

# **The Application of Mask Diplomacy: China's Belt and Road Initiative as Health Diplomacy in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Countries During COVID-19**

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## **Abstract**

*China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a diversification of economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical activities, previously known as the "New Silk Road", which was later changed to "One Belt and One Road". BRI is one of the Chinese Government's most ambitious foreign and economic policies. China uses this route to expand its influence and gain attention in destinations in commodities, energy, transportation, and others in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) countries. This paper uses descriptive qualitative methods to explore various unique phenomena from the Health Silk Road against Vaccination in MENA countries. As a result, 17 countries have become members of the BRI and have cooperated with China, and at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, most MENA countries are using vaccine diplomacy from China to overcome their crisis. This situation is used for China to carry out "Mask Diplomacy" to expand its influence in MENA countries. This proves to be effective for China in improving and creating more significant opportunities to emerge as a "hero" in providing health services to developing countries while increasing its presence in the world.*

**Kata Kunci:** COVID-19; Vaccine diplomacy; Belt Road Initiative; Mask Diplomacy; MENA

## **Abstrak**

*China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) atau 'Satu Sabuk dan Satu Jalan' adalah diversifikasi kegiatan ekonomi, diplomatik, dan geopolitik, yang dulu dikenal sebagai "Jalan Sutra Baru". BRI adalah salah satu kebijakan luar negeri dan ekonomi paling ambisius dari Pemerintah China, yang menggunakan jalur ini untuk memperluas pengaruhnya dan mendapatkan perhatian dalam tujuan komoditas, energi, transportasi, dan lainnya di negara-negara Timur Tengah & Afrika Utara (MENA). Tulisan ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi berbagai fenomena unik dari Jalur Sutra Kesehatan Terhadap Vaksinasi di negara-negara MENA. Hasilnya, 17 negara telah menjadi anggota BRI dan telah menjalin kerja sama dengan China, dan pada saat krisis pandemi COVID-19 ini, sebagian besar negara MENA menggunakan diplomasi vaksin buatan China untuk mengatasi krisis negaranya. Situasi ini dimanfaatkan China untuk melakukan "Mask Diplomacy" untuk memperluas pengaruhnya di negara-negara MENA. Terbukti bahwa jalur ini efektif bagi China untuk tampil sebagai "pahlawan" dalam memberikan pelayanan kesehatan pada negara-negara berkembang sekaligus meningkatkan kehadirannya di dunia.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Diplomasi vaksin; Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); Mask Diplomacy; MENA

## **Pendahuluan**

After the Coronavirus (Covid-19) spread worldwide and increased in number, many countries experienced a global health crisis. This Covid-19 pandemic is marked by mass deaths caused the virus which is not easy to deal with. The spread of this virus has plagued all humankind in the world. 2020 was a challenging year for the world when the Covid-19 outbreak appeared abruptly, which seemed local at first in Wuhan – China, then spread and ravaged the joints of the world economy. The crisis has practically forced all countries to back down from the strategic plans that had been previously set, to be replaced with emergency response policies by mobilizing all resources to overcome the Covid-19 outbreak.

At the end of 2019 the virus was first found in China, and then it became a global epidemic. As a result, WHO declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Ducharme 2020). According to the data, the total number of cases on December 10 was 99,604, with a total death of 4,636 people (Worldmeters 2021). Since the pandemic outbreak which killed 5.4 million people, by January 17, 2022, the Eastern Mediterranean Region reported an increase of 86% in the incidence of weekly cases (Julie 2022; WHO 2022). 9.37 million vaccine doses were distributed, and 50.3% or around 3.92 million people of the population was fully vaccinated (Thomala 2022).

China then became the first country to have control over the epidemic and was the country that exported most commodities to the world to fight Covid-19. For example, due to the Coronavirus outbreak in Cambodia, China sent a team for the first time to the country to assist in handling and controlling the virus there. Overcoming the coronavirus outbreak can strengthen the basis of cooperation between various countries with China, and open up opportunities for bilateral cooperation and trade in medical devices in the health sector. Thus, China becomes the beneficiary party and can achieve its national interests through Health diplomacy.

