

adarga
research
institute

BRIEFLY

China in the changing world order

16th August 2024

Volume 01
Issue No 2

ADARGA.AI

Powered by
adarga_vantage

ABOUT

Briefly - China in the Changing World Order

Adarga is a leader in AI-driven information intelligence for defence, national security, and commercial organisations.

'Briefly - China in the changing world order' is brought to you by the Adarga Research Institute, which is dedicated to delivering in-depth geopolitical and geoeconomic analysis, enriched by its AI software and proprietary data models.

This report combines the analytical expertise of the [Adarga Research Institute](#) with Adarga's Vantage software, which is designed to increase the quality, speed, and breadth of intelligence outputs through the application of cutting-edge AI tools, enabling key insight to be derived from huge volumes of diverse information.

Time taken to generate research for this report with Adarga Vantage:

<10
seconds

Articles & papers scanned:

5.2
million

Languages covered:

55

Including articles from:
**China, India, Qatar,
Turkey, UK, US & UAE**

POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

British Airways halts flights to Beijing and the "52nd Meridian Challenge"

On 8 August British Airways (BA) announced it had decided to "pause" its direct flights between London and Beijing from 26 October until at least November 2025.^{1,2}

The Beijing route was only reinstated just over a year ago after a pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic and at the time the carrier reportedly described it as "one of our most important routes".³ BA stated it will continue to operate daily flights to Shanghai and Hong Kong,⁴ however, neither the airline or its parent company IAG specified the reasons for suspending the London-Beijing route. The decision comes as operators are grappling with an airspace ban over Russia, which has necessitated longer and more expensive routes. The decision also comes one month after fellow British carrier, Virgin Atlantic, announced it would suspend its last remaining route between the UK and China, which connects London and Shanghai, also from 26 October.⁵

ARI Analysis: The announcement by BA has importance above and beyond the impact on passengers. First, there is the symbolism of the two capital cities no longer being

connected by the main British carrier, reinforcing the sense of a widening gap between China and the West. Second, it reinforces the difficulty that the West has of keeping open East-West movement across the Eurasian landmass. With the emergence of the Counter Alignment – those countries in loose arrangement against the West, including China, Russia, and Iran – Western access by land and air to Central Asia and further East is under threat. This risk has distinct political, economic, and defence implications.

The 52nd Meridian is a line of longitude that runs southwards from the Barents Sea in the north through Russia and the Caspian Sea, briefly touches Kazakhstan, and then passes into Iran. The reality is that whoever controls this meridian can block all traffic between East and West. Keeping this open is the "52nd Meridian Challenge", and it is essential that it remains so if the West wants to keep its access to Central Asia and maintain land and air routes across Eurasia. The cancellation of the BA flight may be an early indicator for much more turbulence to come.



China's diplomatic engagements in the Middle East

There has been a flurry of activity between China and countries in the Middle East in the last week, furthering the development of China's bilateral and multilateral engagement in the region.

Plans were unveiled for the upcoming 'UAE-China Summit presented by HSBC', which will take place in December as part of Abu Dhabi Finance Week.⁶

The summit will mark 40 years of UAE-China diplomatic relations and build on the Abu Dhabi Global Market's (ADGM's) participation in the Shanghai Investment Summit, which was attended by 200 executives from mainland China's and Hong Kong's financial and industrial sectors. ADGM serves as a strategic link between the growing economies of the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and the rest of the world. Over 75 major financial institutions from mainland China and Hong Kong engaged in strategic discussions with ADGM's leadership, discussing cross-border regulatory cooperation, expansion plans, and strategies to enhance liquidity in each other's capital markets.

On 5 August, Chinese Ambassador to Iran Cong Peiwu met with Iran's Vice Minister of the Interior.⁷ Cong emphasised China's strategic and long-term interest in developing China-Iran relations, as well as China's willingness to deepen cooperation and communication, including through local exchanges, as part of the two countries' Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

On August 6, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, spoke via telephone with Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdelatty.⁸ They discussed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between China and Egypt, of which this year marks the 10th anniversary. They also exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East. Wang Yi proposed a three-step initiative to address the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, which includes achieving a comprehensive ceasefire, promoting post-war governance in Gaza, and implementing a two-state solution. Abdelatty expressed Egypt's concern about the escalation of the conflict and the potential for an all-out war in the region.

ARI Analysis: These three engagements should be seen in the context of China's broader activity in the Middle East, which is an increasingly important strategic dynamic in the geopolitical landscape. They are indicative of China's ongoing and systematic efforts to strengthen ties and build influence in the region through close bilateral engagements and multilateral forums, such as the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. China is now an important trade and development partner in the region – including to countries with military ties to the US and others in the West – and is a leading provider of key digital infrastructure, such as 5G communications and the Beidou global satellite navigation system.

