Saudi Gazette*, and other English publications have been excluded due to their language medium. I should also add that the selected newspapers are widely distributed in the Kingdom and reflect a wide range of regional and sub-regional groupings and readerships. According to a study conducted by Global Investment House, *Al-Jazirah* is reported to have a circulation of 110,000, the Jeddah-based *Okaz* of 110,000, *Al-Riyadh* nearly 150,000, and *Al-Eqtisadiyyah* around 81,888. Data is unclear about *Al-Watan* and *Al-Medina*, but both appear to be available everywhere in the Kingdom. For information on circulation and political links behind each paper, please see: [http://mec.biz/term/uploads/SRMG\\_03112009.pdf](http://mec.biz/term/uploads/SRMG_03112009.pdf)



Such a categorization will allow for a more coherent commentary that factors in the political and cultural considerations at play concerning the representation of China in Saudi Arabia. By using these two terms, I do not mean to imply the existence of ideological categories; for example, while *Al-Riyadh* (elitist) and *Al-Watan* (populist) are described as liberal newspapers, *Al-Eqtisadiyyah* (elitist) and *Al-Jazirah* (elitist) are believed to espouse very conservative positions. More paradoxically, seemingly Islamist, modernist, and Western discourses/critiques find some platform or the other in most if not all Saudi papers, making this type of categorization redundant, especially when taking into account that all newspapers are shaped at some level or the other by the government narrative. Rather, the purpose of this distinction is to point out the power structures, reflected in the identity of a given paper, that influence the construction or the mode of representation of news regarding China. In other words, the proximity of a given paper to the levers of power (and hence its propensity to reproduce the ‘official line’), and the makeup of its targeted audience, work in tandem to define the parameters and nature of its content. Therefore, *Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Eqtisadiyyah*, and *Al-Jazirah* are defined, for our purposes, as elite newspapers – due to their links to the Saudi political establishment– while *Al-Watan* and *Okaz* are defined as populist primarily because of their regional backgrounds, constrained and more parochial reporting, as well as the identity of their readership.<sup>11</sup> *Al-Madina* emerges as an exception in that its China coverage is usually quite sophisticated for a local paper, and could be considered a hybrid of a sort – a populist newspaper that has the professionalism usually expected in elite newspapers but whose reach is largely limited to a smaller audience chiefly residing in the Hijaz, without any exceptional political clout. I should note that all Saudi newspapers – regardless of their proximity to the authorities – do reflect the official line on some level or the other and particularly in the main editorial columns due to the nature of censorship practiced in the Kingdom. However, the relative importance of elitist newspapers as mediums of authority in comparison to more populist ones grants the latter more leeway in their coverage and, as a result, they show less of a tendency to ‘tow’ the official line. One should not overplay this point, however.

In addition to the implicit structural differences, populist and elitist newspapers also differ in their approach to content by the degree to which they embrace ‘contextualization’ in their reporting. Because China is a relatively ‘new’ knowledge space, it remains a largely unknown entity to much of the Saudi readership. Elitist newspapers have sought to address this by periodically publishing analytical and descriptive articles – of varying levels of sophistication and detail – introducing

---

11. Ibid.

different aspects of modern China's economy, system of governance, culture, and strategic aspirations. Of course, this 'contextualizing' tendency is not limited to general topics but extends to issues of major public concern. Particular events – such as Syria or Xinjiang – are therefore situated within a larger analytical framework that attempts to identify the causes and dynamics influencing the said event outside the repeated truisms found in more populist texts which – because of their more local focus – rarely offer any context to Chinese political decisions or events. Needless to say, contextualization does not always serve to 'expand' knowledge but also works at times to intensify or assuage negative or positive perceptions by implicitly influencing the discourse. For instance, while all Saudi newspapers reported on the Xinjiang riots in 2009, only elite newspapers chose to publish analytical pieces on "Islam in China" emphasizing the rebirth of traditional Muslim culture throughout the country. Another example includes routine attempts on the part of elite newspapers to relate the experiences of Saudi students or tourists in China. These topical choices function as a form of positive representation which generates a sense of familiarity about China through the sympathetic narratives of religion and the diaspora, diluting in turn the poignancy of the 'larger' issues at hand.

Despite differences in the populist and elitist approaches, there are observable similarities at least in their coverage on China. Since King Abdullah's endorsement of a "Going East" strategy in 2006, the Saudi media has employed and maintained, when superficially read, a largely positive-neutral tone in its coverage about China. Editorials and major articles, towing the official narrative, have constantly sought to emphasize the significance and importance of Sino-Saudi ties. Accordingly, many of these pieces are colored by a positive Orientalist (or reverse Occidental) undertone. By this I mean to imply that there is clear admiration for the Chinese model of growth and its perceived ability to wed its traditional culture with modernity.<sup>12</sup> This echoes the non-Western world's excitement over China's ascension on the global stage and could be described more as a projection of an imagined China than anything else. Furthermore, and perhaps in conjunction with Saudi political efforts, there is a propensity to also reproduce the 'official' Chinese narrative even when it relates to China's Muslim minorities (a narrative which discounts, for instance, the depredations of the Cultural Revolution.)<sup>13</sup> Another interesting

12.

حماد، أمين "الصين.. بين سياسات الانفتاح والحفاظة على الهوية التقليدية". الرياض. Accessed: Dec.-Jan. 2012/2013. شراحيلي، يحيى "المدينة المحرمة" سحر من الإبداع والجمال في فن العمارة والتراث في بكين. الرياض. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012. حماد، أمين. "بكين واختزال العولمة." الرياض. Accessed: Dec.-Jan. 2012.

13.

شراحيلي، يحيى. "المظاهر الإسلامية تزين شارع البقر في بكين." الرياض. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

trend that has consistently appeared in all Saudi newspapers is the notion of China as an evangelization project. By this, I mean to imply that there is a widespread perception in the media coverage that the country and its residents are in need of, and susceptible to, Saudi religious guidance. This is especially noticeable in the attention the media has paid to the stories of mass conversion among the Chinese workers in Saudi Arabia.

In recent years, however, the media commentary as a whole has manifested new strands of skepticism and pessimism about China. These strands have not only reproduced common motifs found in the Western media about China, including oft-heard critiques about the country's dismal human rights record and its authoritarian political system, but also seem to draw on an indigenous repertoire of anti-Chinese sentiment that dates to the early years of the Cold War during which opposition to Communist China was a guiding diplomatic principle for the Kingdom. Negative perceptions about the quality of Chinese products (the 'made in China' brand) have always existed in the Saudi discourse, but these too have been amplified, especially in the wake of certain events, including those of political contention and those involving Chinese production scandals. The emergence of these strands appears to be closely connected to certain key events – such as the Xinjiang riots and the Syria UN veto (2009–present). However, it is also clear that the language and discourse they deploy hails from already pre-existing undercurrents found in the media which predate these events altogether. These negative undercurrents may have been concealed in the past due to Saudi political considerations, but have been allowed to come to the forefront as political realities changed and conciliatory coverage no longer seemed feasible (or beneficial.)

In all, it seems that the one major reason for the negative commentaries in the Saudi media about China is the existence of a serious knowledge gap. This gap not only reflects the limitations and orientation of Saudi newspapers (which are rooted in the local and regional), but also the more significant fact that the Saudi people's interest in China followed the state's consolidation of political and economic ties with Beijing in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the gap poses a risk of exaggerating the centrality of certain events, there has emerged a tendency within the press – and backed by political concerns – to contextualize Sino-Saudi relations and place them within a positive framework. This process of contextualization often exaggerates the reality of Sino-Saudi relations and creates more confusion than understanding about it. The mechanisms underlying the process are also problematic: more often than not, Saudi newspapers address their own information deficiency by turning to either Western news sources (henceforth adopting viewpoints and

critiques alien to the Saudi context) or comfortable historical legacies dating from the Cold War which reinforce paradigms and stereotypes that resonate with the wider Saudi public. We should also take into consideration the fact that authors also bring in their own experience or idiosyncratic viewpoints when writing about China. This may, at times, give rise to highly professional pieces – such as those written by Ayman al-Hamad of *Al-Riyadh* who authored countless papers dealing with China's domestic and international challenges – but more often than not leads to confusion about the country and the issues it faces as journalists resort to reductive descriptions about it.<sup>14</sup>

It can be said then that the confluence of these tendencies – the goading of a larger political order that wants to foster better relations on the one hand, and a knowledge gap that undermines these efforts and encourages a resort to outside sources and assumptions on the other – serves to complicate overall attitudes about China in the Saudi discourse: despite widespread political messaging asserting traditional friendship and strategic convergence, China emerges as neither friend nor foe in the commentary. This confusion is easily reflected in the absence of a proper and wide-ranging debate on the future of Sino-Saudi relations. While this may be attributed to certain political considerations (as is operative with the United States and other entities), it is far more likely that the lack of intimate knowledge about China and a general failure (or inability) within the Saudi media to recognize the latent problems in the current Saudi security regime and/or appreciate the full strategic potential implicit in China's rise is at fault here. There are very few authors who have discussed the possibility of China emerging as a strategic 'alternative' to the United States, and those who have present an arguably circumscribed analysis: all of them, with the exception of one author, asserted the inevitability of an eastward shift, or the need for it, without any accompanying interpretation of the strategic implications, repercussions, structural forms, or issues of interest that the Saudi readership might be interested in. There is, in other words, an operating assumption about a natural convergence between the two states and a need to emulate Chinese success – with little else said beyond that. In this respect, elitist and populist newspapers show little difference.