To launch its primary goal, China used the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to assist BRI countries in sending aids and commodities to deal with Covid. Unfortunately, the path made deliberately by China in increasing its power in the world was stopped because of the global pandemic. But China is not running out of wits; China uses this situation to further build and strengthen diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. China previously also actively held health forums such as Central and East European colleagues 2015 in Prague; 2016 in Suzhou; 2017 in Budapest; 2019 in Sofia (Rudolf 2021). China also conducts Cooperation in combating infectious diseases such as MERS and SARS as mentioned in the Suzhou Declaration of June 20, 2016 (Rudolf 2021). Through President Xi Jinping's official statement

statement in May 2020, the Chinese government will make the COVID-19 vaccine a "world public good" that is easily accessible and affordable for people in developing economic regions (Petrella 2020).

In this study, the author will focus on the cooperation between China and Middle East countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, which killed 5.4 million people worldwide. The existence of BRI will facilitate the distribution of health aid to BRI member countries. This pathway is used effectively by China to support vaccination drives in the region. China has provided vaccines to many Middle East countries, such as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco and Turkey. Furthermore, the Health Silk Road (HSR) is also used to restore the economy during the pandemic and is used by China as a diplomacy strategy to strengthen economic cooperation and investment with BRI member countries.

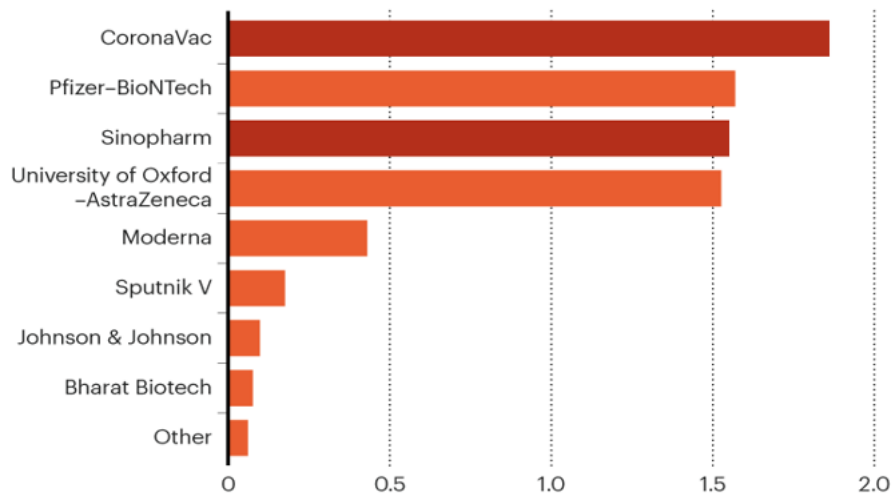
According to data, almost all countries in the Middle East members of BRI use vaccines made in China and receive health assistance from China. Vaccines produced in China are also used worldwide, with around 9.71 billion doses of the vaccine (Thomala 2022).

