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Contents

Development in Africa

- Post-Cold War Democratic Experiment and Presidential Term Limits in Africa** 527
Chima Anyaeze
- The Process of Environmental Institutionalization in Mozambique** 554
Giverage Alves do Amaral

Diploamcy and Trade

- Wading in Troubled Waters: China's Middle East Diplomacy in the New Era** 575
Degang Sun, Yuyou Zhang
- The Geo-economic Effects of the Expansion of the Panama Canal on World Maritime Trade** 584
Massimo Deandreis

Media Research

- Media as the Incentive or Mediator of Populism: A Research on the Media Populism Strategies and Factors of Political Power in Turkey** 588
Izem Zeynep Bulut, Fatih Keskin

Wading in Troubled Waters: China's Middle East Diplomacy in the New Era*

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The current Middle East situation is characterized by accelerating multi-polarity, the intertwining sectarian politics and geopolitics, the impending crisis of US alliance system, the escalation of arms race, and the deterioration of terrorism and separatism. Syria, Iran, Yemen and Palestine-Israel peace process will remain the flashpoints. Within such a changed situation, China's Middle East policy is evolving from passiveness to aggressiveness. First, participation in the Middle East governance and protection of its practical interests are the two major pillars of China's diplomacy in the Middle East; second, bilateral and multilateral mechanisms are the major platforms; third, partnership instead of alliance is the unique China-styled coalition policy, and finally the "Belt and Road Initiative" is an important tool of Chinese Middle East diplomacy.

Keywords: China and the Middle East, Middle East diplomacy, Peace Process, conflict resolution

Introduction

In 2015, the situation in the Middle East has revealed the characteristics of "stable in general, but turmoil at local". In that year, factions in Libya reached a draft peace agreement, Iran and six powers signed the nuclear agreement, the Security Council unanimously adopted No. 2254 resolution on Syria (Stea, December 23, 2015), Yemen once achieved a temporary ceasefire, and the so-called Islamic State's territory shrank by 40% from its maximum expansion in Iraq, and by 20% in Syria in 2015 (Reuters, 2016). Even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was under control in general. In January 2016, however, Saudi Arabia executed the Shiite Sheikh Nimr al Nimr, which caused the termination of diplomatic relations of several Arab countries with Iran. The tendency of Kurdish separation in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq was deteriorating. Disagreements between Turkey and the United States increased after the failed coup in July 2015. The Middle East refugee crisis had not been solved yet. The Israeli-Palestinian issue and the Syrian crisis were still in stalemate. The situation in the Middle East in 2016 continues to show the coexistence of transition and turbulence.

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