14. Some examples of his work are: "China and the Challenge of Breaking the American Cordon," "China and India....A Fight for Influence in Afghanistan," and "The Chinese Presence in Africa... an Investment Accused of Colonialism!"

حماد، أيمن. "الصين ومهمة فك الطوق الأمريكي" الرياض.  
حماد، أيمن. "الصين والهند...صراع النفوذ في أفغانستان" الرياض.  
حماد، أيمن. "الوجود الصيني في أفريقيا...استثمار بتهمة الاستعمار!!" الرياض

Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

A few examples should make this clear enough and give the reader a taste of the limited nature and even superficiality common to the Saudi discourse: Mazen Al-Sudairi, writing for *Al-Riyadh* in “The place of Saudi is in Asia and not the Middle East” promoted the notion that the strategic focus of the Kingdom should not be set on Yemen or the Gulf. Rather, he argues, the future of the country lies in emulating the development experiences of China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong.<sup>15</sup> He ends his rather short piece with a call for Saudi involvement in Asian organizations and a deepening of bilateral ties with East Asia and away from the larger Arab World. Mohammed al-Maklouf’s *Al-Watan* article “The Voice of China and the picture from Shanghai” regurgitates Al-Sudairi’s sentiments while emphasizing the potential of China as a possible ally and a development model *par excellence* for Saudi Arabia – Beijing being the key to solving Riyadh’s many security and economic dilemmas.<sup>16</sup> In an article titled “The Visit of the Chinese President to the Kingdom: Changing Strategic [Variables]” in *Al-Madina*, Dr. Sami Sa’id Habibby makes the curious argument that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are poised to decline in the coming years as demand for energy slumps, primarily as a result of the United States and Europe embracing energy-saving technologies.<sup>17</sup> He then goes on to claim, in what appears to be a contradiction of sorts, that the US is likely to collapse under the weight of the 2008 financial crisis which would then catapult China into the role of Saudi Arabia’s most important partner due to its continued dependence on oil. Dr. Habibby then winds up his piece with a general recounting of the current state of Sino-Saudi relations, underlining its continued growth and future prospects.

Taking a different viewpoint, Mohammed Hassan Alwan, in an article titled “Is China the alternative we want?” for *Al-Watan*, utilizes a seemingly pro-Western liberal discourse to attack the pervasive acceptance of China within the Saudi political milieu<sup>18</sup> The author begins by inviting readers to consider the differences between a world run by a Chinese police officer and one run by an American officer. He then goes on to question, in a sarcastic tone, if Chinese values are in any way superior to American values – implying, of course, that the comparison itself is too frivolous to be taken seriously, and that, despite our misgivings about Washington, its humanistic values remain far superior to those of Beijing. He dismisses the ‘momentary’ love experienced by China in the Arab World as based on nothing

15. السديري, مازن. «موقع السعودية هو في آسيا وليس في الشرق الأوسط». لرياض. Accessed: Oct.-Nov. 2012.

16. مخلوف, محمد. «صوت الصين وصورتها من شنغهاي». الوطن أون لاين. Accessed: Dec.-Jan. 2012/2013.

17. سعيد حبيب, أ.د. سامي. «زيارة رئيس الوزراء الصيني للمملكة: متغيرات استراتيجية». المدينة. 2012. Accessed: 28 Jan.

18. حسن علوان, محمد. «الصين: هل هي البديل الذي نريده؟». الوطن أون لاين. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

more than spite and hatred for United States and a desire to see the latter's clout in the region curtailed as soon as possible. This sentiment, Alwan argues, is not only false but also out of touch with reality – it would take China many decades to translate its newly acquired economic wealth into 'hard power' – in the meantime, US supremacy would persist. Alwan's key argument is that China can never be an acceptable partner to the Arabs (and more specifically, Saudi Arabia.) To that end, he lists a set of reasons: China opposed the Arab Spring with its refusal to endorse the NATO bombing of Qaddafi's Libya and displays continued support for Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria. In addition, he describes China's economic behavior as hegemonic, opportunistic, and, in the context of Africa, clearly colonial and exploitative. There is also the problematic issue of China's political system, which is downright authoritarian in nature, routinely executing – according to Alwan – over 5,000 people a year for crimes as simple as tax evasion. To add insult to injury, Alwan then highlights China's increasingly warm ties with Israel, brushing off in the meantime its early recognition of the PLO (as the first non-Arab country to do so) as part of Beijing's overall anti-Western strategy than a genuine expression of solidarity with Arab causes. Indeed, according to him, China could very well be described as an enemy of the Arabs by virtue of the fact that it had undermined the effectiveness of the Arab boycott of Israel by providing the latter with an alternative and lucrative market for Israeli exports. Alwan finishes his article by stating that the emergence of China as the global hegemon will not make the world better for the Arabs simply because such a world will be dictated by a hegemonic logic where political opportunism will run amuck and the law of the jungle will prevail. Countries should and must depend on themselves and not on some imagined 'salvational' power, and especially when the said Messiah in question is China.

### China as a Political Entity

#### *(a) Xinjiang*

The Urumqi riots, which first began on July 5, 2009, marked one of the major turning points in the Saudi media's representation of China and precipitated the emergence of a new stream of negative commentary in a space that has, since 2006 at least, maintained a positive-neutral tone in its coverage of the country. The increasing daily count of the dead and the Chinese authorities' heavy-handed response to what were clearly identified as Muslim grievances led to an eruption of public outrage

in Saudi Arabia.<sup>19</sup>This anger was fed by a highly emotional and charged depiction of the events beginning with the decision of several Saudi newspapers and cyber media outlets to publish pictures of the purported massacres committed against the Uyghur. One particular photograph showing two lines of mangled corpses – ostensibly Uyghur – left inside what appears to be a storage room gained widespread notoriety and came to symbolize the savagery perpetrated against a defenseless Muslim minority.<sup>20</sup> In an attempt to contain the damage and placate growing public concern, the Chinese embassy in Riyadh issued three separate statements over the span of five days narrating the official Chinese version of events.<sup>21</sup>

The damage, however, had already been done. The riots served to activate public interest in much the same way as the events in Bosnia and Chechnya had done in the 1990s. Religious solidarity as well repeated outbreaks of violence in 2010 and 2011 (which the photo came to epitomize)<sup>22</sup> sustained this public interest and helped generate a narrational aspect of ‘Other’ against China. This explosion of public interest also fed and reinforced pre-existing fears and conceptions about China as a ‘Communist country,’ a theme that was picked up across the Saudi press with its frequent use of Cold War terminology in its coverage on Xinjiang in ways similar to its earlier condemnations of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. While it is unclear whether these associations with Cold War imagery were intentional or simply expressed long-held assumptions about the country, one cannot easily downplay the impact this type of language has had on the overall framing of the story: the use of particular keywords or monikers – atheist, communist and so on – easily invites public disgust in ways that function to undermine counter-narratives of comity and friendship. At the very least, they raise suspicion about China’s professed values and long-term aims, especially viz-a-viz Muslims and Saudis. This gradually spills over to the larger coverage on China so that, for instance, while an author may praise China’s development model or the industriousness of its people, this is usually accompanied – particularly after 2009 – by remorseful or critical comments regarding China’s lack of a spiritual tradition or its continued assault against Muslim expressions of piety and faith. Public pressure also plays a significant role in buttressing this: a failure to hold China to account could very well invite public denunciations

19. اشتباكات بين الهان واليوغور في شوارع أورومتشي .. وعدد القتلى بلغ 156 .. والاعتقلون 1434 شخصاً». الرياض 2012. Accessed:

20. Ibid.

21. Please look at the website of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Saudi Arabia: <http://www.chinaembassy.org.sa/eng/>

22. مقتل 15 شخصا في اضطرابات في إقليم شينجيانغ الصيني». الرياض 2012. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

against the author in the Saudi cyberspace and online commentary. At times, one can even encounter comments that go on to compare the United States' albeit misguided adherence to an Abrahamic religion (Christianity) with China's state-endorsed atheism, raising in turn the specter of irreconcilable differences between the Islamic world and China. This raises the proposition that while the West is in an oppositional relationship to Islam, it is somewhat redeemed by the fact that it possess a core religious identity. The same cannot be said about China which is anti-Muslim by virtue of its communist system and atheistic/immoral culture.