**Figure 1. The list of Vaccination and Type in MENA countries**

Country	Dosage Given	Complete Vaccination	% of complete vaccinated population	Vaccine Type
Algeria	12.9m	5.76m	13,1%	1. SputnikV 2. AstraZeneca 3. Sinopharm 4. Sinovac
Bahrain	3.31m	1.19m	70%	1. Sputnik V, Sputnik Light 2. Johnson&Johnson 3. Sinovac 4. AstraZeneca 5. Covaxin
Djibouti	208k	99,007	10,0%	1. Sputnik V, 2. Johnson&Johnson 3. Sinovac 4. AstraZeneca
Egypt, Arab Rep.	61.2m	24.8m	24,3%	1. Sinopharm 2. SputnikV 3. Pfizer-BioNTech 4. AstraZeneca 5. Sputnik Light 6. Moderna 7. Johnson&Johnson 8. Sinovac
Iran, Islamic Rep.	126 million	53.2m	63,3%	1. SputnikV 2. Covax-19 3. Soberana 02 4. Razi Cov Pars 5. Sputnik Light 6. Johnson&Johnson 7. Covaxin 8. AstraZeneca 9. FAKHRVAC (MIVAC) 10. Covid-19 Inactivated Vaccine 11. Sinopharm
Iraq	15m	6.09m	15,1%	1. Pfizer-BioNTech 2. AstraZeneca 3. Sputnik V 4. Sinopharm 5. Covax
Kuwait	7.2m	3.24m	75,8%	1. Pfizer-BioNTech 2. AstraZeneca 3. Sputnik V 4. Sinopharm 5. Covax
Lebanon	4.72m	1.93m	28,3%	1. Pfizer-BioNTech 2. AstraZeneca, 3. Sinovac 4. Sinopharm 5. Sputnik V
Libya	2.91m	940k	13,7%	1. AstraZeneca 2. Covax 3. Moderna 4. Sputnik V 5. Johnson&Johnson 6. Pfizer-BioNTech 7. Sinovac
Morocco	51.5m	23.1m	62,6%	1. AstraZeneca, R-pharm 2. Sinopharm (Wuhan) 2a. Sinopharm (Beijing) 3. Covax 4. Pfizer-BioNTech and Johnson&Johnson 5. Sputnik V
Oman	6.38m	2.94m	57,5%	1. AstraZeneca 2. Pfizer
Qatar	5.45m	2.22m	77,0%	1. Pfizer-BioNTech 2. Moderna 3. Covax 4. Sinovac 5. Sputnik V
Saudi Arabia	54.2m	23.5m	67,5%	1. AstraZeneca 2. Moderna 3. Pfizer-BioNTech 4. Covax 5. Johnson&Johnson
Syrian Arab Republic	2.93m	883k	5,0%	1. SputnikV and EpiVacCorona 2. AstraZeneca
Tunisia	12.5m	6.12m	51,8%	1. Covax 2. Pfizer-BioNTech 3. Sputnik Light 4. Johnson&Johnson 5. AstraZeneca 6. Sinopharm (Beijing) 7. Sinovac
United Arab Emirates	23.1m	9.21m	93,1%	1. Pfizer-BioNTech 2. Sinopharm (Beijing) 3. SputnikV 4. Recombinant SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine (CHO Cell) 5. Moderna 6. Sputnik Light 7. AstraZeneca
Yemen, Rep.	786k	367k	1,2%	1. AstraZeneca

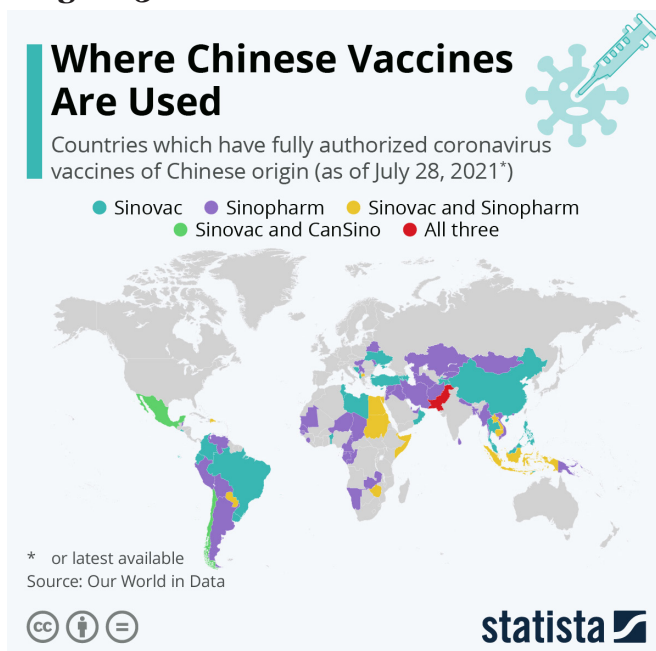
The author tabulates the Table based on the data from many resources such as Our World in Data & COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker; The National; 2021-2022. *Source: Mallapaty 2021.*

**Figure 2. Vaccine Type and Doses Delivered (billions)**



Source: Mallapaty 2021.

**Figure 3. China Vaccine All Over the World**



Source: Buchholz 2021.