The engagements all related to China attempting to build its sphere of influence in the Middle East. Beijing already has a close relationship with Tehran, which was gilded with a deal in 2021 that promised \$400 billion investment in Iran in exchange for the supply of oil for 25 years, and the two countries have increasingly cooperated in a Counter Alignment to the US-led global order. Others in the region have also created stronger political and defence relations with China in recent years. The UAE, for example, has not only joined the China-dominated BRICS organisation, but has started annual air force drills with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force, which this year were held in the skies over Xinjiang. The UAE is also rumoured to be a potential site for a PLA Navy base.

In addition, China's growing international influence and the relative decline of that of the US have led Beijing to pursue a role as a regional mediator. Wang Yi's comments on the Gaza conflict reflect China's interest in enhancing this role and in strengthening ties with the Arab world more generally. China's efforts to act as a mediator in the Israel-Hamas conflict have focused on a two-state solution and a "Palestine governed by Palestinians". In July, China hosted reconciliation talks between 14 Palestinian factions, and since October 2023 has become increasingly critical of Israel in a marked departure from its position in previous conflicts.^{9 10} This more active role as a mediator in Middle Eastern affairs builds on China's success in brokering rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2023, something which Wang Yi emphasised alongside other examples of China's international leadership in a *People's Daily* editorial on China's foreign policy following the Decision of July's Third Plenum.^{11 12}



Military drills in the South China Sea

On 7 August, China’s Southern Theatre Command announced it had carried out joint air and sea combat patrols to test “strike capabilities” “near Huangyan Island”, the Chinese name for the Scarborough Shoal.¹³

The announcement followed a series of joint naval drills conducted by Australia, Canada, the Philippines, and the US in the region. In its coverage, the *Global Times* emphasised the presence of “non-regional countries” and branded the joint exercises “a serious provocation”.¹⁴ On 9 August, the Philippines and Vietnamese coast guards conducted drills in Manila Bay, off the west coast of Luzon, which leads into the South China Sea.¹⁵ This exercise represents the first joint activity between the coast guards of the two countries, and simulated firefighting, rescue, and medical response activities.

ARI Analysis: These developments are the latest in a series of events in the theatre amidst heightened tensions between China and the Philippines following a clash on 17 June. The involvement of countries such as Australia, Canada, and the US, who are allied to the Philippines but external to the region’s sovereignty disputes, underscores the South China Sea’s geopolitical significance. Their involvement complicates the geopolitical landscape, and their military presence has the potential to serve as both a deterrent to Chinese aggression and a potential flashpoint for conflict. Additionally, the joint exercises between the Filipino and Vietnamese coast guards – who have competing claims of sovereignty in the waters – illustrates a growing solidarity among Southeast Asian countries in countering China’s military assertiveness in the region, and may reflect a broader strategic realignment.

References

- ¹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/transportation/british-airways-to-halt-london-beijing-direct-flights>
- ² https://www.guancha.cn/international/2024_08_09_744302.shtml
- ³ https://www.guancha.cn/international/2024_08_09_744302.shtml
- ⁴ <https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/business/3045831-british-airways-suspends-beijing-flights-until-2025>
- ⁵ <https://aviationweek.com/air-transport/airports-networks/virgin-atlantic-suspend-sole-china-route>
- ⁶ <https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/events-and-conferences/uae-china-summit-presented-by-hsbc-announced-during-adgms-china-roadshow-jiweoaku>
- ⁷ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zwbd_673032/wshd_673034/202408/t20240806_11466926.shtml
- ⁸ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjzbhd/202408/t20240807_11467111.shtml
- ⁹ <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tracking-chinese-statements-hamas-israel-conflict>
- ¹⁰ <https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/chinas-ambitious-efforts-to-expand-its-influence-in-the-israel-palestine-issue/>
- ¹¹ http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2024-08/13/nw.D110000renmrb_20240813_1-06.htm
- ¹² <https://trackingpeoplesdaily.substack.com/p/breakdown-of-wang-yis-post-plenum>
- ¹³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/7/beijing-manila-and-allies-launch-drills-near-south-china-sea-flashpoint>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202408/1317700.shtml>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.voanews.com/a/philippines-vietnam-conduct-1st-joint-drills-amid-south-china-sea-tensions/7737213.html>

To provide feedback on *Briefly - China in the changing world order*, or suggest themes that you would like to see covered, please email hello@adarga.ai

To learn more about the Adarga Research Institute please contact us [here](#).