### Media Texts on Xinjiang

During the course of the Xinjiang events, Saudi newspapers, both elitist and populist, adopted a negative and condemnatory tone in their coverage. Even in pieces which were aimed at 'contextualizing' the Uyghur-Han ethnic riots and placing them within a historical and purportedly objective framework, there was a strong propensity among authors to place the blame wholly on China and assert that some form of ethnic cleansing was taking place. Despite the appropriation of a negative discourse on the part of elitist newspapers, however, their critiques, in contrast to populist newspapers, still maintained some aspects of the older and larger narrative of comity and friendship with China (in some cases via the pathway of contextualization). Whether this was a result of political pressures aimed at controlling the fallout or of a natural synthesis in what appear to be conflicting viewpoints – i.e., between the 'established' line of thinking and the new stream of information brought about by the Xinjiang issue – is uncertain, but what is clear is that one can sense a desire to salvage the image of China as a friend of the Arabs in some parts of the elitist discourse (this does not imply of course that the public acquiesced to this as the commentary will show.) The most common opinion observed among elitist authors – aside from outright condemnation – stressed the need for finding a constructive solution to the Xinjiang issue involving an incremental application of pressure aimed at dissuading Beijing from its current policies. This 'reasoned' approach would eventually yield concrete results that would prove to be far more enduring in the long run than Turkey's widely popular and well-received diplomatic posturing against China. These calls also carried an implicit warning about the risks involved in mishandling the issue: that China could end up an enemy of Muslims in the same way that the West had become. These were usually juxtaposed to articles not only contextualizing the events, but also covering the 'modernizing' policies spearheaded by Beijing in the province.<sup>23</sup>

23. حزمة اصلاحات تقودها الحكومة الصينية تجاه الاقليم... والرئيس الصيني يرجع تخلفها للأسباب التاريخية والاجتماعية“



The reader should take note that the selection I have chosen to showcase the Saudi media's discussion on Xinjiang heavily favors items from elitist newspapers as a result of two factors: (1) populist newspapers had noticeably far less articles and editorial pieces addressing the issue in comparison to elitist newspapers, and (2) their quality and sophistication was noticeably far less than that of any of those found in elitist newspapers. While some examples will be given below, populist coverage can be reduced to a basic condemnation of China followed by a call for imposing some form of punishment on Beijing including the severance of diplomatic ties. It is probable that populist commentary in this case is closer to Saudi public sentiment, at least to the extent that I can discern from the accompanying commentaries in the Saudi cyberspace.

It would be best to start off with Dr. Hassan Al-Barari's *Al-Eqtisadiyyah* article "The Uyghur...A Problematic Issue for China and a Mark of Shame for the Muslim World" given its rather typical line of argument.<sup>24</sup> It begins by providing readers with a mainstream account of Xinjiang's history, starting with an early 'golden age' era of Muslim rule (marked by the first Arab conquests, of course), which then is abruptly put to an end by the Qing conquests of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to the author, the Chinese occupation put into motion a long string of pogroms and attacks directed against the local community that only intensified with the Communist takeover in 1949. Han ethnic nationalism, unjust government policies, and the biased role of the Chinese media are identified by Al-Bariri as the main culprits behind the Uyghurs' difficult situation. He then lists, as do many other authors, examples of the religious persecution faced by the Uyghur, including anti-Hijab campaigns, the execution of Quran teachers, the enforcement of "I will not go to Hajj" pledges and so forth. He ends his piece by stating that, whatever the Chinese claims about the presence of Al-Qaeda in the region, the authorities are committing ethnic cleansing against a defenseless minority in the name of security. Dr. Nora Khalid Al-Sa'ad, also writing for *Al-Eqtisadiyya*, chose to look at the Xinjiang issue through a slightly different lens, but comes to similar conclusions as those espoused by Al-Bariri. In her article, "Mrs. Rabiya Qadir, the Uyghur National Resistance Fighter," Al-Sa'ad recounts to her readers a short Al-Jazeera interview with Rabiya Qadir in which the latter narrated the history and challenges facing the Uyghur peoples, including state sanctioned disenfranchisement and the like.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Al-Sa'ad, in her own follow-up commentary compared the situation of the Uyghur to that of the Native Americans

الرياض. Accessed: Nov, 2012.

24. «الإيغوريون.. ورطة للصين ورح للعالم الإسلامي». الاقتصادية. Accessed: Sept.-Oct. 2012.

25. «السيدة ربعة قدير المناضلة الأوبجورية». الاقتصادية. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

and Palestinians, all of whom had experienced dispossession and subjugation under colonial rule. This comparison is accompanied with a call to ‘not forget’ the Uyghur plight and China’s guilty involvement in perpetuating it.

M’hna Al-Habeel, writing for *Al-Madina* (“Even Candles Are Forbidden for Uyghur Martyrs”) describes the dire straits of the Uyghurs one year after the events.<sup>26</sup> He first takes the opportunity to remind his readership of Turkey’s lone but heroic efforts in condemning the massacres perpetrated by China. He then contrasts this with the muted silence found in Saudi Arabia, urging in turn the Saudi media and Ulema to expend greater efforts in informing the wider public of the Uyghur plight. He argues that pressure, both domestic and international, has to be put on China in order for the Uyghur to gain genuine self-autonomy and live a dignified life. He ends his article by exhorting people not to let China get away with erasing the memory of its crimes. Tariq Mohammed Nasir, in his *Al-Riyadh* column “The Uyghur: How can we help them?” regurgitates the same themes, but goes on to underline that the issue of Xinjiang is significant to the Saudis given their strong sense of religious solidarity.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, he contrasts this pious identification with the ethnic nationalism displayed by the Turks which, in his opinion, is narrower and *jabili* (ignorant) in character. His call to action was similar to Al-Habeel’s in which he hoped that the Saudi authorities, in conjunction with the wider public, would mount a peaceful campaign against China to end its state sanctioned discrimination against the Uyghur.

Yusuf Al-Kuwaleet’s article “China and its Muslim Minority,” published in *Al-Riyadh*, offered what is perhaps the most sympathetic representation of China in the selection examined in this paper.<sup>28</sup> Rather than focusing on the history of Xinjiang, Al-Kuwaleet opted to start his article by reminding readers of the amiable and war-free relationship traditionally maintained between the Muslim world and China. He then goes on to state that China had always been a pacifist country, and even during the Communist era had only really waged two wars in total – and all of which, he emphasizes, were executed in self-defense. Xinjiang is a Chinese internal affair, but the situation there, Al-Kuwaleet admits, threatens the goodwill built up over many centuries with the Muslim world in the same way as Chechnya drastically affected the traditionally good relationship shared with Russia. A security response, he argues, should not be the first reaction for a country that had been able to bring

26. الحجيل, مهنا. «حتى الشموع ممنوعة لشهداء الأيغور». المدينة. Accessed: 17 July 2010.

27. محمد الناصر, طارق. «الإيغور : كيف نساعدهم؟». الرياض. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

28. الكويليت, يوسف. «الصين.. وأقليتها المسلمة..». الرياض. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

back Macau and Hong Kong via peaceful measures. Given the West's hatred of Muslims – epitomized according to Al-Kuwaleet by its reaction to the Gaza cordon, the killing of Marwa al-Sharbini, and the French Niqab row and so on – the Muslim world cannot afford to lose China. Rather, it must work to convince the country that safeguarding the rights of its Muslim minority would be the key to its long-term stability and prosperity.

It is interesting to note that Al-Kuwaleet's article, among all those written on Xinjiang, was one of the few to elicit a strong public reaction in the Saudi cyberspace beyond the attached commentary section provided by the newspaper's website. One popular thread entitled "To Yusuf al-Kuwaleet: Fear God in the blood of the Muslims!" and which was readily reproduced in many Saudi forums chastised Al-Kuwaleet's 'generous' depiction of China and his 'active' support for an atheistic power that had shown a habit of spilling Muslim blood.<sup>29</sup> The terms used in these threads approximated the rhetoric deployed in populist newspapers. *Okaz's* editorial piece "The Confrontations of Xinjiang" is typical in that regard.<sup>30</sup> After starting off with a now well-established cursory narration of China's occupation of the region, it went on to denounce the Chinese presence there as a clear form of colonialism and imperialism. What else, the editorial questions, sounds eerily similar to Western justifications for Imperialism – the so-called "white-man's burden" – than the Chinese leadership's repeated claims about bringing economic development and technology to Xinjiang? China, the editorial concludes, must be brought to question about its actions.