China's diplomatic health strategy is a brilliant idea considering other countries are experiencing extraordinary chaos due to a global pandemic that paralyses various sectors such as economy, health and others. China has also experienced a significant economic downturn due to this outbreak. Still, China uses the BRI, which it has built over the years for infrastructure and strengthens its position in the world to be transformed into an arena of Health diplomacy Cooperation with other BSI countries. China helps other countries by providing aid and commodities to handle COVID-19 to achieve its national interest. The author agrees with Rudolf (2021), yang stated that "The WHO's explicit support for the BRI reflects the growing influence of the People's Republic within WHO, which has been noticeable for years. In August 2017 officials from many countries, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) signed the Beijing Communiqué on BRI Health Cooperation and the Health Silk Road, which summarises the fundamental elements of China's BRI health policy". his indicates that the world has recognized China's efforts.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper is considered a conceptual paper that settles on secondary data analysis. Terminologically secondary data analysis is a method of research that investigates before, and collects data to be analysed by another researcher in the relevant field to explore what is already known and what can be explored further in a specific area (Johnston, 2014). In this case research, an in-depth literature review of China's Belt and Road (BRI) and HSR (Health Silk Road) Initiative, affect diplomacy using "China's Health Diplomacy" during Covid-19 in the Middle East. Using secondary data, the author wants to examine the relationship between vaccination rates achieved by BRI member countries in the middle east MENA (the Middle East & North Africa). The member countries are Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Arab Rep., Iran, Islamic Rep., Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, Rep.

There are several research steps conducted in this paper, *First*, the author develops research questions focusing on export-import value to or from China to find out the impact of the BRI effect. *Second*, the author identifies BRI and HSR as a diplomacy strategy China uses to increase its influence in the MENA Region. *Third*, the author presents "Health as Part of the BRI in the Middle East." *Fourth*, the author added more about vaccine diplomacy in MENA countries, including BRI members, using Chinese vaccines. *Last but not least*, the author also developed a hypothesis that the diplomacy vaccine carried out by China during Covid-19 in the Middle East could benefit China in terms of exports and analysed the result of the data set to answer the research question.

## Hypotheses

### **BRI does affect increase in the use of Chinese Vaccine products**

This paper uses descriptive qualitative methods to explore various unique phenomena from the Health Silk Road against Vaccination in Middle East Countries. In explaining the role of this pathway, it increases a lot of Cooperation in various fields. Although there are often conflicts in the Middle East, its peak in 2016 is heating relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, it has no significant effect on China's exports to Middle East Countries. Likewise, during a pandemic, the existence of this route makes it easier for China to offer assistance in the form of health workers and vaccines. BRI member countries received the vaccines made in China, and in the UAE, a Chinese Vaccine (Sinopharm) factory will be built to provide vaccine stocks (The National 2021). This will increase China's close relations with Middle East countries because it will positively impact other sectors such as energy, transportation, technology, and agriculture.

This paper then will be directed to support the finding of two hypotheses, which are *first* by conducting Health and Vaccine Diplomacy in MENA, China has a positive effect on the export value and other sectors. *Second*, the Cooperation carried out by China through the Belt Road Initiative has strengthened its influence even during the crisis (COVID-19) outbreak.

## Results and Discussion

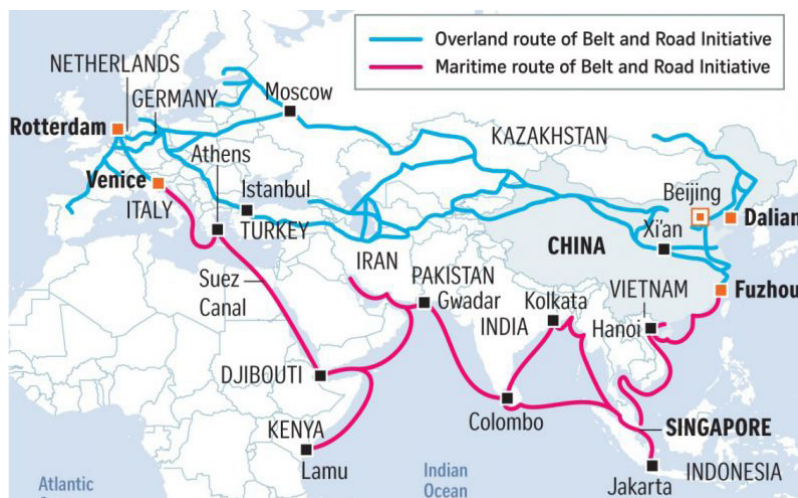
This is because the crisis in the Middle East due to Covid clarifies that China is more able to help them in their lows. In this context, it is said that China will increasingly take control of the new map of international relations by shifting the United States and Europe influence. President Xi also added that this would immediately pave the way for the immediate realization of the BRI China Belt and Road Initiative mega-project. China uses vaccine diplomacy to increase its influence in the Middle East to launch its investment in many fields. The warm welcome by the UAE and other Middle East countries who signed to use vaccines made in China because of their affordable prices was also one of the first steps to support this collaboration. By using diplomacy vaccination in BRI countries, of course, China can clarify its position as an essential partner and cannot be underestimated because China is supporting the Middle East in the face of their crisis, in this case an outbreak pandemic. Even the exports did not drop drastically when the Middle East was at war.

### **BRI and HSR (Health Silk Road)**

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in September 2013 at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan (Rolland 2019) and health cooperation between China and BRI members in 2015.

China's BRI is a diversified economic, diplomatic and geopolitical activity that was previously named "New Silk Road" later changed to "One Belt One Road". China's Belt and Road Initiative is one of the Chinese Government's most ambitious foreign and economic policies. This policy aims to strengthen Beijing's economic influence through a comprehensive infrastructure development program in all countries along the route. This policy was issued also considering the trade war between China and the United States, which is fighting for political and economic influence.

**Figure 4. BRI route**



*Source: DailyNewsIndonesia 2020.*

BRI has two details: the land-based economic silk route and the sea-based maritime silk route. BRI connects Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Europe with various infrastructures built. China has tried to put forward a cooperative nature which will be mutually beneficial. President Xi Jinping, in his speech, emphasized the BRI in peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit. China has opened the world's longest railway line connecting China to Europe. This opens up business opportunities for companies along the route, both the land silk route in the north and the maritime silk route in the south.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will fundamentally change many countries' global politics and foreign policy priorities. With the pandemic having a negative impact on so many economies, it is unlikely that the BRI will be able to proceed with an expensive and sometimes controversial infrastructure project, so China is using this project to continue its diplomacy through Health and take advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic to advance its national interests. In addition, the BRI is operated by China as a tool to "help" countries it passes through with humanitarian assistance

during the pandemic. Therefore, together with the "Silk Road", China is trying to build and improve its image by involving almost all ministries in this Cooperation.

The Chinese government initiative related to HSR is Healthy China 2030, launched in 2016. Healthy China 2030 is a comprehensive and ambitious program that aims to improve the overall health standards of Chinese citizens (WHO n.d; Kuhn 2020). At the end of 2021, the number of countries that joined BRI and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China is 144. The following are countries in the Middle East that have joined BRI:

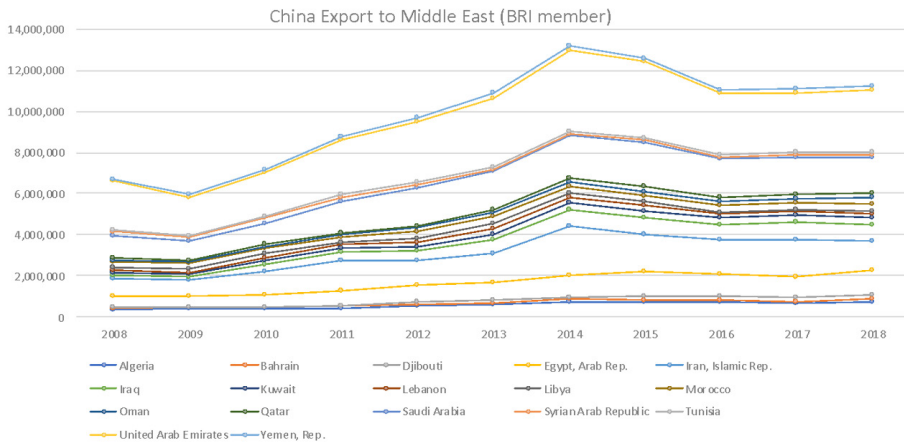
**Table 1. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - Middle East and North Africa Country**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Year joined</b>	<b>Income Group</b>
Algeria	2018	Upper middle income
Bahrain	2018	High income
Djibouti	2018	Lower middle income
Egypt, Arab Rep.	2016	Lower middle income
Iran, Islamic Rep.	2018	Upper middle income
Iraq	2015	Upper middle income
Kuwait	2018	High income
Lebanon	2017	Upper middle income
Libya	2018	Upper middle income
Morocco	2017	Lower middle income
Oman	2018	High income
Qatar	2019	High income
Saudi Arabia	2018	High income
Syrian Arab Republic	2022	Low income
Tunisia	2018	Lower middle income
United Arab Emirates	2018	High income
Yemen, Rep.	2017	Low income