By my assessment, these pieces have contributed to the emergence of a persuasive and powerful narrative that inexplicably links China to the persecution of Muslims. While initially limited to Xinjiang, the narrative quickly pervades across the discourse – corroborated as it were by many passing references to it in articles that have little to do with China to begin with (and certainly with some interesting mutations). In Ali Al-Habardi's *Al-Riyadh* column "Return of the Tartars from the West," for example, wherein the author mainly focuses, as the title would suggest, on the West's depredations and what he calls the 'grand conspiracy' against the Muslim polity, he attributes the massacres in Xinjiang to the importation of Western Islamophobia to China.<sup>31</sup> While obviously acknowledging the association mentioned above, his argument carries a 'sympathetic' and even positive representation of China in which it carries no responsibility for its actions. Al-Habardi's commentary appears to be

29. Examples of some forum links: <http://www.baq3a.com/archive/index.php/t-346.html> <http://sl3sl.com/vb/showthread.php?t=7872>

30. مواجهاات شينجياغ عكاظ. Accessed: Oct.-Nov. 2012.

31. الجبردي، علي. «عودة التتار من الغرب». الرياض. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

more of an exception, however, with more commentators reinforcing the negative narrative as it were. Ali Al-Hijli's *Al-Eqtisadiyya* article "Ramadan Thoughts," which mostly discusses random social ills found in Saudi society, reminds readers, almost as an afterthought halfway through, of the plight of the Xinjiang Muslims who – 9 million in total – are barred from fasting due to government diktat.<sup>32</sup> In Rakan Habib's *Al-Watan* article "Fitna of Al-Kashgar and Escape from the Dragon" we again find the same image of an oppressive and anti-Muslim China (projected to the distant past and personalized through the story of the Al-Kashugri family which fled from Xinjiang) in an article that mainly focuses on defending the person of Hamza Kashugri during the twitter-blasphemy events.<sup>33</sup>

### (b) Syria

Since the first UN Security Council vote in October of 2011, the Saudi media has maintained a largely negative tone in its coverage of China's role in the Syrian crisis. Its critical reporting deepened as Saudi diplomatic efforts to bring about a meaningful change in Beijing's position for the February and July 2012 resolutions faltered. Yet, amidst the media's seemingly unanimous condemnation of China, one can distinguish many competing narratives reflecting the dichotomy of elite/populist representations mentioned earlier. Conveying a sympathetic undertone in their coverage, elite newspapers reprovved, but did not necessarily condemn Chinese behavior. Rather, they emphasized the futility of disengaging, let alone punishing China for its vetoes, but stressed that Beijing would have to radically change its behavior lest it suffers further damage to its hard-earned reputation in the region. Again, this is not to imply that all columns or articles under the elitist rubric participated in this form of sympathetic representation. Given the widespread rejection of the Chinese position even within the Saudi political establishment, condemnations – some utilizing an overtly pro-Western discourse – are rather common. By contrast, populist newspapers – riding the wave of public outrage and Sunni mobilization over Syria – consistently deployed a more negative and pessimistic discourse (notwithstanding some exceptions in the editorial ranks), with some columnists even urging the government to 'force' a change in Beijing's stance on Syria by leveraging the country's "special" economic relations with China (other opinions – more commonly heard in the commentary – called for a public boycott of Chinese goods). In all, the common narrational thread is that of disappointment with what was assumed to be an up and coming friend of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

32. الجحلي، علي. «خواطر رمضان» 3. "الاقتصادية". Accessed: Sept.-Oct. 2012.

33. حبيب، رakan. «فتنة الكشغر» والهجرة من «التنين» الوطن أون لاين. Accessed: Dec. 2012.

Variations in the discourse are more pronounced in the interpretations advanced by columnists and analysts regarding the motives or causes underlying China's obstructionism or opposition to Saudi-backed UN Security Council resolutions. The most frequently cited interpretation (the 'conventional interpretation') places China's action – along with that of Russia – within the context of a global struggle (fueled by ideological differences or hard power disparities) between the West and the East in which regime change in Syria plays a significant role. Within this conventional interpretation there exist a number of gradations, with some authors voicing a passive acceptance about the inevitability of such power plays and others casting China and Russia as downright immoral and Machiavellian in their actions (and a few absolving China of any responsibility by suggesting that its vetoes were influenced by Russia.) Whatever the chosen slant, authors tended to couple their identified motives with a series of assumed military and economic connections shaping China's relations to the Assad regime. A few authors – mostly writing for elitist newspapers – felt that ideological or cultural factors had influenced Chinese behavior, but these were by far a small minority. A realist (conventional) interpretation therefore pervades the discourse.

Populist pieces on the Syrian issue are markedly more numerous than those dealing with Xinjiang. This could be attributed to greater public concern over Syria – by virtue of proximity, sectarian sympathies, and more active government backing – than anything else. For the sake of balance, I will start by examining the populist pieces first.

### Media Texts on Syria

Setting the tone in what can be considered a rather archetypal piece, Dr. Nasir bin Abdullah Al-Khar'an explains in his *Okaz* column "Russia and China....Swimming against the International Current" that the Chinese and Russian vetoes are nothing but empty, symbolic gestures which were cast in the name of 'resistance' (ostensibly here, against the West).<sup>34</sup> Al-Khar'an makes an appeal to the leaders of the Gulf countries to use their economic relations with China to convince it to end its support for the Assad regime. Marwan Al-Qablan, also from *Okaz*, agrees with Al-Khar'an, but stresses in his article "A Bit of Thinking to Understand the Chinese Veto" that one must acknowledge the fact that China's decision in the UN is largely shaped by what he defines as the country's three principal strategic concerns: the need to maintain internal stability, secure its energy supply lanes, and ensure that the

34. عبدالله الخرعان، د. ناصر. «روسيا والصين .. السباحة عكس التيار الدولي». عكاظ. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

homeland is never surrounded or 'ringed in' by hostile powers.<sup>35</sup> While he does not, in my opinion, spell out a clear link between these three principal concerns and his conclusion that China is using Syria as a hedge against further US expansionism, he reiterates what can be considered at this point the conventional interpretation which Al-Khar'an also put forward: China is using Syria to resist further Western advances in the region. In a markedly less vocal piece, the *Okaz* editorial, "Where Are China and Russia's Interests?" tried to draw its readership's attention to the fact that China's and Russia's links with the wider Arab world were more substantial and at far greater risk than any ties the two powers claimed to possess with the faltering regime in Syria.<sup>36</sup> While the editorial dismissed the possibility of Russia assuming a constructive role in the crisis, it hoped that China – by virtue of its growing links with the Gulf – will come to reason and alter its unjust position on Syria.

In "China is the Biggest Loser in the Syrian Game" by Omar al-Zubayidi of *Al-Watan*, we encounter a more critical assessment of the Chinese UN stance.<sup>37</sup> Regurgitating the narrative that China is using its veto to 'make its voice heard' (and thus, asserting itself *viz a viz* the West), the author comments that China has given Bashar the green light to continue butchering the Syrian people, gaining nothing in turn but the eternal enmity of the Arab and Muslim worlds. He then goes on to add that while Moscow had acquired a new base in Tartosa as the price of its veto, China by contrast, in committing this grievous political error, has suffered irreplaceable losses in the Arab world. He concludes by remarking dismissively that, when the rebels manage to wrest control of all of Syria, China will be revealed for the 'infantile' power it is, unable, as he terms it, to play 'adult games.' Al-Zubayidi's exasperation is shared by another author, Hussein Al-Hoyader, who remarked in his brief column in *Okaz* that, along with its cheap and faulty goods, China was now getting proficient in exporting 'wounds and injuries' to the Arab world.<sup>38</sup> This symbolic connection between 'cheap' China and its position on Syria conveys his own disdain at Beijing's moral failings. Turning to elite newspaper excerpts, Ayman Al-Hamad of *Al-Riyadh* expounds in his "China's Foreign Policy – A Fight for Priorities" a view that amalgamates the conventional theory and a condensed version of Al-Qaban's 'principal concerns.'<sup>39</sup> He argues that China is fearful of the Arab

35. القبلان, مروان. «قليل من التفكير لفهم الفيتو الصين». عكاظ. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

36. أين مصالح الصين وروسيا؟. عكاظ. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

37. الزبيدي, عمر. «الصين الخاسر الأكبر في اللعبة السورية». الوطن أون لاين 30 May 2012. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

38. بن حويدر, حسين. «الصين تصدر لنا الجراح». عكاظ. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

39. حماد, أيمن. «سياسة الصين الخارجية.. صراع في حيز الأولويات», الرياض. Accessed Dec. 2012.

fallout from its UN veto, but its efforts at minimizing the damage are undermined by the Chinese leadership's adamant opposition to the West and its need to limit the emancipatory effects of the Arab Spring on its own society (this interpretation appears to be influenced by Western sources and the notion of a 'Jasmine Revolution' in China.) He adds, however, that, despite the tensions that will arise in Sino-Arab relations, both sides cannot afford to deepen these tensions. The Arabs need China and should therefore be selective in the issues they pressure Beijing for – otherwise, they risk blunting the effectiveness of their arguments and the capacity to persuade this rising power in the future. In the same vein, Al-Hamad argues that for China to safeguard its credibility in the region, it must become more sensitive and responsible in its foreign policy, particularly on issues of great concern for the Arab/Muslim worlds.