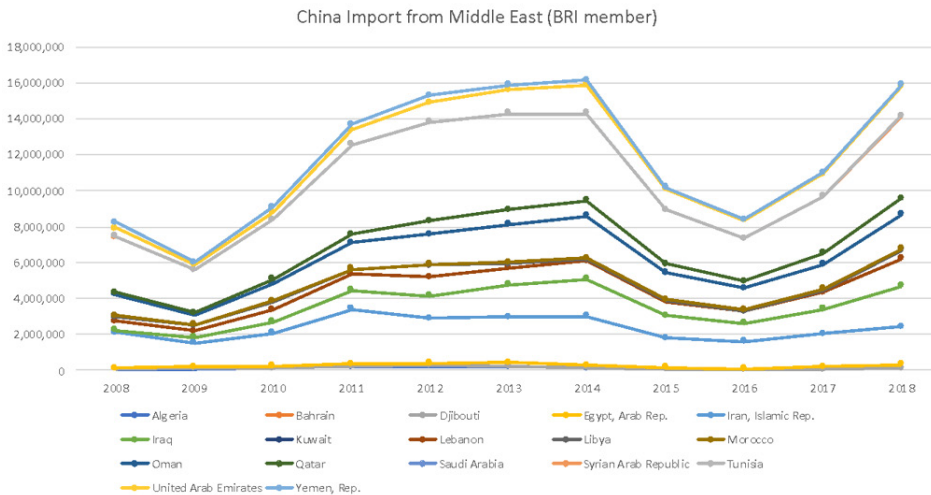
*Source: Green Finance & Development Center 2021.*

17 countries Middle East & North Africa (MENA) become a member of BRI. However, Israel, Sudan, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan have not or are not the members of the BRI. The following chart is the economic impact that occurs between the two parties. Figure 5 is China Export to the Middle East, and Figure 6 is China Import from the Middle East.





**Figure 6. China Import from the Middle East (BRI member)**



The chart above clearly illustrates that in 2015 and its peak in 2016, China's imports from Middle East countries experienced the sharpest decline. This is partly because several conflicts continued to hit this oil-rich region during 2016. From the war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Iran-Saudi crisis, to the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the Middle East region events throughout 2015-2016 are still colouring. Moreover, in a "superheated" situation like in early 2016, the Middle East region was shocked by the heating up of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The tension between the two countries was triggered by the execution of the Shia cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, by Saudi Arabia on January 2, 2016 (Slawson 2016; BBC 2016).

The situation escalated when Iranian protesters stormed and burned the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Tehran in protest against the execution of a critic of the Shia group, the most vocal in fighting for the equality of Shiites with Sunnis in Saudi Arabia. After the attack on its embassy, Saudi Arabia then severed diplomatic relations with Iran. Uniquely, China's exports continue to be as in the years before the conflict heated up, stable and having little effect. China is the biggest client for almost all major oil exporters, including Saudi Arabia. Imports are reduced from member countries, but exports are still smooth. Furthermore, China's presence in the Middle East region is getting stronger daily with these lucrative business deals and cooperation. The weakening economy and the increasingly unclear geopolitical role of the United States have left China free to play its role in the Middle East.

In conclusion, the conflicts in Middle East countries did not affect China's exports; China's exports remained stable, and the curve was sloping and stable. As if it does not affect the survival of the Chinese economy. On the other hand, imports have decreased. Countries in conflict reduce imports to China, and their economies are devastated by war, but not with China. China still has many partners to meet the country's needs. China can use BRI effectively even in situations of role and conflict. Relations between China and Middle East countries are more than oil. Investments can be in the form of Metals, Energy, plastics, rubber, Real Estate, Transportation, Technology and Agriculture in the Middle East (Kazemi and Chen 2014; Silk Road Briefing 2022). The construction of Chinatown and an 800-hectare project near Dubai International Airport can be examples. Non-oil activities can enhance cooperation between China and the Middle East. China's economic influence is also developing, as well as the harmonious relationship with the Middle East. Moreover, beyond energy and commodities, investment also extends to the urban sector and transport infrastructure. The table following the details of export-import could be seen clearly as it is attached in the Annex.

### **Health as Part of the BRI in the Middle East**

Beijing is serious about working in the Middle East, predominantly Muslim, by making the region Ningxia special autonomy because the Muslim Hui ethnic minority inhabits it as a base for industry, trade and promotion. The Hui had embraced Islam for thousands of years when the Old Silk Road became the economic lifeblood linking China to the Middle East. Islamic preachers and Arab traders who came to this area not infrequently then married local women and settled here for generations as part of the Hui tribal community. Meanwhile, China will have access to Gwadar Port, which is in a very strategic position. Both economically and militarily because it faces the Arabian Sea and is close to the entrance to the Persian Gulf, which is always traversed by giant tankers containing oil or gas originating from the Gulf Arab countries Gulf. The whole world.

All of this will benefit China if it can control and gain cooperation in health during this pandemic situation.

Covid-19 has changed all forms of the world order to be very complicated and unpredictable. Healthy China 2030 from 2016 stated that China will implement a "global health strategy " and comprehensively promote international health cooperation. Using the bilateral cooperation mechanism as the basis, China will innovate on the Health cooperation model and strengthen human-to-human exchanges with BRI countries. China will also enhance South-South Cooperation, spur public health cooperation projects between China and Africa, and continue sending medical aid teams to developing countries, emphasizing maternal and child Health. Especially after the mass death occurred because of coronavirus.

"The Rise of China" is in the world's spotlight today; China, a developing country in the past four decades, has become a strong country globally and competes with the United States (Garnaut et al. 2018). Health Cooperation is a significant change between China and other countries. China always cooperates with neighbouring countries and improves diplomatic relations, even during a pandemic. Since 2015 China had held regular forums held by the Chinese Ministry of Health, such as Cooperation with ASEAN, even before the BRI was initiated. In the same year, China also held the China-Arab States Health Cooperation Forum (CASCF) in the mid-2000s as part of a dialogue forum that China has established with Arab League countries (Rudolf 2021; Sidlo 2020).

One of the factors that prompted China to make BRI policies could not be separated from China's ambition to take over its role as a leader in the Asian region (Dunne 2021; Habibi and Zhu 2021). This ambition can be seen in China's efforts to spread its influence in Asia in financing infrastructure projects, especially high-speed rail projects, in tight competition with Japan. Therefore, China's commitment to invest in infrastructure projects through BRI is an excellent opportunity for Chinese railway companies to expand their overseas market network. China's highest level in diplomatic relations) signed with Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and strategic partnerships with another eight states in the region.

HSR covers projects to supply Chinese-made medical products and vaccines, which will impact economic activity in the Southeast Asian region, where the majority of countries already have trade relations with China and whose foreign policy tends to be neutral. HSR was initially related to China's domestic health policy until finally, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the urgency of developing public health infrastructure for developing economic countries. With the first case of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China has received assistance, in the form of material and financial aid, from at least 58 countries to recover the situation (Rudolf 2021). This is also marked by the fact that the dispute between the United States and

China had indeed attracted attention, especially incidents such as when US President Donald Trump threatened to freeze funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) after he accused the institution of being 'China-centric'. China has also deployed a corps of 'wolf warriors' diplomats to counter criticism of its handling of Covid-19. Although this strategy is not liked by some countries such as Australia, which views China as a threat of "economic blackmail". However, developing countries are in favour of China's policies because they feel 'helped' during dealing with this virus. China is also helping to restore Health through vaccines, masks and personal protective equipment. But China uses mask diplomacy by using the health sector as a tool to achieve their national interest China's role automatically shifts European and North American countries, which usually seem agile in handling natural disasters or health crises.

### **China's Mask Diplomacy**

Since successfully controlling the spread of COVID-19 at home in early March 2020, the Chinese government's focus has slowly shifted to deploying logistical assistance abroad to help other suffering countries. For example, Italy struggled at the peak of the wave of infections in the first wave of March-May 2020, with a death rate of 47.7% or around 16,326 people (Chirico et al. 2021). This was followed by the second wave, which killed 15,515 deaths or about 18.9% (Chirico et al. 2021). A Chinese medical team then landed in Rome with 30 tons of medical equipment organized by the Chinese Red Cross, while Italy's other neighbours in the European Union ignore their condition because each wants to maintain a stock of masks and medical equipment for their own citizens. The condition of no one helping Italy when it was in a low position allowed China to lend a hand and help Italy face the crisis.