Yusuf Al-Kuwaleet, in his *Al-Riyadh* article “Why Are the Russians and Chinese Backing the Assad Regime?!” begins by questioning the notion that the Chinese and Russian vetoes can be explained in light of their economic and military interests in Syria.<sup>40</sup> Instead, he offers an elaboration of the conventional interpretation by stating that Russia and China, which operate according to him from different vantage points – of weakness and strength, respectively – are attempting, via the UN veto, to limit further US gains in the region. He adds, however, that their diplomatic behavior leaves room for the possibility of finding a resolution to the Syrian crisis without damaging relations any further. In another editorial also for *Al-Riyadh*, “China and Russia...Falling into a Deadly Mistake,” Al-Kuwaleet explores the ‘costs’ both countries had suffered in their bid to save the Libyan and Syrian regimes. He argues that, in contrast to China and Russia, the West successfully adjusted to the new circumstances arising in the region following the Arab uprisings and is now reaping the benefits. China, he warns, should take heed and alter its position on Syria before it incurs further losses in the future.

In addition to the conventional theory, another, albeit less pervasive avenue of interpretation sought to examine Chinese behavior through the prism of ideology and culture. In this regard, it should be noted that, with one exception, none of the authors reviewed in this section dealing with Syria appear to have considered, let alone discussed, the validity of China's claim of principled non-interference in the affairs of other countries. The articulation of this claim was largely left to spaces allotted to translated articles from the Chinese official press, or to interviews with figures from the Chinese government (almost solely in *Al-Riyadh* and *Al-*

40. الكويليت, يوسف. «لماذا انحاز الروس والصينيون لنظام الأسد؟!» الرياض. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

*Jazirah*.)<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, these ‘Chinese spaces’ were badly received by Saudi netizens unconvinced by official explanations from Beijing. This could explain the absence of this interpretation among skeptical journalists who – in so far as they are part of Saudi society – might share what appears to be a unanimously ‘rejectionist’ public sentiment towards the Chinese “official line.” But this may be an overt simplification on my part, especially when taking into consideration there were only a limited number of articles – all of which in elite newspapers – espousing even a basic ideological or cultural interpretation of Chinese politics. This suggests that, with few exceptions, the Saudi media still suffers from serious ‘knowledge gaps,’ undermining a more nuanced debate on Chinese decisions and intentions. This is not to say that the strategic analyses found in the Saudi press are unreasonable or unexpected, but it is somewhat unusual that the Saudi media seems to have little exposure to the academic and scholarly discussions found elsewhere in the global press.

I have selected two articles to cover this part – the first of which closely approximates in its argument the Chinese claim to non-interference (and mixes it with elements from the conventional interpretation) and the second which provides an unusual critique of the ‘Orient’ using a pro-Western or liberal discourse of human rights that also alludes to the image of China as an anti-Muslim power. The first, titled “Russia and China...Reasons behind the Veto...and the Price of Retreating from it” comes from the *Al-Madinah*’s Studies Center and is written by one Hatim Izz Al-Din.<sup>42</sup> In this article, the author attempts to determine the reasons behind China’s veto from a cultural perspective. He begins by stating that Chinese civilization, with nearly 4,000 years of political experience and copious amounts of bloodshed in its history, has learned to appreciate, and even assimilate, a sense of balance and non-spontaneity in its foreign policy approach. This attitude is epitomized best in China’s cautious stance towards the Arab Spring revolutions which it sees as a threat to its economic and political projects in the Arab region. The sudden change in the ‘rules of the game’ has forced the country – fearful of American influence – to recalibrate its strategy and halt any further developments by way of supporting the Assad regime. China, However, Izz Al-Din believes that China has shown some flexibility in its diplomatic engagement and might be willing to let go of Assad if it is either persuaded to do so or its interests are no longer served by the survival of his regime.

41.

حماد، أمين. «المبعوث الصيني لـ«الرياض»: لا «مأرب خفية» لموقفنا بشأن سوريا» الرياض. Accessed: Nov. 2012. Accessed: Dec. 2012. «الصين والأمم المتحدة» الجزيرة. Accessed: Dec. 2012. «الصين والأمم المتحدة» الجزيرة. Accessed: Dec. 2012.

42. عزالدين، حاتم. «روسيا والصين.. أسباب الفيتو.. وثمن التراجع عنه.» المدينة. Accessed: Nov. 2012.



The second article from *Al-Riyadh* “Man’s Humanity between the East and the West,” and written by Mohammed bin Ali Al-Mahmud, is a liberal critique that compares the ethical culture of the Orient and the Occident through the prism of Syria.<sup>43</sup> Al-Mahmud opens his article by stating that China’s position on Syria has proven that those gambling on the East in the Arab world have lost. For in the East, Al-Mahmud argues, politics is king and the end justifies the means. From this guiding principle, it is clear that support for the Syrian regime on the part of Beijing and Moscow is justified on several grounds: (a) China and Russia share an ideological solidarity with the totalitarian and security institutions of the Assad regime which places the interests of the few over the interests of the many. Supporting authoritarian governments allows Russia and China to assert to their peoples that the non-democratic nature of their own systems is not an aberration in the global context – but a natural form of governance found elsewhere and everywhere; (b) According to most analysts cited by Al-Mahmud, the only reasonable replacement for the regime in Syria will likely be one that adheres to some form of political Islam. This explains why Russia and China are fearful of the blowback the regime’s demise could cause in their Muslim provinces – Chechnya and East Turkestan (Xinjiang); (c) In addition to these two factors, Al-Mahmud also factors in China’s military and economic interests in Syria as a significant element in the equation.

The crux of the matter, Al-Mahmud states, is not about politics but about stark differences in the ethical systems separating the East from the West embodied in the international reaction to Syria. The West, of course, seeks out its own interests but unlike the East, does not divorce its humanitarian principles from its political calculations. This concern is maintained through a vibrant press, an electoral system characterized by transparency, and a moral code demanding responsibility. In the East, there is no concern for ‘man’ as such – he simply does not exist in its lexicon. Yes, Al-Mahmud admits, the West has committed atrocities in the past but it is the West itself that sheds light on them. In the East, by contrast, Russian society has yet to come to terms with the Stalinist period, and in China, the authorities have effectively erased any discussion on Tiananmen and the massacres of East Turkmenistan. These widely different approaches need to be seriously taken into account. Al-Mahmud ends his article by warning readers who celebrate China’s ascendancy and display an idiotic glee when the West retreats from any front – for in the end, any defeat for the West, is a defeat for ‘man’ as such.

43. علي المحمود، محمد، «إنسانية الإنسان بين الشرق والغرب». الرياض 43. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

### China as an Economic Entity

Over the past 40 years, China's ascendancy on the global stage has been closely associated with the economic transformation that it has undergone since the *gaige kaifeng*. It follows then that the notion of China as an 'economic power' assumes a place of importance in the Saudi discourse – whether as a model of success or an entity to guard against. However, as noted earlier in the paper, it is difficult to identify – as was the case with the political section – clear topics around which the media focuses its attention. The reason for this is that while the topics and concerns voiced by both elite and populist papers are diverse enough to warrant some form of categorization, they all embrace very similar themes and stereotypes that leave any category-wise breakdown wholly redundant. More specifically, China oscillates between two conflicting images: the first is easily described as a form of overtly positive orientalism embodied in the avid admiration displayed by Saudis towards its quick-paced neo-liberal development (and noticeable in the nearly universal repetition of the Napoleonic idiom on China among Saudi authors 'when the slumbering giant wakes, the world will tremble) and the second, a stereotyped projection that reduces China's success to a formula that relies on a basket of immoral practices including its dependence on hive-like numbers – "Yajuj Majuj"<sup>44</sup> – to bolster production, illegal and unfair trade subsidies, crushing low wages, widespread adoption of copycat methods, and low-quality goods.<sup>45</sup> "Low quality" in fact is widely presented as a Chinese trademark, with many Saudi commentators (and some authors) questioning the moral integrity of businessmen who keep importing and dumping the market with cheap but dangerous goods (this should be seen in the context of global concern following a string of scandals relating to Chinese production in areas ranging from dairy products to toys.) While the two images appear to be mutually exclusive, they do at times co-exist in the same commentary, and most notably when used as a standard by which Saudi industry, projects, and government/customs practices are compared. In assessing the Saudi media's discourse overall, it appears that the representation of China as an economic entity is largely positive in both elitist and populist works if only by virtue of the speed with which the 'Chinese miracle' has unfolded and its proximity, in public imagination at least, to the modern successes of Japan, South

44. The term 'Yajuj Majuj' - or Gog and Magog - comes from the Quran and Islamic sacred texts, referring specifically in the Islamic context to a tribal horde (or two tribal hordes) characterized by their numerousness and savagery. In popular usage, the term is used in connection with Asian countries, and particularly China, which are populous, industrializing, and about to 'overwhelm' the world as it were.