Not to forget, African nations and Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait received medical logistics support from China. Vaccine availability is a central and central issue, including in the Middle East region. In the Middle East, the case of vaccine availability has also become a political issue that has come to the fore, which for the time being, can describe the geopolitical map of the region that is always volatile.

Vaccine politics is rolling, as Iran rejects vaccines made by the United States and Britain. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, has publicly rejected vaccine products from the two countries. Instead, Iran has chosen to work with China and Russia as strategic partners in the region, which have been known to be more trustworthy than the US and Britain. The same thing happened to Turkey, which was reluctant to cooperate with the US and Britain, marked by the President of Turkey, Erdogan, openly and being the first to be vaccinated using the Sinovac vaccine produced by

by China, a strategic partner in difficult times. In addition to actively meeting the global need for medical devices, the Chinese government is also ambitious in developing COVID-19 vaccine research.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain were the first to approve a Chinese coronavirus vaccine Sinopharm. Then, Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey and Brazil were followed, among others who had approved Chinese vaccines (Rudolf 2021). Vaccine diplomacy carried out by China is seen as helping other countries deal with the Coronavirus and promoting an image as a good neighbour in the Southeast Asian region. In addition, the success of China's vaccine diplomacy will, of course, largely depends on the level of safety and efficacy of vaccines produced by Chinese companies. The United Arab Emirates has even formed a joint venture with China to build a Covid-19 vaccine developed by Sinopharm in the UAE (The National 2021). The Hayat-Vax vaccine will be the first Covid-19 vaccine produced in the Arab world (Hackett 2021). Not only that, but Syria also establishes cooperation to ensure the availability of vaccines for its citizens.

China's vaccine diplomacy is considered a success; according to The Associated Press and The Diplomat (2021) by Wu and Gelineau (2021), China has promised nearly half a billion doses of the Covid-19 vaccine to more than 45 countries. China and the USA are competing for influence globally when it comes to vaccines. Pragmatically, vaccine diplomacy benefits both sides. The US and vaccine recipient countries each benefit. Likewise, China's vaccine diplomacy against the countries, it helps. So far, Indonesia has relied chiefly on vaccines from China's Sinovac Biotech but continues to diversify supply sources even though its effectiveness is doubtful. However, many countries still use Sinovac as a booster vaccine, including Indonesia. Meanwhile, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China's vaccine diplomacy seems to smoothen trade relations between the two countries that have existed for so long. The UAE, one of the wealthiest Gulf countries, relies heavily on the Sinopharm vaccine. The United Arab Emirates and China governments are also cooperating in the production of a Covid-19 vaccine in the United Arab Emirates starting at the end of 2021. A new vaccine factory will be established as a joint venture between the Chinese pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm and the UAE Group 42 (The National 2021). While waiting for a vaccine factory to be launched just based, temporary production of the vaccine has begun in the Ras al-Khaimah region, which is managed by the Gulf Pharmaceutical Industries PSC or Julphar. The purpose of establishing the Sinopharm factory in the UAE is to help meet the vaccine needs in other countries in the Middle East.

## **Conclusion**

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the world, and Indonesia is one of them. China's Health Silk Road and Long-Term Health Diplomacy. China's diplomacy during the Covid-19 pandemic is an effort to strengthen health cooperation between China and the BRI countries. Working together to deal with the public health crisis will help protect China's health security and social stability and the BRI countries, which also covers the development of BRI. China is known as a reliable country in infrastructure, so China uses the infrastructure to build an image and Cooperation in the health sector. BSI, which is one of the ambitious economic policies issued during the reign of China Xi Jinping, was a huge success during the pandemic. China's ambition to take over the leadership role in the Asian region is the reason that pushes China to implement this policy. In addition, the diplomatic dilemma of vaccines has also become a serious matter to be studied. Vaccines, which are the only means of inhibiting or preventing the spread of this epidemic, are used as an opportunity for China to carry out health diplomacy.

Developing economies in the Middle East region shows high interest in Chinese vaccines. The price of these vaccines is relatively lower, and the storage method is practical compared to other vaccines. The availability of vaccines in the Middle East region has become a political issue that can also explain the current and future geopolitical map. As long as the national interests of each country are safe, the expansion of China's health business within the framework of the HSR can benefit member countries which is a win-win solution. It must be admitted China has succeeded in establishing its existence from the past until now. When China is at the peak of economic excellence as it is today, China is just about to win the battle based on health diplomacy.

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