45. اللحياني, هاني. «أسواق الجملة الصينية تنصيد السعوديين بشهادات تزكية مزورة». الرياض. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

Korea, and the 'Asian Tigers.' This success is continuously compared to the failing economies of the West (after 2008) which had long been presented as a model for imitation. It is likely that this generally positive assessment of China reflects several underlying 'anxieties' (and hopes) shaping the Saudi polity and society that include: (a) a search for a successful model of development and economic transition; (b) and a sense of urgency and trepidation regarding the current course of national development (becoming a mirror, as it were, for Saudi failures.)

The selected articles that follow address a variety of issues that, while seemingly disorganized and haphazard, fall within an economic rubric, including discussions about the Chinese model of development and modernization, domestic issues related to Chinese consumer products and companies operating within the Kingdom, as well as cultural and political ruminations on China emanating from an economic standpoint. While both elitist and populist newspapers participated in these discussions, elitist newspapers as a whole displayed greater interest in the process of Chinese development and modernization. By contrast, populist newspapers focused on more localized topics such as quality control issues, the speed at which current infrastructure projects were being completed, and how the Chinese development model continues to influence living standards and prices both within and outside China. Interestingly enough, the sophistication of the Saudi media in dealing with China as an economic entity is not concentrated among elitist newspapers as one would have assumed: unlike their somewhat crude reporting on political affairs, populist newspapers were nearly comparable to their elitist counterparts in the quality of their coverage. It is likely that the more heightened interest in economic issues among the Saudi public, as well as the lack of pervasive 'political' messaging about China in relation to such topics plays a role here. One could also potentially add the impact China's economic growth has had on the Saudi socio-economic system as a major factor in elevating the debate and raising more immediate concerns as a whole.

### Economic Media Texts

Given the prominence of the China development model as a primary focus for the Saudi media, we will start from there. Ayman Al-Hamad published a long piece in *Al-Riyadh* entitled "A 'Developing Country' called China." In this half-travelogue, half-analytical piece, Al-Hamad attempts to identify the reasons behind Chinese growth.<sup>46</sup> Utilizing a very celebratory language about the country, the author begins by introducing his readers to the model Chinese city of Wushi with its whopping \$100 billion GDP as an emblem of the new China. Following his glistening description of

46. الحماد, أيمن. «دولة نامية اسمها الصين!» الرياض. Accessed: Oct.-Nov. 2012.

Wushi, he presents a series of truisms about how China had reached the current stage in its development: the work ethic of the local people, the influence of Deng Xiaoping and so on. The end result, he believes, has been breathtaking: after an arduous path spanning only a few decades, China has emerged as an economic superpower worthy of Western respect. Al-Hamad then abruptly forwards two questions in the middle of his piece, the first of which is seemingly to reprimand the Saudi leadership over the country's current state of affairs: If China is still a developing country, what can we call our own Third World countries? He then asks a more significant question: what can be learned from China's amazing experience? In answering this question, Al-Hamad attempts to compare Arab and Chinese societies. Both peoples, he notes, were once largely dependent on subsistence agriculture and craftmaking and shared a traditional outlook and challenges as colonized societies. The Chinese, however, decided to join the bandwagon of the global revolution, welcoming Western investment and industry while laying down the basis of an economic system one could only envy. Al-Hamad ends his article by noting that the West is attempting to monopolize the claim to 'modernity' (which seems to be an outcome of economic progress, according to the author) but China presents, by virtue of its success, a real model for other non-Western societies seeking their own 'modernities with non-Western characteristics.' The Arabs must follow the path already taken by their Chinese brothers if they wish to define modernity on their own terms.

Ahmed Al-Ghawi, also from *Al-Riyadh*, avoids Al-Hamad's meta-approach to the question of Chinese development and opts instead to examine more closely some of the 'concrete' factors that may have contributed to its takeoff. Al-Ghawi begins his piece "China...Studying the Market is the Key to Success" by pointing out that Chinese products have been well-received in the Saudi domestic market, and particularly in the so-called 2 riyal stores.<sup>47</sup> He attributes this success to the Chinese ability to quickly adapt to the local conditions and tastes of the market, maximizing their existing comparative advantages there. He offers the example of the electronic prayer-beads. Al-Ghawi then laments the lost opportunity for Saudi industry and wonders how such simple daily goods have been completely abandoned to the Chinese. He ends his article by calling upon Saudi entrepreneurs and industrialists to imitate the Chinese in their approach and to effectively compete with them in quality and price within their own domestic market. Dr. Salim bin Ahmed Sahab from *Al-Watan* reproduced much of Al-Ghawi's assessment in his "Caution about China" piece.<sup>48</sup> His focus, however, was mainly on the Chinese challenge to the

47. غاوي, أحمد. «الصين .. دراسة السوق هو سر النجاح». الرياض. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012.

48. أحمد سحاب, أ.د. سالم. «حذار من الصين». المدينة. Accessed: Dec. 2012.

nascent Saudi solar industry, stressing that if Saudis are interested in competing with a people who “work, work, and then work some more,” they will have to embrace an approach to development that approximates that of Beijing in its unbridled support for industrial growth.

Dr. Abdullah bin Muhsin Al-Faraj’s *Al-Riyadh* piece “This is the [naught] of China” examines the growing competitiveness of Chinese products in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>49</sup> Chinese competitiveness, he argues, is not limited to “burying other countries with cheap goods and buying failing companies wholesale,” but also in embracing a copycat approach to everything. Dr. Al-Faraj recounts China’s desire to build a major tourist city near Shanghai with an estimated annual capacity of 43 million tourists. The city’s design, according to Chinese officials, would be based on an actual Austrian tourist town that already attracts some 800,000 tourists per year. While the author is uncertain as to whether one should congratulate China for its business savvy or adopt a cautious attitude towards it, he admits that Chinese protectionism – whether via depreciating the Yuan, supporting exports through subsidies or fighting cases in the WTO court – has been a remarkable success. This competitiveness could very well bring about the downfall of the West and relegate it to the fate of its former colonies.

Populist newspapers, as mentioned, have displayed similar enthusiasm for the Chinese model. Yassir Al-Amru’s *Okaz* piece “The Chinese Experiment” largely reflects on how quickly China has made the jump from a society that in 1949 was 80% illiterate – and suffered moreover from the depredations of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-60s and early 70s – to a country that today has effectively eliminated illiteracy and is poised by 2020 to become the world’s largest economy.<sup>50</sup> He further adds that current unemployment in China – a country of over a billion people – stands at 4.3 percent as opposed to the United States’ whopping figure of 9.5 percent. Surely, Al-Amru asks, on the basis of these figures alone, something could be learned from China’s experiences? *Al-Watan*’s Salah Al-Deen Khashugshi takes a slightly different angle in his piece “How Has China Reached the Top?” He begins by remarking on the change in the tone of the United States towards China following Hu Jintao’s last state visit – it has become, he notes, far more respectful and deferential than one is usually accustomed to.<sup>51</sup> In reality, Khashugshi argues, China has at last achieved parity with the United States, and this was not only due to the 2008 financial crisis

49. محسن الفرج, د. عبدالله. «هذا عقد الصين». الرياض. Accessed: Dec. 2012.

50. العمرو, ياسر. «التجربة الصينية». عكاظ. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012. Web

51. خاشقجي, صلاح الدين. «كيف وصلت الصين إلى القمة؟». الوطن أون لاين. Accessed: Sept.-Oct. 2012.

which hastened global shifts in power, but also largely to the meticulous planning and hard work of its elites. Their vision – crystallized in a successful development policy – has at last garnered them the respect and even begrudging admiration of the West. Khashughshi’s argument clearly establishes a link between the respectability of a given nation and its stage of development. It also alludes to the notion that power constitutes a real safeguard for any society, and particularly non-Western ones, in a world dominated by the West.

Abdul Aziz Hamad Al-Uqayshiq (*Al-Watan*) has a more critical and sober assessment of the Chinese development model. His article “China, Corruption and the Price of Fast Growth” discusses how recent attempts by the authorities to jumpstart internal consumption after the 2008 financial crisis have led to the proliferation of corrupt practices and underhand deals.<sup>52</sup> According to his own estimate, corruption alone makes up around 3 percent of the Chinese GDP. Moreover, it is rarely – if ever – combated by the CCP, which operates on the basis of political considerations and connections in dealing with economic matters, leading in turn to the emergence of real structural problems in the economy that will have to be resolved at some point in the future. Al-Uqayshiq cites the example of corruption to highlight the need for a more objective and fact-based examination of the Chinese model that does not simply regurgitate empty laudations and truisms about it.

Some authors – by and large, in populist newspapers – turned their attention to the issue of infrastructure projects in Saudi Arabia in so far as it relates to China. While many, like *Okaz*’s Mohammed Al-Harbi, opted for a theoretical and self-flagellating interpretation that compared the quick-paced successes of Chinese building projects with those within the Kingdom (Jeddah’s still-born ventures in Al-Harbi’s case),<sup>53</sup> a few such as Abdullah Abdul’ Samh, again from *Okaz*, attempted to cover some of the recent rumors surrounding the problems and issues faced by Chinese companies in Saudi Arabia. His piece, “Has the Chinese [Quality] Fallen?” looks specifically at the dispute between the Ministry of Education and the China Railway Bureau 15, in which the latter was contracted to build over 200 schools over the span of several months.<sup>54</sup> He cites misunderstandings and language barriers as the main cause but also suggests that the much-lauded Chinese model is not all that it is set up to be – at least when compared with its Korean competitors.

52. العويشوق, عبدالعزيز حمد. «الصين والفساد وثمن النمو السريع». الوطن أون لاين. Accessed: Oct.-Nov. 2012

53. الحربي, د. محمد. «جسر الصين العظيم». عكاظ. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012. Web.

54. ابو السمح, عبدالله. «هل انكسر الصيني؟». عكاظ. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012. Web.

## Conclusion

Having showcased and examined a sizable slice of the media coverage about China, it has become somewhat clear that we are facing a cultural landscape that has produced, and continues to produce, many different representations or images about China. These images are shaped by what can be described as reductionist understandings about China, its institutions, interests, and long-term aims, a condition that stems from the Saudi media's reliance on Western news streams, a Cold War inheritance, and the lack of a historical experience of sustained engagement with China. The role of government messaging, particularly through elitist newspapers, plays a role here as well in that, while it gives rise to a contextualizing discourse, it concomitantly undermines the articulation of indigenous critiques about the country, relegating to the media the responsibility of *promoting* as opposed to *informing* about Sino-Saudi relations. One can, however, easily see the 'fissures' eating away at this optimistic narration when differences of interest between Riyadh and Beijing become irresolvable – as was the case with the UN Security Council veto on Syria – or when religious issues involving China and eliciting Saudi public outrage come to the forefront. This appears to have less to do with the government instructing a change in messaging and more with it permitting the media to express popular outrage and reactions (perhaps for the purpose of indirect political pressure.) These expressions, in turn, are colored by the knowledge gap discussed earlier regarding China which simply adds to the confusion in the coverage. Taking all this into consideration, it seems that the 'gap' separating the media's 'positive-neutral' representations of China and the public's adamantly negative perceptions about it is real only to the extent to which the state allows it to be so.

The media's overall coverage reveals the existence of several points of tension that could in part explain why China continues to garner such negative pluralities within Saudi Arabia as found in the polls. The first main source of tension relates to genuine fears about China and its relationship to 'Islam' both in terms of its treatment of local Muslims and the problematic aspect of its identity as a country that publicly adheres to 'state socialism' and 'state atheism.' As may be expected, this tension is unavoidable given the centrality and significance of Islam to the wider Saudi public, its collective impressions from the Cold War period, and the fact that China will likely – notwithstanding dramatic changes in its government – maintain the *status quo*. There is little that could be done to alleviate this ideational issue which could very well worsen over the coming years depending on the popularization of the Uyghur narrative in the Arab and Saudi media and on whether insurgencies coming from Pakistan or elsewhere spill over into Xinjiang.

The second source of tension relates more to the conflict between expectations and reality. The meta-narrative espoused by the media rests on the assumption that China is or will become a close ally of the Arabs. Accordingly, when long-term Chinese policy approaches – such as its opposition to foreign interference – or its decades-long friendly relations with Iran or Syria come under the media limelight, there is an immediate clash with such expectations, breeding in turn a sense of cynicism and pessimism about a country that seemingly does not pay any attention to principles and morality (since Saudi positions are identified as such in the public mind) except in so far as it facilitates or impedes its ability to more make profits. This source of tension is coupled closely to the glaring knowledge gaps about China discussed earlier, which have allowed many authors to project their own assumptions and visions about the ‘Other.’ I should also add that this tension also reflects the policy-making limbo which the Saudi elite finds itself in: there is, as yet, no long-term vision as to where Sino-Saudi relations are going beyond expanding economic ties.

The last source of tension relates more to what I believe are orientalist and even racist perceptions about Chinese society in Saudi Arabia. While this is rarely seen in the Saudi media’s various discourses, it does manifest itself often enough in the media’s textual language (stereotypes), the Saudi readership’s commentaries as well as in daily contexts. I cannot, of course, comment expansively on this issue given that there are, as yet, no comprehensive academic studies on racial constructions in Saudi Arabia. However, it does appear to me that one can speak of a Chinese stereotype: while there are ‘positive’ elements involved in the perception of Chinese – industrious being a key element here – negative imagery frames much of this perception. These include the notions that the Chinese lack proper hygiene habits, think in a hive-like mentality (Yajuj wa Majuj,) adhere to no religion or moral code (in some cases this also extends to Chinese Muslims who are often seen as being only culturally affiliated to Islam and rarely if ever perform the prayers), and place wealth at the center of their existence. This is not a particularly difficult hurdle when compared to the others and betrays a lack of familiarity and interaction with the Chinese more than anything else.

In all, there is still a great deal of confusion about China in Saudi Arabia, notwithstanding the media’s promotion of government policy. The discourse will continue to evolve and may even attain greater sophistication in time, but this is predicated on the need for a clear blueprint regarding the future of Sino-Saudi relations. In regard to Saudi public opinion: it is unlikely, given the past decade’s overall trend, that Saudi public opinion will experience any dramatic shifts on its own. However, the persistence of these negative attitudes poses a risk to (and may



very well constrain) any future policies aimed at integrating China into a regional security framework favorable to Saudi interests especially since it reflects elitist attitudes as much as it reflects popular ones. What is needed in light of this is a more expansive and active ‘cultural’ diplomacy aimed at introducing Chinese culture and society to the wider Saudi public while offering avenues for multi-cultural dialogue. More significantly, polls gauging Saudi public perceptions about China should be conducted on an annual basis. These yearly polls should examine the Saudi public’s apprehensions about China and contribute to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of developments in Sino-Saudi relations.

## Appendix I

To help readers get a better sense of the general undercurrents and type of language deployed about China in the Saudi cyberspace, I selected a number of Saudi comments found beneath a selection of articles and translated them from Arabic into English. Most are from elite newspapers since these typically allow online commentary.

### 1. From ‘Chinese Companies Hand over Their Projects to Saudi Contractors and Leave the Market’ in *Al-Riyadh*:<sup>55</sup>

And I’ll tell you something – boycott Chinese goods as they kill, and harass our brothers in the faith in the Turkmenistan region now called Xinjiang. They also support Bashar the Nasiri, the Alawite scum. By God, anyone who has the blood of Islam flowing through his veins and believes in God should boycott them! Those polytheists –[they are not even] Christians! They don’t believe in a Creator. So do it oh Muslims so that they may know our value all countries [unclear] so combat them at least once by God for the sake of our religion and the sanctity of the Prophet, the guided one.

وانا مني شهاده قاطعوا بضاعة الصين انهم يقتلون ويضيقون على اخواننا في الدين في اقليم تركستان المسما  
الان تشيخاؤ وكذلك يدعمون بشار النصيري العلوي النجس بالله عليكم كل من يشى دم الاسلام بعروقه ويؤمن  
بالله انه يقاطعهم هؤلاء الوثنيين حتي مسحين ماهم مسحين اي لا يؤمنون بخالق فافعلوها بأبهاء المسلمين حتي  
يعرفوا قيمتنا كل الدول تساهين بناء فحاربوهم ولو مرة اناشذكم بالله لرفععه ديننا واحترام لرسولنا الهادي  
المصطفى والله الهادي لسوا السبيل

### 2. From ‘Chinese Bulk Markets Seek out to cheat Saudis with Fake Guarantees ‘ in *Al-Riyadh*:<sup>56</sup>

A rising power indeed! May God keep their evil away from us. A mysterious people, full of distrust, and difficult to deal with. Honestly, there is a big difference between the Japanese – and the South Koreans included – and the Chinese in terms of manners and morals.

55. شركات صينية تسند أعمالها لمقاولين سعوديين وتخرج من السوق. «الرياض». Accessed Dec. 2012.

56. «أسواق الجملة الصينية تتصيد السعوديين بشهادات تزكية مزورة». الرياض. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

قوة قادمة عسى الله ان يكفيننا شرهم.. شعب غامض شكاك و صعب التعامل معه.. و بصراحة هناك فرق كبير بين اليابانيين مع الكوريين الجنوبيين و الصينيين من ناحية الادب والاخلاق..

It is incumbent upon us to boycott them for their support of Bashar. Some guy will ask me 'don't you have anything else aside from boycott?' My response to him will be 'the strongest weapon is that of economic warfare as pursued by America and its allies.' Anyway, our businessmen only bring the rubbish of China and they sell it for really exaggerated prices!

الواجب علينا نقاتعهم لوقوفهم مع بشاراح يسالني واحد يقول ما عندك غير المقاطعه ارد عليه واقول من اقوى الاسلحه الفتاكه هي الحرب الاقتصاديه كما هي سياية امريكا وحلفائها اصلا جازنا ما يجيوا الانفايات الصين ويبيعوه بمكاسب مبالغ فيها جدا

China is the land of wisdom and quick development in all fields without exception. As for the 'sleeping' world countries, and especially the Arab ones, they are at the bottom in all fields because they are countries built on lies, boasting, and false claims of grandeur [and they never even left!]

الصين بلد الحكمه والتطور السريع في جميع المجالات دون استثناء -اما دول العالم النائم وخصوصا العربيه فهم في اسفل قائمة التخلف وفي جميع المجالات لانها دول بنيت على الكذب والتفاخر الزائف اكبر واطول واضخم وافخم في العالم وهم وهم في وهم مكانك راوح

### 3. From Dr. Nora Khalid Al-Saad, 'Ribiya Qadir the Uyghur Resistance Fighter' in *Al-Eqtisadiyah*:<sup>57</sup>

In the 'Rasid' show that aired two weeks ago, Sheikh Mohammed al-Munjid dedicated a whole episode to discuss the tragedy [of the Uyghurs] and there were some good reports in it that covered different aspects of the issue as well as what is hidden, including the persecution of the Muslims on the part of the Chinese authorities and the cutting off of the internet so that people would not know what is happening there. They even forbade journalists from entering and discovering what is happening. The problem is if you enter the Chinese websites you'll find a lot of talk that reflects the Communist government's stance like such absurdities that the family of Rabiya Qadir must desist from terrorism! They want to use the global media's agitation against Bin Laden to accuse a whole people!

في برنامج الراصد قبل اسبوعين خصص الشيخ محمد المنجد الحلقة كلها للحديث عن هذه المأساة وكانت هناك تقارير مفيدة حدثت عن القضية وخفاياها وعن قمع السلطات الصينية للمسلمين وقطع الانترنت عنهم حتى لايعرف الناس ماذا يجري هناك حتى انهم منعوا المراسلين من الدخول واكتشاف ما يحدث. المشكله انك لو دخلت للمواقع الصينية جد كلام مختلف تنشره الحكومة الشيوعيه المسيطره على الاعلام ومنه أن عائلة ربيعة قدير تطالبها بالتوقف عن الارهاب!! يريدون استغلال الاعلام العالمي ضد بن لادن ليتهموا شعب كامل بالارهاب

57. خالد السعدي، د.نورة. "السيدة ربيعة قدير المناضلة الأويغورية." الاقتصادية. Accessed Nov.-Dec. 2012.

4. From Omar Al-Zubayidi, 'China, the Biggest Loser in the Syrian Game' in *Al-Watan*:<sup>58</sup>

Countries that claim to be friends of Saudi Arabia but only seek out their own interests cannot be trusted.

لا يمكن الوثوق بدول تعتبر نفسها اصدقاء للسعودية وهي في الحقيقة تبحث عن مصالحها فقط

5. From Yusuf Al-Kuwaleet, 'Why are the Russians and Chinese backing the Assad Regime?!' in *Al-Riyadh*:<sup>59</sup>

It's already known and no one needs to ask questions about (Chinese support for Syria) – it's because he (Bashar) is a Nusayri atheist otherwise why would the Chinese sacrifice billions of dollars of trade with the Gulf for Bashar?!

معروفه مايبى لها سؤال عشانه نصيري ملحد والا هل من المعقول الصينيين تضحي بمليارات قيمه تبادلها مع دول الخليج بالذات عشان سواد بشار الطفران !!!

Whatever Russia's and China's points of view, they have proven that human rights mean nothing to them even if the Syrian regime uses the worst types of weapons and slaughtered its people in whole.

مهما تكن وجهة نظر روسيا والصين ولكنها اثبتا ان حقوق الإنسان لا تعني لهما شيئاً على الإطلاق حتى ولو استخدم النظام السوري أعتى الأسلحة وأباد شعبة ونحرهم كما يفعل الان ؟..

## Endnote

i Arab and Saudi opinion polls used in this paper were drawn from a number of sources, including:

- 1) The Arab American Institute (Zogby International) sources:
  - (What Arabs Think about Other Countries in the World, December 09, 2002 ) <http://www.aaiusa.org/dr-zogby/entry/w120902>
  - (Attitudes of Arabs 2005) [http://aai.3cdn.net/f82a26b554af8f607d\\_g6m6bej0w.pdf](http://aai.3cdn.net/f82a26b554af8f607d_g6m6bej0w.pdf)
  - (Arab Attitudes 2011) <http://www.aaiusa.org/reports/arab-attitudes-2011/>
  - (Arab Attitudes towards Iran, 2011) [http://aai.3cdn.net/fd7ac73539e31a321a\\_r9m6iy9y0.pdf](http://aai.3cdn.net/fd7ac73539e31a321a_r9m6iy9y0.pdf)

58. 30 May 2012. Accessed: Nov.-Dec. 2012. الزبيدي, عمر. "الصين الخاسر الأكبر في اللعبة السورية." الوطن أون لاين 30

59. الكويليت, يوسف. "لماذا انحاز الروس والصينيون لنظام الأسد؟!" الرياض. Accessed: Nov. 2012.

2) The University of Maryland, Brookings Institute, and Zogby International surveys (principal investigator Shibley Telhami):

- (University of Maryland in collaboration with Zogby International surveys for the years 2003,2004, 2005, 2006 and 2008) <http://sadat.umd.edu/surveys/index.htm>
- (BrookingsInstitute,UniversityofMarylandandZogbyInternational2008)[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2008/4/14%20middle%20east/0414\\_middle\\_east\\_telhami](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2008/4/14%20middle%20east/0414_middle_east_telhami)
- (Brookings Institute, University of Maryland and Zogby International 2010) <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2010/08/05-arab-opinion-poll-telhami>
- (Brookings Institute, University of Maryland and Zogby International 2011) <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/11/21-arab-public-opinion-telhami>

3) Gallup sources:

- “China’s Leadership Better Regarded outside the West,” April 29, 2008, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/106858/Chinas-Leadership-Better-Regarded-Outside-West.aspx>; “U.S. Leadership Approval Lowest in Europe, Mideast,” April 2, 2008, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/105967/US-Leadership-Approval-Lowest->
- WorldPoll dataset question: “Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of China?” – Saudi Arabia. 2006–2009, <https://wpr.gallup.com>

4) Pewsurvey dataset questions drawn from <http://www.pewglobal.org/>

- And overall do you think that China’s growing military power is a good thing or a bad thing for our country? (Survey: Spring 2011, Spring 2010, Spring 2008, Spring 2007)
- Which comes closer to describing your view?...China will eventually replace the U.S. as the world’s leading superpower; China has already replaced the U.S. as the world’s leading superpower; or China will never replace the U.S. as the world’s leading superpower? (Survey: Spring 2011, Spring 2009, Spring 2008 )
- Overall do you think it would be a good thing or a bad thing if China were to become as powerful militarily as the US? (Survey: Spring 2011, Spring 2005)
- Turning to China, overall do you think that China’s growing economy is a good thing or a bad thing for our country? (Survey: Spring 2011, Spring 2010, Spring 2008, Spring 2007, Spring 2005)

- Today, which ONE of the following do you think is the world's leading economic power? (Survey: Spring 2012, Spring 2011, Spring 2010, Spring 2009, Spring 2008)
- Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of...China (Survey: Spring 2012, Spring 2011, Spring 2010, Spring 2009, Spring 2008, Spring 2007, Spring 2006, Spring 2005)

**GRC PAPER**



**Gulf Research Center**  
Knowledge for All

---

[www.grc.net](http://www.grc.net)